The kaleidoscope of adult second language learning: Learner, teacher and researcher perspectives
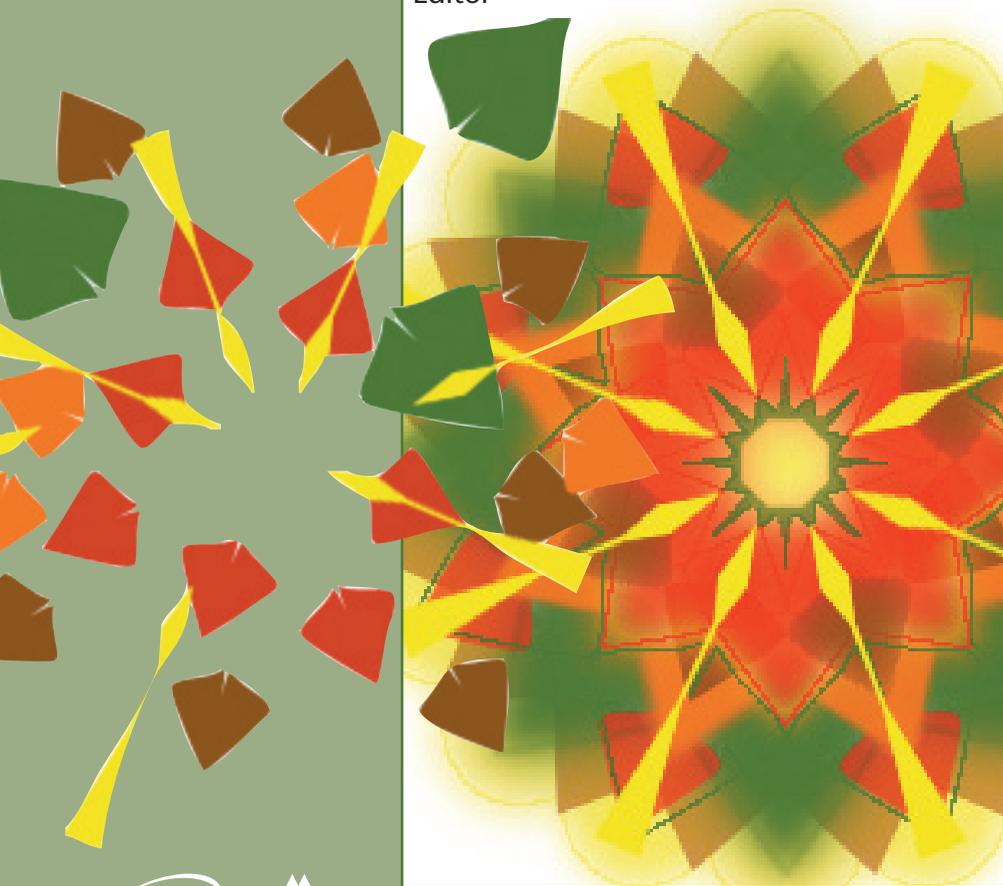
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Editor

Research Collection 2

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Transcription conventions

The following conventions are used in transcriptions of interviews with learners and teachers:

Italic print:	*The interviewer's words*
Roman print:	1 The Teacher's words
	2 An interpreter glossing the learner's L1 reply or comment in English, or explaining what the learner has said
Bold print:	**The learner speaking in English**
…	A pause by the speaker
[…]	A short or lengthy section of the transcript has been omitted
[ ]	The word provided is what was probably said, but it is not clearly audible on the tape
XXXX	A word or phrase is unintelligible
{ }	Contextual notes

Note: Potentially identifying information (for example, first language, names of suburbs) has been removed from the transcripts.

Example numbering

All examples are numbered, with the pseudonym of the interviewee, and the week number. Week numbers refer to the week in which the interview took place, as follows:

Term 4, 2001	Week 1	Term 2, 2002	Week 20
	Week 4		Week 23
	Week 8		Week 27
Term 1, 2002	Week 12	Term 3, 2002	Week 32
	Week 16		Week 35

Section 1: Influences on learning

Chapter 1: Rotating the kaleidoscope: The role of cultural, social, educational and individual factors in language learning

Gillian Wigglesworth

For migrants[1] arriving in a new country, whether they have come as a result of economic imperatives, as a lifestyle choice, because they are refugees fleeing persecution, or because they are coming to be reunited with relatives, there are many challenges to face. For those who come from a different language background, one of the most important of these challenges for achieving their educational, professional and settlement aims is likely to be that of learning the language of the host community.

Yet, for every learner, the challenge of learning the language is likely to be a very different experience – for some it will be easier, for others more difficult. For teachers, too, experiences will vary considerably. Each class will present new challenges, different students, and new considerations, potentially calling for fresh approaches. Thus, for both the learner and the teacher, the classroom brings together a vast array of different factors that combine in various ways to influence learning – creating what we have termed the kaleidoscope of language learning.

The background and motivation for the study

In Australia, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is a national program that provides English language classes to various categories of migrants who have achieved permanent resident status. The program is free for all learners who have not yet attained a 'functional' level[2] of English language learning, and who meet certain selection criteria. The program allows each migrant to receive up to 510 hours of English language tuition through a nationally accredited program offered in centres throughout urban and rural Australia.

For curriculum planners and teachers alike, one of the most pervasively challenging features of this program has been the diversity of learners who attend classes (see Burns and Hood 1997, for further discussion of this issue), and more recently, the rapidly changing nature of the various groups of migrants. Learners come from widely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, so one class may include learners from every continent and a wide variety of countries. Not

only do teachers need to take into account the different linguistic traditions of their learners, but they may, at the same time, have to manage a class in which learners range in educational background from none to college-level education, and in previous occupation from manual worker to university academic. Some learners may have had experiences of torture and trauma, and have experienced dramatic family disruption. In addition to these life experiences, and demographic and educational variables, teachers have to be able to work successfully with learners who may have quite different learning styles. Some prefer one approach to learning over another, some will acquire language and move through the different stages more quickly than others, and learners will vary in how easy, or how interesting or relevant, they find the same aspects of language learning. Furthermore, teachers and learners both bring to the learning activity their own personalities, foibles, interests, preconceptions, values and learning, and all of these may interact in myriad ways with those of the other participants in the classroom. Thus while we tend to think of the language classroom as an environment with a distinctive and shared purpose, it is, in reality, a microcosm of the broader society in which we live, with individuals who may be more or less assertive, more or less enthusiastic, and with more or less natural ability to learn a language, and more or less ability to cooperate with one another.

This volume represents an exploration of some of the factors that impact upon learners in the language-learning situation. We examine their perceptions, their participation and roles in the classroom, and how their background, previous educational experiences and family situations influence their learning. In addition to the voices of the learners, we hear the voices of the teachers – their perceptions of the learners, their approaches to teaching them, and their ideas and views of the learning process. Because this investigation was undertaken as a research study, we hear also the voices of the researchers who interviewed the learners and the teachers, who observed the classes, and who analysed the substantial amount of data which resulted from the study. We have attempted in this book to pull together all of these perspectives and to examine what is, essentially, a kaleidoscope of factors which impact upon the learners and their learning. Through what was, in the data-gathering phase, a series of detailed case studies, we have attempted to unravel some of the mysteries of language learning, and to unpack what it is that contributes to an individual's approach to learning a language.

The primary motivation for this study was to ensure a major focus on the learners; we wanted to access their views, perceptions, ideas and motivations, and we wanted to investigate how they learned English as a second or subsequent language from a variety of perspectives. The major objective of the study was to investigate learning issues in relation to particular groups of learners who had recently accessed the AMEP program – those groups of learners who represented the more recent migrants to Australia, and with whom teachers had little familiarity in terms of background, learning styles etc. More specifically, we wanted to document the cultural and individual characteristics that influenced the language learning of individuals from these groups, and we wanted to do this through detailed longitudinal studies. Thus the major aims of this study were to try and tease out how the various cultural and individual influences learners experience affect their language learning efforts, in order to identify a basis for articulating the kinds of strategies teachers could introduce into the classroom to make language learning easier, and to provide insights into the appropriateness of the current assessment tools available within the context of the Adult Migrant English Program.

Although in this project we identified learners from specific backgrounds for our case studies, we were under no illusions that we were looking for group similarities. Rather, we were interested in looking at each of these learners as an individual, with a view to determining what factors might impact upon, and influence, each individual learner and thus their learning outcomes. The different kinds of factors which were likely to influence their learning fell into two main groups: cultural influences and individual influences.

Human behaviour can be influenced by both individual, or genetic influences,[3] and environmental factors. We are not concerned here with the precise balance between these two types of influence and do not intend to revisit the nature/nurture debate. However, we wanted to explore the environmental influences across a range of different variables and to include the influence of parents and/or other family members or caretakers and previous cultural experiences, as well as the ways that the learners themselves engage with and build on those cultural and social experiences, and the effect of prior educational and learning experiences. Ross (2000) argues the latter is the most consistent predictor of successful achievement in the type of competency-based curriculum which has been adopted by the Adult Migrant English Program.

Cultural influences incorporate a range of different experiences, all of which have a role to play in the approach to learning that learners take in any new learning situation, including that of learning the language of the host community. One of these is interactive style, which is not only a matter of individual differences in

personality, but also a result of cultural and linguistic background. Thus factors such as degrees of directness, persuasiveness, reticence etc, may vary among people from different cultural backgrounds according to the norms with which they have become familiar. A second factor, which may be critical to how a learner learns, relates to the extent to which earlier educational experiences have been available, and accessible. Socio-historical factors, such as war, family and inter- or intra-group rivalry and conflict have all too frequently resulted in major displacements, which may include years spent in refugee camps, changes of country and lifestyle, and traumatic migration experiences. Under these conditions, access to education may have been at best limited, and at worst, completely unavailable. In addition to this, there may be issues resulting from traumatic past experiences. In undertaking this study, we were aware that many of the newer migrant groups who study in the AMEP come from refugee backgrounds. Some have little or no prior educational experience, and that educational experience may have been, in any case, relatively unsuccessful, for example if they had been part of an oppressed minority group within a different dominant culture. All of these factors have been shown to impact on the degree of success with which learners progress through the AMEP (McPherson 1997), and on the kinds of support that learners from these backgrounds require (Allender 1998; Seufert 1999).

For those migrants for whom education has been available, or has even been the norm, radically different educational approaches may mean that classroom experiences during the school years were very different from those on offer in adult language programs in Australia and other English-speaking countries. Related factors here include different practices of cultural literacy, and the effect of these practices on learning styles, which may not be readily open to the kind of communicative language teaching which is customary in most English-speaking countries today. The effects of both educational background, or lack of it, and earlier educational experiences, were aspects of learning we wanted to explore with the learners as we discussed with them their perceptions of learning English in Australia. The theoretical considerations of these factors are discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of this volume: Nicholas and Williams (this volume, page 29) explore the implications of different oral and literate traditions for learning, while Yates (this volume, page 53) reflects upon the ways in which prior learning experiences can influence current learning experiences.

Equally important are the individual factors that learners bring to the activity of learning. In general these factors have been more broadly explored in the second language learning literature than have cultural factors, so that we are familiar with the idea that the learner brings to the process certain attributes, such as personality, age and aptitude, which may affect learning. Other factors relate to the manner in which the learner may approach and conceptualise the learning process, and these include the cognitive style of the learner, the motivations learners bring to bear on the task, and their attitude towards language learning in general. In addition to this, learners actively interact with the process of language learning. Ideally, they bring with them a range of strategies for learning, while they remain open to the idea of adopting new strategies and approaches in their new learning context. We wanted to be able to explore with the learners their perceptions of their aspirations and motivations in order to examine their views about their learning, and to consider what effects personality and other factors might have on their learning overall.

The overarching objectives for this project were to enable us to provide a more precise description of the language development of these learners over time as they progressed through the AMEP; to develop a more precise description of how the learners responded to the demands of AMEP classrooms; to develop a better understanding of issues related to learner management and how the needs of different learners could be accommodated within the same classroom; and to develop a clearer understanding of how the particular learner communities approached English as a second language learning, which would allow us to develop a more comprehensive sense of the most relevant teaching strategies.

Design of the project

The project consisted of one large individual component which was a series of individual case studies, and two small components which were classroom case studies both concerned with the teaching of literacy. In the component designed as a series of individual case studies, the learners were followed as they progressed through the AMEP for up to a year. In the first classroom case study, reported by Gunn (Chapter 10, this volume), preliterate African women participated in a program specially designed for their needs. In the second, discussed by Barber (Chapter 11, this volume), more advanced writers were provided with additional writing instruction, which introduced a range of strategies to assist them in their writing development. The research approach adopted in these two classroom case studies is incorporated into the relevant chapters (Chapters 10 and 11). In the section below we detail the research methodology adopted for the individual case studies, the findings from which are reported in Chapters 5 to 9.

Research methodology

We framed our objectives around the four key variables, or questions, identified by Breen (2001: 1), which focus on the learner contribution to the learning process:

- What the learners contribute to the process (or 'what are the specific contributions of the persons doing the learning?').
- The language data made available to the learners in the communicative environment in which learning occurs (or 'under what conditions or circumstances does learning take place?').
- The interaction between learners and environment in terms of the situated learning process (or 'how is the learning done?').
- The actual outcomes of the learning process (or 'what is actually learned? What is it that people learn and what constitutes significant learning in these groups?').

Methodological approach to the individual case studies

The research design adopted for the individual case studies was intended to allow us to probe the interrelationships between these four questions. The first question is concerned with what the learners themselves bring to the activity of learning and this reflects the mix of individual influences as well as the environmental and/or cultural influences which have contributed to the way learners approach the learning activity as discussed above. With respect to the second question, we planned to document the type of language data made available to the learners within the context of the AMEP, and the types of activities in which they were involved, although there were limits with respect to what we could do here, as we could not realistically document the language experiences the learners had outside of the AMEP situation. The third variable relates to the interaction between the learners and the environment – that is the AMEP – in which the learning is happening. There are numerous factors that may influence this situation, which include the approach taken in the classroom, and the personality and style of the teacher and other participants in the class. The final variable relates to what the learners actually ended up learning. While this may be in terms of achievements on the assessment system, it may also be less formal achievements in terms of their ability to function in society outside of the classroom. Clearly these factors all interrelate at a number of levels. Breen (2001) argues that it is the contributions by the learner to the learning process, which are realised in terms of the choices the learner makes, that shape significantly the

language learning outcomes for the learner. The selections that the learner makes result, in part, from the learner's affective attributes – in other words who the learners are, what they feel and think, and how they react to different situations and learning environments.

To address these objectives, we designed a methodology in which a series of case studies followed learners over a period of up to 12 months in their progression through the English program. The data collection techniques were triangulated to enhance the validity of the data, and consequently a variety of data collection techniques were used. These were:

- **Classroom observation:** Learners were observed in the classroom twice per term for the duration of the study. These allowed observation of the learners' interactions within the classroom, general behaviour and learning styles.
- **Learner interviews:** Learners were interviewed two to three times per term with an interpreter present in order to allow in-depth interviews with the learners in their first language. These were designed to elicit their own ideas and perceptions about their learning approaches and the classroom situation. These interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed.
- **Language elicitation:** Each learner was interviewed three times per term (usually without an interpreter present) for the purposes of eliciting oral English. These elicitation interviews were taped and transcribed.
- **Teacher diaries:** The classroom teacher of each of the learner participants selected for the study was asked to keep a daily diary in which they made a brief entry for each lesson involving the learner-participant, which reported any specific events noted in the student's activities.
- **Program plans, task record sheets and student written work:** Teachers kept a week by week record of their program, and of tasks given to students in class (including copies of any handouts and work sheets distributed in class), and maintained a folder of copies of any written work produced by the learner-participants in their class. Brief pro-formas were provided for these activities and to assist teachers with describing the context in which the written work was produced, and to ensure comparability of data collection across different classes.
- **Teacher interviews:** Classroom teachers participated in two short interviews each term. These were taped and later transcribed. Diagramatically, the data collection approach can be modelled as follows, demonstrating the circular nature of the data collection, and the inter-related aspects of it:
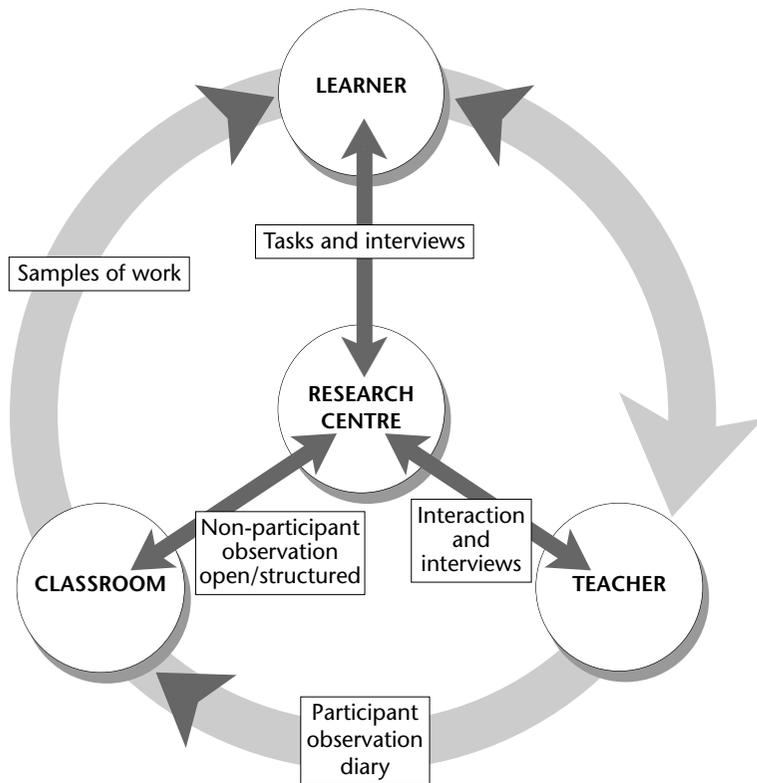
Figure 1   The data collection process

The learners

Twenty learners were followed over the one-year period of the study. The learners
were identified in consultation with selected AMEP Centres. This process
entailed the following steps: centre coordinators were asked to identify potential
learners and teachers to be involved in the project. The participants were
approached by their teacher, and if they expressed interest in the project, one of
the researchers visited the centre with an interpreter to discuss the project. If the
participant agreed, a formal consent procedure was undertaken. As learners
were the focus of the project, they did not necessarily remain with their original
teacher throughout the project. As a consequence, the teachers who were included

in the study varied according to the classes in which the learners were enrolled.
All teachers gave their time willingly to provide the complementary perspectives
on the learners' experiences.

The small numbers of learners from each group, and particularly from Horn of
Africa, which is ethnically and linguistically diverse, means that these learners
could not be claimed to fully represent the breadth of diversity which would be
encountered in each group. However, they represented a cross section of members
of these communities, exhibiting a fairly typical range for their group according
to the teachers and centre coordinators, and were not considered exceptional in
any way.

Although we had initially intended to follow 16 learners through the program
for a year, ultimately, of course, a number of learners completed their hours
(that is, their 510 hours of free English tuition) and left the program. Others
moved to different language centres where they could not be followed, and
others left to work or take up childcare duties, and were no longer available to us.
Others dropped out for reasons we never came to know. One learner left, but
returned after a term in another institution. However, despite these problems,
which are inevitable with case study research, we followed a core group of stu-
dents through three to four terms, with others monitored for shorter periods of
time. A brief background and the number of terms they completed is detailed in
Table 1 (page 12). More details about the participants can be found in Chapter 5.

Data collection

The Australian academic year runs from January to December. It is divided into
four terms, each of approximately ten weeks, with a two-week break between
terms, and a six-week break from mid-December to late January. Generally,
Term 1 begins in late January and finishes (usually depending on the timing of
Easter) in early April. Following a two-week break, Term 2 begins in late April
and runs to late June. Term 3 runs mid-July to late September, and Term 4 early
October to mid-December. The data collection for this project began in Term 4,
2001 and ended at the end of Term 3, 2002.

Data analysis

The data collection procedures meant a range of data was collected. As outlined
above, there were language data from the second language elicitation interviews,
interviews in the learners' first languages conducted through an interpreter,
interviews with the teachers of the learners, the collected written work of the

Table 1   Summary of learner participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Origin	L1	Terms completed
Zena	Female	61	PRC	Mandarin	4
Joe	Male	68	PRC	Mandarin	4
George	Male	69	PRC	Mandarin	4
Kane	Male	52	Iraq	Arabic	4
Andrea	Female	46	Iraq	Assyrian	3
Sue	Female	18	Iraq	Assyrian	3
Zara	Female	47	PRC	Mandarin	3
Nigel	Male	19	Eritrea	Tigrina	3
Fern	Female	30	Ethiopia	Amharic	3
Ray	Male	29	Iraq	Assyrian	3
Ilia	Male	47	Iraq	Arabic	3
Zeinab	Female	26	Eritrea	Arabic	3
Abe	Male	22	Ethiopia	Tigrina	2
Alex	Male	24	Ethiopia	Amharic	2
Harry	Male	20s	Ethiopia	Amharic	2
Linda	Female	32	Iraq	Assyrian	1.5
Elsie	Female	23	Eritrea	Arabic	1
Esther	Female	26	Eritrea	Arabic	1
Carrie	Female	25	Ethiopia	Oromo	1
Andrew	Male	28	Ethiopia	Arabic	1

learners, and the teacher project plans and task record sheets. The interview data, which was the major focus, are summarised in Table 2.

The learners' first language interviews and teacher interviews were coded for the categories outlined in Table 3 (page 14). These broad themes had emerged throughout the course of the data collection period, and so were designed to encapsulate the major issues which had been raised, and to reduce the volume of data for further analysis without reducing it to such limited categories that the overall picture would be lost. The interviews were imported into NUD*IST[4] for qualitative analysis.

Table 2   Summary of interview data

Pseudonym	L1 interviews	Teacher interviews	English elicitations
Zena	8	5	10
Joe	8	5	10
George	8	5	10
Andrea	6	4	8
Zara	5	4	7
Germ	5	4	7
Sue	5	3	7
Nigel	5	3	8
Zeinab	4	4	4
Ray	4	3	6
Kane	4	2	6
Ilia	4	2	7
Alex	4	2	4
Linda	3	2	3
Abe	3	1	4
Esther	2	3	3
Elsie	2	2	3
Carrie	2	1	2
Harry	2	1	4
Andrew	0	1	2
TOTAL	**84**	**57**	**115**

The data from the English language elicitation interviews were coded for linguistic features. Since a large proportion of the initial interviews elicited little more than single word responses, it was decided to code the data for a set of very basic categories which would allow a classification that would enable any developmental progression to be recognised. Consequently, each utterance was initially coded for one of the categories in Table 4 (page 14).

Multiple constituent clauses and clause complexes were coded additionally for the presence of a subject (SP) or the absence of a subject (SA), and the presence

Table 3   Coding categories for interview data

i	AMEP provision
ii	Bilingual issues
iii	Comment on gender (similarities/differences)
iv	High oracy issues
v	Literacy
vi	Perception of age-related factors
vii	Perceptions of class content
viii	Perceptions of student learning
ix	Perceptions of teaching
x	Prior learning
xi	Speaking skills

Table 4   Coding categories for language elicitation data

Symbol	Constituent	Description of utterance
N	noun	single nominal, no morphology
V	verb	single verb, no morphology
Adj	adjective	single adjective, no morphology
Adv	adverb	single adverb, no morphology
R	repetition	exact repetition of interviewer's previous word/utterance
Mn	fragment or minor clause	eg 'yes', 'no', 'okay', 'um', 'er' etc
MC	multiple constituent clause	words from different constituents plus (optionally) morphology, or simple clause
CC	clause complex	main clause plus subordinate clause or coordinated clauses

of a verb (VP) or the absence of a verb (VA). Finally, questions asked by the learner (not the interviewer) were coded as Q, and negated utterances produced by the learner were coded as Neg.

The simplicity of this coding system was designed specifically for this data, which consisted largely of short, incomplete utterances, from generally very low-level

learners (although of course there was improvement through the course of the project). Thus this study was not designed to collect the highly detailed and complex data on adult language acquisition reported in, for example, the European Science Foundation (ESF) study in the Perdue volumes (Perdue 1993a, 1993b), because its major focus was on the perceptions of the learners. This simple coding system was developed to allow us to code the data as much as possible without speculating about alternative grammatical structures which would involve choosing between different interpretations of the meaning of the learner utterances. In terms of the patterns of language acquisition discussed in Chapter 7, while we did not have, as the ESF study did, a control group with which to compare our participants' language development, our concern was with individual developmental patterns. As Edwards and Levelt (1993) point out, however, the presence of a control group in this study meant that the researchers were able to determine with reasonable assurance that, although the motivations of their participants may have been enhanced by the regular contact with the researchers, the patterns of language acquisition themselves were probably not unduly influenced by the interaction with the researchers. Thus we can only speculate that the patterns of acquisition we see here are not greatly influenced by the learners' participation in this project. The fact that the teachers indicated no divergence from 'the norm' for the learners in this study supports this view.

Conclusion

This volume presents both a discussion of some of the pertinent background issues, and an analysis and discussion of the findings from this longitudinal investigation of learners participating in the Australian AMEP. As discussed earlier, the metaphor of the kaleidoscope highlights the point that no single perspective will enable us to understand all that we need to about the learning and teaching process. It also serves to underline the point that these phenomena can look quite different when they are viewed from different perspectives, or at different times. We have endeavoured to keep faith with this metaphor both within and across the chapters in this book.

In the next chapter, Murray compares the statistical data on immigrant groups to Australia at the time the study was begun with current trends, and considers the implications for where this might take us in the future. While also looking forward, this chapter provides useful background information about the AMEP in Australia. In Chapter 3, Nicholas and Williams examine the elements of oracy and literacy practices which may impact on the way learners approach the

Australian English language classroom. Chapter 4, by Yates, discusses a range of factors related to prior learning, and speculates on how these might affect learners' experiences in a new learning environment.

The second section of the book presents the substantive findings from the individual case studies. The first chapter in this section, by Williams and Yates, provides a profile of the learners and examines the range of influences that congregate in a single learner, and inevitably affect the learning process. The next chapter by Lunt, discusses what we were able to glean of the kinds of strategies and approaches the learners adopted in their learning activities. In Chapter 7, Nicholas and Wigglesworth discuss the progress learners made in terms of their English language development as they travelled through the AMEP, and consider factors which may have impacted on their progress. Chapter 8 by Yates and Williams discusses the range of learner perceptions of their own learning processes; these are compared and contrasted with the teachers' perceptions of those same learners, examining how far these are congruent. In Chapter 9, Wigglesworth draws on the data to evaluate the learners' perceptions of the potential of bilingual assistance in various forms. This draws on data both from the individual case studies, and the perceptions of the learners in the preliterate case study group (Gunn, this volume) where bilingual aides participated in the classroom.

The final section of the book presents the findings from the two classroom case studies, Gunn's study in Chapter 10 and Barber's classroom case study profiling the experiences of a high oracy, low literacy group in an action research study focusing on developing writing skills in Chapter 11. The final chapter reflects on what we have learned in the course of this study, what more there might be to learn, and where we might go next.

Notes

1 The Australian term for 'immigrant' is 'migrant' and the terms are used interchangeably throughout.

2 'Functional' English is considered to be more than 2 on the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) (Ingram and Wylie 1984; Wylie and Ingram 1995/99). This level, Basic Social Proficiency, is described as 'able to satisfy basic social needs, and routine needs pertinent to everyday commerce and to linguistically undemanding "vocational" fields' (see http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/call/frameset4.html).

3 'Individual' is not meant to be understood as identical to 'innate'.

4 NUD*IST is the acronym for Non-numerical Unstructured Data * Indexing Searching and Theorizing. It is a program through which qualitative data can be coded for a range of categories, and then analysed.

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Chapter 2: Changing clients in the AMEP at the turn of the 21st century

Denise E Murray

The motivation for the studies reported in this volume was the observation by AMEP teachers and service providers[5] that the students in their classes were from different backgrounds from those in previous cohorts, and that perhaps such learners might need different instructional strategies. AMEP teachers and service providers identified learners from Horn of Africa[6] and Iraq, and older Chinese learners, as ones they felt less familiar with, and about whom they would like additional knowledge. Having studied these groups over a two-year period, we have uncovered the special needs of learners from these particular groups, but we've also learned that understanding individual differences is as important as understanding group characteristics and that other demographics of immigrants and refugees coming to Australia are often not representative of those in their homeland. Indeed, humanitarian program immigrants[7] are most likely to be non-representative since they have fled their countries because of persecution, a persecution based on their difference from the ruling group. For example, while Iraq's population is primarily Muslim, with 97% of its population Sunni or Shiah (Yates 2002), many humanitarian program Iraqi immigrants to Australia are Christian. From May 1, 2002 to April 30, 2003, 2704 Iraqis settled in Australia, of whom 2170 were in the humanitarian program. While 37.1% of all settlers were Muslim, 62.2% were Christian, including 21.7% Chaldean Catholic and 17.6% Assyrian Church of the East (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2003).

How then do we learn from the findings reported in this volume – not just in terms of the needs of these particular learners, but in terms of the implications for the AMEP's ability to fashion its programs to meet the needs of whatever learners come to its doors? Certainly one perspective is to examine the changing client groups over time to predict new groups that may need special study. Another approach is to examine Australian immigration plans, especially with regard to humanitarian clients, to predict new groups likely to be eligible for AMEP services and who may present unique challenges for the AMEP. However, while humanitarian clients usually present new groups for the AMEP, the

AMEP also teaches immigrants from the family stream. Many in the family stream are relatives of family members who arrived in Australia in previous years under the humanitarian program, there being very few settlers on this program from those same countries in subsequent years. This can be seen in the steady numbers of Cambodian, Lebanese and Vietnamese family immigrants still coming to Australia: 203, 1065 and 1285 respectively in fiscal year 1999–2000, compared with only three, two and 21 arriving under the humanitarian program in 1999–2000 (DIMIA 2003). The additional category of client in the AMEP is family members of skilled immigrants. Australia admits migrants in various changing occupations, based on Australia's need. While DIMIA has several categories within the skilled stream, of interest here is the aggregate.

Therefore, we need to examine the groups whose numbers in the humanitarian category have changed since the project began, groups we expect to come in the next year based on immigration policy, and also projected new or increasing family reunion or skill groups. Even so, predicting the future is uncertain since ceasefires (for example, Sudan) or wars (for example, Iraq) may result in fewer refugees, or new civil strife may erupt where we were not expecting it.

> *The central problem of refugee policy is that it is based on humanitarian and not pragmatic considerations. It is also affected by warfare, revolution and the rise and fall of authoritarian regimes. This introduces uncertainty into processes which successive Australian governments have tried to make predictable.* (Jupp 2003, p BB3)

Similarly, with the skill program, Australia's needs may change, resulting in immigrants and AMEP clients from new groups or in different proportions.

Changing groups 2000–2003

AMEP teachers' and service providers' perceptions in the year 2000 that they were receiving clients from new areas such as Horn of Africa and Iraq, and new groups such as elderly Chinese, are supported by the data. Over the period 1999–2002, there was an almost 100% increase in offshore humanitarian grants[8] to Africa, while grants to Europe were almost halved. This can be seen in Table 5.

In the period May 1, 2002 to April 30, 2003 we find the numbers from all humanitarian programs for Sudan alone (2305) outstripping those from Iraq (2170). For Somalia, a country from which refugees began arriving earlier than from Sudan, we find the family stream (88) catching up with the humanitarian

Table 5   Offshore resettlement program, grants by region, 1998–99 to 2001–02

Region	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Europe[9]	4736	3424	3462	2709
Middle East and South-West Asia	2919	2208	2155	2743
Africa	1552	1736	2032	2801
Asia	295	113	316	189
America	24	21	27	16
TOTAL	**9526**	**7502**	**7992**	**8458**

stream (124). Similarly from Eritrea, the family stream was 35 while the humanitarian was 57, while for Ethiopia it was 175 and 315 respectively. In contrast, while 2305 arrived from Sudan under the humanitarian program, only 58 arrived under the family stream (DIMIA 2003).

In the period when the AMEP Research Centre consulted with service providers about potential research projects (mid-2000), while the largest groups in the AMEP were from People's Republic of China, Vietnam, former Yugoslavia and Lebanon, 9.1% were older Chinese, 5.4% were from Iraq, 3.1% were from Horn of Africa, and 1.3% from Sudan. By 2003, these numbers had changed dramatically. The five countries of origin with the highest percentage of clients did not change over the four-year period, although their ordering changed. However, interestingly, the percentage total for the top five has steadily declined from 59.1% in 1999 to 52.2% in 2003, resulting in greater representation from other countries of origin (see Table 6, page 22).

Since we consulted with teachers and service providers (mid-2000), numbers in the AMEP have remained constant for Horn of Africa, have fluctuated slightly for People's Republic of China (PRC) and Vietnam, have increased slightly for Iraq and Lebanon, have reduced significantly for the countries of the former Yugoslavia and have tripled for Sudan. While numbers have increased considerably for some other countries (for example, Thailand going from 1.4% in 1999 to 2.7% in 2003), the most dramatic increase has been in clients from Sudan, which more than doubled (from 2.2% to 4.8%) from the beginning of the research (Term 2, 2001) to the end of the research (Term 2, 2003).

Table 6   Percentage of clients in the AMEP 1999–2003 by country of origin[10]

Region	1999	2000	Term 2 2001	Term 2 2003
PRC	24.8	24.4	22.4	20.6
Vietnam	9.8	9.3	8.9	10.3
Former Yugoslavia[11]	17.2	15.1	17.0	9.6
Lebanon	2.9	3.9	4.3	5.0
Iraq	4.4	5.5	4.6	6.7
Top 5 total	**59.1**	**58.2**	**57.2**	**52.2**
Sudan	0.9	1.4	2.2	4.8
Horn of Africa[12]	3.0	3.0	2.7	3.0

In addition to clients from these particular countries of origin, teachers and service providers had identified elderly Chinese as another group that might need specially targetted strategies. Table 7 demonstrates that, while this group was reasonably large when they were identified, their numbers have declined considerably.

Table 7   Percentage of elderly Chinese clients in the AMEP 1999–2003

	1999	2000	Term 2 2001	Term 2 2003
PRC 46+ years	8.3	9.1	8.7	5.9

With regard to destination within Australia for migrants, there is considerable variation among the states, with Tasmania taking proportionately more from Horn of Africa and Sudan. A snapshot of differences among states for Term 2, 2003, at the end of the project, indicates which states are likely to experience increasing numbers of the client groups on which the research focused. In 2003, for example, while Tasmania accounted for only 0.7% of the total AMEP client group, Sudanese made up 44.4% of their clients, but were only 4.8% of the national client group (see Table 8).

Because of the different population sizes of the states, the PRC 46+ years group still represents a large number of clients (532), while the Sudanese in Tasmania, although being almost half of their clients, is still a modest number (40).

Table 8   State with the highest percentage of clients in the AMEP Term 2, 2003 by country of origin

Country of origin	National client group (percentage of)	State with largest representation (percentage of state client group)
Eritrea	0.5	WA (1.6)
Ethiopia	1.6	NT (9.1)
Somalia	0.9	Vic (2.1)
Sudan	4.8	Tas (44.4)
Iraq	6.7	WA (8.0)
PRC 46+ years	5.9	NSW (8.6)

In addition to humanitarian program entrants, we also need to consider those coming via the skills stream. As discussed above, the family stream largely follows on some years later from communities arriving through the other two streams. The following table shows the numbers of migrants in the skilled stream who arrived in 2001–02.

Table 9   Arrivals in skilled migration stream 2001–02 by region

Oceania	1073
Europe and former USSR	7221
Middle East and North Africa	688
South-East Asia	8070
North-East Asia	5803
Southern Asia	5819
Northern America	552
South America, Central America and the Caribbean	248
Africa (excluding North Africa)	6557

DIMIA 2002

This data is rather misleading when trying to predict numbers in the AMEP since several regions include largely English-speaking populations (New Zealand in Oceania, United Kingdom and Ireland in Europe, all countries in southern

Asia, and South Africa in Africa). However, the most recent figures for China, from which the largest number of immigrants come to Australia, for example, show that arrivals are almost equally split between family stream (3415) and the skill stream (3357) for the year ending April 2003. In contrast, for the same period, arrivals from Vietnam were largely in the family stream (2149) with only 186 in the skill stream (DIMIA 2003). These numbers are reflected in AMEP enrolments, where the Chinese constitute the largest percentage of skill stream entrants as can be seen below in Table 10.

Over the period 1999–2003, there has been fluctuation in the percentages among the top ten countries of origin in the skill stream and some internal change of ranking; however, the top ten have consistently remained the top ten. We do notice a considerable increase in Korean clients (which have more than doubled) and a reduction in clients from Hong Kong (by almost two-thirds).

Table 10   Percentage of AMEP skill stream clients 1999–2003 by country of origin

Country of birth	1999	2000	Term 2 2001	Term 2 2003
PRC	38.2	34.4	34.8	40.4
Taiwan	12.1	14.6	16.1	12.4
Indonesia	7.3	5.5	5.2	5.3
HKSAR of the PRC (Hong Kong)	6.2	6.1	4.3	2.3
Republic of Korea	3.9	4.4	4.7	8.3
USSR	3.8	4.1	3.3	2.4
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	2.2	1.6	1.7	1.2
India	1.8	2.8	3.7	3.4
Japan	1.8	1.7	2.0	2.7
Vietnam	1.5	1.8	1.5	2.0
Other	21.0	23.0	23.0	20.0
TOTAL	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

However, we also know that in 2001–02 in the AMEP the breakdown among the three broad streams was as follows (Table 11).

Table 11   AMEP clients 2001–02 by migration category[13]

Migration category	Principal applicants	Non-principal applicants	Total clients
Family/provisional	42.7	18.5	61.0
Humanitarian	11.2	11.9	23.0
Skill	2.7	10.0	13.0
Others	0.0	3.0	3.0
TOTAL	**56.5**	**43.4**	**100.0**

Therefore, the skilled stream accounts for a small but significant group within the AMEP.

The future

On May 7, 2002, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs announced that Australia would make 12 000 places available in the 2002–03 financial year (July–June) for the Humanitarian Program and that priority would be given to refugees from 'Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia, as recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (Ruddock 2002: 1). Jupp (2003: BB11) also notes that Australia has 'worked with the UNHCR in Africa to provide some minor remedy to the disaster in that continent'. In March 2003, the 2003–04 program was announced, similar to that for 2002–03, except that the targeted areas are Africa and the Middle East (Ruddock 2003). The data for each of the two financial years appears in Table 12 below (Ruddock 2003: 1; DIMIA 2003).

Table 12   Offshore Humanitarian Program – Regional breakdown for 2001–02 (actual grants) and 2002–03 (notional allocations)

Allocations	Europe	Africa	Middle East and South-West Asia	Asia and Americas
2001–02	32%	33%	32%	2%
2002–03	12%	43%	41%	4%

As Table 12 indicates, although projections were to focus on Africa and the Middle East and South-West Asia, in fact the actual numbers were fairly evenly distributed among the three main refugee areas. Projections for 2003–04 indicate a re-balancing. Australia can, therefore, expect to receive more offshore humanitarian program immigrants from Africa and the Middle East/South-West Asia than in 2002–03. However, these numbers are rather misleading since, in 2001–02, the largest number of grants were to the Middle East/South-West Asia because a large number of onshore grants (that is, grants to people already in Australia) were made so that, in fact, 48.5% of all humanitarian grants were made to this region, while only 23.6% were made to Africa. This was the direct result of temporary protection visas being granted to those seeking asylum directly in Australia, rather than in a third country. This group is not eligible for the AMEP. For 2003–04, as a result of the change of government in Afghanistan, Afghanis are no longer deemed to be among those with the greatest need for resettlement. Similarly, we might expect that, as a result of the war in Iraq, Iraqis will also be no longer considered in greatest need. While we will continue to receive immigrants from both countries, most will likely come from the family stream, as has already begun to happen with Iraq and Somalia.

Conclusion

Immigration is a complex phenomenon, depending as it does on variable government policy and changing world conditions, both economic and political. However, given the historical blend of AMEP clients, we would expect to find more humanitarian clients arriving from Africa, especially from Sudan and possibly from Rwanda, a country considered of concern to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. We would also expect family stream clients from Horn of Africa to continue to increase. States and territories with sizable communities from these countries are likely to experience the greatest increase in numbers. Meanwhile, the family stream from countries such as China, Vietnam and Lebanon will continue, while in the skill stream we could expect a continued increase in Korean clients.

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Notes

5   Service providers are those institutions which provide English language tuition for the AMEP in Australia.

6   In fact, Horn of Africa was widely interpreted to mean anyone from sub-Saharan Africa and so included Sudan.

7   Australia takes three major categories of immigrants. Humanitarian immigrants are fleeing persecution or war in their own countries and come either through the United Nations High Commission on Refugees or through Australia's own humanitarian program process. Immigrants in the skill stream are those offered settlement in Australia because they possess work skills (or business investment) in areas where Australia has insufficient workers. Immigrants in the family stream are sponsored by a family member already resident in Australia.

8   'Grants' is the term used by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to refer to offers made of places available. As a result of changing circumstances in various countries, this may differ from the number of places initially set aside in different categories.

9   Offshore (that is, outside Australia) humanitarian grants are primarily made to residents of the former Yugoslavia

10   The numbers are for four data points 1999, 2000, the beginning of the research project (Term 2, 2001) and the end of the research project (Term 2, 2003).

11   As well as clients stating Yugoslavia, this includes those stating the newly formed countries of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

12   Includes here Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.

13   All AMEP data are from the National Measurement Information Unit.

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Chapter 3: Oracy is more than the absence of literacy: Changing learner groups in ESL classrooms in highly literate societies

Howard Nicholas and Alan Williams

The goal of supporting adult immigrant learners for life in the modern techno-logically oriented societies of the English-speaking migrant intake countries means that ESL programs for these learners need to assist them to develop both their English language oracy and literacy. Within these programs, the insights of researchers such as Collier (1987) and Cummins (1979), building on the work of Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukamaa (1976) and Brent-Palmer (1979), have generally been acknowledged. These insights are that, given acknowledgment and incorporation of their culture and identity, learners will make easier progress in the acquisition of second language literacy if they have well-developed first language literacy and, implicitly, a version of first language oracy that will com-plement their first language literacy. This is because in learning one language well, people not only learn that language but also learn something about the general ways in which languages can be organised. This helps them to predict what they might have to learn in a new language. For example, in learning a lan-guage, people learn that there are things we recognise as words. Consequently, in learning a new language, we look for the 'words' in that language. In learning to write a language, we generally learn that there are ways of dividing the flow of symbols into 'words' or 'sentences' and so we know to look for these groupings in a new language.

Generally, in learning languages in literacy-based societies, children progress from learning a spoken version of a language to a written version. Children make use of what they have learned about the specific language and language in general through learning to speak when they come to learn to read and write. Thus, their knowledge and understanding of spoken language complement and benefit their learning and use of written language. Having a well-developed understanding of language through learning to speak, readers can make predictions about what they see when they meet written text. Through the exploration of learning to read and write, children gain a better understanding both of what is shared between oral and written language and also what distinguishes these two modes of language use. In turn, teachers with good understandings of these complex

relationships can make use of those understandings to help their students to progress further and faster.

The ability to use insights from learning to speak in learning to read and write is, however, limited if either the learner only has an insecure base in their spoken variety (for example, someone with severely disrupted schooling or with experiences of schooling that have consistently characterised them as an 'outsider'), or if there are dramatic differences between the features of the spoken variety and the features of the written variety. In this chapter, we will not consider the issues of people with only limited command of their first language. Rather, our focus will be on contexts where there is potential for there to be a great difference between speaking and writing because the tradition in the culture is for oral communication. One insight into this difference is provided by Soyinka (1976: 38–9).

> … *the difference which we are seeking to define between European and African drama … is not simply a difference of style or form, nor is it confined to drama alone. It is representative of the essential differences between two world-views, a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics … The so-called audience is itself an integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena through offerings and incantations.*

We will refer to cultures, such as those that also underpin Soyinka's thinking about 'African drama', as 'highly oral' or 'high oracy' cultures. By this we mean cultures where the core meanings and texts, as well as the core negotiating processes, are oral rather than written. In such cultures, for example, there is generally no written statement of the culture's core values, there tend to be no written legends/tales/myths and no requirement that something be 'put in writing' before it is regarded as confirmed.

Stephenson (2000: xiii), a white American who lived for a year with the Hadzabe people in Tanzania, captured this from the perspective of an uninformed outsider as follows.

> *The hunters' body language and way of communicating was absolutely captivating. They were keen imitators of animal sounds and excellent actors … [I] … later came to understand the importance of exaggera-*

tion, enriching the actual experience, to create a more universal truth for the listening party; which I find is the brilliance of oral history – it is not solidified in time and space. It embodies continuous change, improvisation, growth.

In order for teachers to be able to draw on the insights into language for learners from those cultures, they need a clearer understanding of what constitutes oracy and of the potential relationships between oracy and literacy. In particular, they need insight into how oral texts and interactions in highly oral cultures are organised and what such texts and interactions offer as insights into what language is and what the expected values in communication are.

Highly oral cultures and L2 learning

In this chapter, we explore the nature of 'oracy' as it might apply to learners from languages and cultures that might be described as 'highly oral' because of the centrality of oral interaction in those cultures. Although there may now be written forms of such languages, the written forms are either recent or exist in highly differentiated contexts from those in which the spoken language is used (Ferguson 1959). Such learners are often labelled 'high oracy' in the discussions of their teachers, because these teachers perceive an adeptness in using, or a willingness to use, spoken language that may not be so widespread among learners from cultures with more dominant traditions of literacy. We believe that such an exploration is necessary because language teaching curricula in ESL programs for adult immigrants may not sufficiently address this area. This is because these curricula are largely framed from the perspectives of a highly literate society. These perspectives are based on well developed understandings of literacy that include the understanding of literacy as sets of practices and attitudes towards written texts, as well as the skills individuals need in order to read and write. The curricula reflect the primacy of literacy in the language practices and culture of these societies, as well as the centrality of literacy in the professional discourse of teachers of ESL to adults.

In working with learners from high oracy backgrounds, ESL teachers and administrators may need to explore their own assumptions and prior experiences, for it is likely that their training and socialisation in a culture with a strong orientation to literacy may lead them into a 'literacy-centred' perception of their learners. While such a perception takes account of the learning that 'high oracy' learners may need in order to meet the expectations of a technological and literacy-oriented society, it may also prevent teachers from fully appreciating

the ways in which such learners use spoken language. A perception of learners that takes account of both the expectations of a literate society, and the cultures of 'oral' linguistic traditions, will help teachers to support high oracy learners in their acquisition of both spoken and written English.

As outlined in Chapter 1, in Australia there has been a recent wave of migrants from the African subcontinent. In many of these countries, particularly those located in Horn of Africa, literacy is a recent development, rates of literacy are quite low, and experience of schooling is quite limited (see Chapter 4). Additionally, learners from parts of the Middle East in adult migrant ESL programs have often come from minority groups in their countries of origin, such as the Assyrians from Iraq. Members of these communities have had to develop proficiency and literacy in the dominant language of their society, such as Arabic, rather than in their home language, so that their literacy may be limited and its use may be restricted to certain domains. Their initial experiences of communication and their primary culture of identification will have been in a language that is not written so that the norms of oral interaction will have prevailed. Their existence as a marginalised minority will have kept them at some distance from the literate traditions of the dominant culture and so their identity as members of a high oral culture will have been reinforced. As we will see below, the fact that there is a strong oral tradition associated with Arabic is likely to provide additional space for members of the Assyrian community to see themselves as within a highly oral culture.

Learners from such traditions have backgrounds of language use and previous education that are often significantly different from the backgrounds of earlier generations of migrants and refugees from regions such as the Mediterranean, eastern Europe, South America and parts of South-East Asia such as Vietnam. These earlier groups of migrants often came from societies in which literacy, and language use in the context of a highly literate society, was widespread.[14]

Features of high oracy communication

As will be explored in depth here, this different relationship of learners to written language creates increased challenges for teachers in developing ways in which they can enable learners to build on their existing language knowledge in their learning of the new language. The nature of this difficulty is that the relationship between a highly oral first language, and a highly literate second language, is more abstract and consequently more difficult to recognise and to reveal to the learners. For example, Olson (1994: 68) has argued that:

writing systems provide the concepts and categories for thinking about the structure of the spoken language rather than the reverse. Awareness of linguistic structure is a product of a writing system not a precondition for its development.

All languages are socially situated and encode interpersonal relationships, but this is done differently in spoken and written language. Consequently, the greater the differences between the oral and literate orientations of two languages and their users, the more difficult it will be for learners and teachers to see how the learners' knowledge of language in general gained through their first language can be used in learning a second language. For example, as we will argue here, based on Tannen (1989), in highly oral languages, repetition can be used as a way of showing that speaker and hearer are closely related to one another, and understand what is being 'said'. In other words, the oral text is shaped by joint participation. In English, as a highly literate language, in contrast, the joint shaping results from the speaker anticipating the information that the reader will need and trying to shape the written text to meet those needs so that the participation of the interlocutor in the creation of the text is implicit.[15] This distinction means that it may be difficult for either the teacher or the learner to see how the features of, for example, a highly oral language are mirrored in a highly literate language. In discussing African mythology, Scheub (2000: 136) points out that:

In an art form that places paramount stress on the emotions, nonverbal aspects of performance are of enormous significance … the nonverbal character of the performance [includes] the body of the artist, movement that is a muted form of dance, the music of the voice, the exploiting of the tonal qualities of the language, the drama of the face, and the shaping force of the hands.

It is difficult to find a direct translation of these features in written language. These features can be understood in the context in which the oral language is mediating the communication because both speaker and hearer/observer/other participants are present and share the background and can adjust the interaction if something is not working. In written communication this interactivity would not be possible and the amount of written language that would be needed to communicate something that might be signalled by a gesture of the hands is frequently enormous.

Biber and Hared (1994) have noted how the introduction of written varieties into Somali in 1972 has resulted in substantial changes in the range of registers

that can be used in Somali. Some aspects of communication that can be thought of as dominated by the oral tradition (for example, folk tales) showed very little expansion, but other registers show dramatic changes over time. While the written texts usually started looking like spoken texts, over time, they evolved to be more and more distinctive, showing decreasing signals of interpersonal involvement, greater variation in the extent to which information is 'qualified' through devices such as subordinate clauses and much greater elaboration of vocabulary to more 'precisely' express meanings.

Issues in teaching second language learners from highly oral cultures

For learners of a second language from a background with no or limited literacy, oracy will have to be used to introduce and motivate the development of literacy, and the extent to which second language literacy will develop will be influenced by the mediational processes of the oral language, which are likely to be strongly influenced by learners' first language interactional practices (see Kasper and Rose 1999, or Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). This requires teachers to be able to make judgments about what learners are able to do. If they cannot easily recognise what learners are trying to do, they will be less able to assist them to take the 'next step'.

Researchers such as Ohta (2000: 52) point out that second language development:

> is impeded both by helping the learner with what she or he is already able to do, and by not withdrawing assistance such that the learner develops the ability to work independently.

Clearly, a key element in making these judgments is the way in which the learner signals, and the teacher perceives, what the learner is capable of linguistically. These judgments will be crucially influenced by the assumptions that the teacher makes about what the learner is doing. If the learner is trying to communicate in ways that are not easy for the teacher to recognise, then the teacher will be less able to respond in ways that are needed. As Ohta (2000: 76) concludes:

> Clearly the nature of effective assistance in the ZPD [Zone of Proximal Development] varies depending upon a variety of factors, including the expertise of the helper (whether 'expert' or 'peer'), the nature of the task, the goals of participants, and the developmental levels of the learners.

As argued within the same Vygotskian framework by Kramsch (2000: 134):

> we learn language not by memorizing arbitrary linguistic shapes and sounds and then putting them to use in goal-oriented activities, but rather, we primarily engage in social activities like schooling, shopping, conducting conversations, responding to teachers' questions. These activities are mediated by all kinds of material signs like gestures, facial expressions, linguistic shapes, and sounds. Through these mediational means, or 'sign operations', external social interactions become 'internalised', that is, reconstructed internally, as psychological processes – ways of thinking, modes of learning.

Where the communication processes and, hence, the 'signs' are not easy to recognise, it will be more difficult both for the learner to see what the teacher is trying to achieve, and for the teacher to see what the learner is trying to achieve.

We therefore need a clearer understanding of the signs and features of oral language in high oral cultures in order to understand what might motivate the construction of their texts. Citing Olson (1994: 91) again:

> whereas spoken utterances tend to indicate both what is said and how it is to be taken, written ones tend to specify only the former.

As Gumperz (1982) demonstrated compellingly in his analysis of the role of stress and intonation in spoken interaction, ways in which we use spoken language are very powerful in influencing the interpretation by others of our intentions. Furthermore, features of spoken interaction that we unconsciously bring from our first languages can be extraordinarily powerful in shaping the ways in which others interpret our intentions.

Patterns in first language use are established very early and, aside from being enduring, are not very easily able to be controlled by learners. As Minami (2002: 264) demonstrates:

> whereas English-speaking mothers allow their children to take long monologic turns and they give many evaluative comments, Japanese mothers – regardless of their child's age (that is, whether the child is four or five) and regardless of where they live (that is, whether living in Japan or the United States) – simultaneously pay considerable attention to their children's narratives and facilitate frequent turn exchanges.

One consequence of this difference is that speakers of English could easily perceive speakers of Japanese to be interrupting while speakers of Japanese could

perceive speakers of English as 'droning on' for far too long. The complexities of these judgments are discussed by Scollon and Scollon (2001: 48).

> *A speaker must find just the right way of saying something which shows the degree to which he or she is involving the other participants and the degree to which he or she is granting independence.*

The reason that involvement and independence are in conflict is that emphasising one of them risks a threat to the other. If I show you too much involvement, you are likely to feel that your independence is being threatened. On the other hand if I grant you too much independence, you are likely to feel that I have limited your involvement.

In this context, it is essential to understand the ways in which learners with highly oral cultures may be constructing their communication processes so that teachers can recognise and appropriately assess the intentions of the learners. Olson (1994: 46) cites Havelock (1963, 1982) as arguing that in classical Greek, the shift from Homer to Socrates is associated with a change from the use of a 'poetically based oral tradition' to a use of 'written records and explicit argument, a literate tradition'. In the following sections we will characterise highly oral cultures in more depth.

Characterising highly oral cultures

As was discussed in Chapter 1, all groups of learners from a particular country need to be thought of in at least two ways. They both share certain features as a result of shared cultural and life experiences and at the same time are differentiated according to their individual and sub-group characteristics. The different combinations of internal and external factors mean that each person will approach second language learning in ways particular to them, but some of these ways will overlap with the ways that other learners with similar experiences choose.

In this chapter we explore the features of interpersonal interaction in highly oral cultures, some of the consequences of highly oral cultures for the organisation of culturally significant texts, and the implications of some of these features for learners with different levels, or experiences of, education. We give some attention to people from four of the countries that make up Horn of Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea). We also consider features of oracy associated with Arabic and with cultural groups from countries such as Iraq, where the influence of Arabic is extensive.

A key point in our argument is that highly oral cultures frequently do things differently from highly literate cultures. In particular, because of the use of speech to record and transact the core meanings of the culture, there is an emphasis on sharing and continuity. This characteristic means that the processes of interaction, and the roles of the interactants, are understood differently from those processes and roles in highly literate cultures. Vansina (1985: 54) argues in relation to highly oral cultures that:

> *original compositions do not exist in several genres of oral tradition. All we have are performances. We can only ask whether a given performance that claimed to be part of a tradition is indeed part of a tradition or not.*

Scheub (2000: xvi) also argues:

> *The enormously complex performance aspects of storytelling, the art of the storyteller, is the key to understanding the meaning of myth.*

As we will show, the expectations and reactions of both learners and teachers come from deep-seated (sometimes hidden) values in the cultures of both participants. Here, we will try to describe some of the key features of cultural expectations as they relate to the differences between oral and literate cultures, while trying to remain conscious of the fact that not all learners from these cultures will behave in identical ways.

Oral language is not just the production of an individual

Tannen (1989: 12) identifies as a prominent feature of spoken discourse the notion of 'involvement', which she characterises as follows:

> *an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories and words … [and as] … an achievement in conversational interaction.*

Consistent with Tannen's argument, we do not draw a categorical boundary between spoken and written discourse. However, Tannen argues that oral language is a particularly important means of creating a sense of involvement between people. In this role, oracy features in all languages. It is a role that is less prominent in written discourse, which *tends* (Tannen 1989: 11) to feature detachment. As Scollon and Scollon (2001: 48) have indicated, in all cultures, there is a need for both engagement and detachment and there is a need for all

modes of communication to enable both. As Tannen (ibid) points out and Minami (2002) reinforces, the resources of conversational interaction are frequently drawn on (in modified form) in more literary forms of communication. A highly oral culture, however, is one in which these more detached functions are primarily or exclusively expressed in oral language (or orally-based versions of the language). In highly oral cultures things such as the core texts are conveyed verbally where a literate speech community would convey them in writing. Examples of these features of highly oral cultures would be when the following exist primarily or exclusively in spoken form: key myths (folk tales), religious or belief messages, histories, legal texts and representations of identity.

It is obviously true that a particular stretch of oral language can only emerge from one mouth. However, oral language texts[16] are frequently (if not mainly) produced by more than one person. Vansina (1985: 34) argues that:

> In most cases the public is not just watching. The public is active. It interacts with the teller, and the teller provokes this interaction … the teller and public are creating the tale together.

This dimension of oral language use is quite different from the dominant nature of written language and relies on quite different assumptions about who knows what and how speaker, hearer and text are meant to relate to one another. While this joint construction can be found in certain oral interactions in a highly literate society (for example, casual conversation), the key difference between a highly oral culture and a highly literate culture is that the joint construction of texts is the dominant feature of highly oral cultures. This feature of joint construction implies that the 'audience' is an active participant in the creation of the text. There is no single creator of the text who has to think about what information the 'audience' might need.

Oral cultures make explicit something that is present but not highlighted in literate cultures. In oral cultures the joint production of oral language is overt. The roles and responsibilities of 'audience' in supporting the speaker's production are explicit. This places different demands on the production of oral language from those placed on it in literate cultures. In oral cultures, the speaker must provide 'slots' into which support moves can be inserted (Soyinka 1976: 38–9). Parallel to this is the expectation by the speaker that the audience will produce the support moves. While these support moves – for example, back channel markers (Duncan 1973) – are required in literate languages, they are reduced in significance and, particularly in teaching contexts, given little more status than grunts.

Hansen-Strain (1989) demonstrated that learners of English as a second language from Samoan and Tongan backgrounds (classed by Hansen-Strain as dominantly oral cultures) produced linguistic features that indicated significantly higher levels of interpersonal involvement in their spoken and written English than did learners from Japanese, Chinese and Korean backgrounds even when all of the groups were matched for ESL proficiency. The spoken and written texts produced by the Samoan and Tongan learners contained features such as much more frequent use of first person references, more references to the audience in the second person, references to the speaker's/writer's own mental processes and the inclusion of comments that can be seen as monitoring the information flow through expressions such as 'well', 'I mean' and 'you know'.

Oral texts have systematic features that distinguish their organisation from that of written texts

In an analysis of features of oral texts from Africa, Okpewho (1992: 70ff) identified the following features of oral literature. We will briefly discuss each of these features in turn.

- Repetition
- Parallelism
- Piling and association
- Tonality
- Ideophones
- Digression
- Imagery
- Allusion
- Symbolism

These features are not those of a 'deficient' or limited system. Rather, they are features that help to make oral language effective in its own terms. They work because they employ assumptions about the immediacy of the sharing between the speaker and the audience, and about the 'live' nature of the interaction. Importantly, they provide ways in which the audience can participate in the making of the text, that is, demonstrate and create 'involvement'. They rely on the ability of both speaker and audience to use the text as a whole.

Repetition

Okpewho (1992: 70ff) indicates that the contributions of repetition are as follows. Repetition:

- adds to the 'poetry' of the text
- invites the audience to join in/respond
- adds emphasis
- expresses emotions (excitement, agitation)
- maintains the rhythmic beat
- indicates boundaries in the text
- provides planning time.

McWhorter (2002: 245) provides the following example from Speaker A and Speaker B, who are using Somali, that illustrates the way that repetition can work both within and between speaker turns. In Biber and Hared (1994: 196–7) this same conversation is described as being between two young women who are discussing whether they have meddled in a relationship between a married couple in which Speaker A feels that she has been unjustly accused of meddling. Note the way that 'my man' is used both by Speaker B, who in providing a quote from another woman provides a repetition of the way in which the other woman had said 'my man, my man' and then this feature is partially picked up and repeated by Speaker A.

Speaker A: *Wallaahi, dee, way iska fiicnayd-suurahay taqaan, haye?*

Swear, um, she just fine coyness-she knew huh?

I SWEAR SHE WAS JUST FINE. SHE KNEW HOW TO BE COY, DIDN'T SHE?

Speaker B: *Waxaa iigu dambeysayba waa kaas. Waxay iigu*

what for-me was-last-time that what-she for-me

darnayd ayaantay Amina ku tidhi 'Ninkayga, ninkayga …'

was-the-worst the-day-she Amina to she-said my-man, my-man …

THE LAST TIME THAT I SAW HER WAS THEN. THE WORST THING FOR ME WAS THE DAY SHE SAID TO AMINA, 'MY MAN, MY MAN …'

Speaker A: *'Ninkaygay igu dirayaan'*

My-man-they to-me they-set

THEY'RE SETTING MY MAN AGAINST ME.

This feature of repetition is not restricted to African languages, and neither is it restricted to high oracy languages; it is simply more frequently present in those languages. Tannen (1989: 79) points out that Johnstone (1987a, cited in Tannen 1989) argues that the grammatical structure of Arabic makes repetition strategies especially available to Arabic speakers.

Parallelism

While repetition is a fairly transparent feature and one acknowledged in many cultures, other features of oral language are less frequently cited. An additional strategy identified by Okpewho (1992) seeks to manipulate changes in the text for rhetorical effect.

Parallelism is the '… transposition or criss-crossing, between adjacent lines, of identical units of speech' or makes use of different words (meanings) in the same structure to mark contrasts.

Scheub (2000: 280) cites the following example of 'African' mythmaking from Frobenius and Fox (1937).

All creatures must die, be buried and rot.

Kings and heroes die, are buried and rot.

I, too, shall die, shall be buried and rot.

There are similarities in this device to 'repetition', but the distinctive dimension is how the repeated element is contextualised or how the more abstract grammatical structure is repeated, but the elements filling the slots in the structure are changed. Such effects are appreciated in poetic writing, but are frequently not looked for in other forms of writing.

Piling and association

The next strategy to be identified by Okpewho (1992: 83) is piling and association, which is characterised in the following way.

In African oral literature, it is perhaps true to say that fullness, not economy, of expression is a fundamental virtue.

the last detail in one line of a song becom[es] *the first detail in the next.*

Whereas written communication frequently[17] demands that its content be transmitted in the most economic matter because, in one sense, it will be intruding on the time of the reader at a time not of the reader's choosing, oral communication is part of a mutually chosen and shared experience. As such, part of the context is the devotion of the speaker's and the listener's time to the totality of the experience. The time devoted to communication is itself part of the process of communication.

Once the experience of communication itself is seen as part of the process of communication, other ways of using language that are not governed by the idea of economy of information exchange are opened up.

Tonality

Okpewho (1992) notes an additional feature of the 'sound' or oral texts that can be found in Christian church services, and is a major feature of oral texts in high oracy cultures. He labels this feature 'tonality':

> *words and lines are frequently stretched out to unusual lengths by giving individual syllables a variety of tones so as to produce a lyrical effect. African tone riddles provide an example of this since the meaning is not transparent, but parts are linked by quality of pronunciation.*
> (1992: 88–9)

The embedding of meaning in the process of communication itself such that the process is part of the meaning means that some of the poetry of communication, the ways in which sound can be played with, and the appreciation of the ways in which things are said become additional resources that can be used by speakers to convey additional layers of meaning. These resources are, again, not obvious in writing, and particularly not in transactional writing, where the purpose is the negotiation of services rather than the expression of self or identity. Such features can be found in novels, poetry and creative writing in highly literate societies such as English-based ones, but in highly literate societies, these text features are restricted to those contexts. Thus the ability to play with 'sound' is an additional creative resource that is available across a wide range of contexts in high oracy cultures. This feature makes an aesthetic dimension of language use more prominent in high oracy communication.

Ideophones

According to Okpewho, ideophones are '… sounds used in conveying a vivid impression …' (1992: 92) – sometimes like onomatopoeia but derived from words whose meaning is related to the concept being conveyed.

Once the immediacy of the context is part of the communication process (rather than something that is regarded as compensating for deficiencies in the means by which information is conveyed), it becomes possible to exploit what both speaker and listener could be expected to know or associate with the moment, and also to expand on those points. Expanding on those points can lead to the exploration of ideas that were not 'planned' but which become significant as a result of the reactions or perceptions of reaction of the audience and will induce a strong deviation from the requirement of 'linearity' in English.

Digression

It will be difficult to explore the relationship between this elaborative/exploratory/digressive feature of oral language and the parallel features of writing. English copes with this via footnotes, but footnotes do not usually find a place in the early learning of second language writing. Okpewho (1992) labels this feature digression and notes that it:

- comments on some aspect of the context of the performance
- comments on something that arises in the story or song
- ensures that there is a direct connection between the performer and the audience's perceived needs.

And since digression pays attention to the possibilities for extension offered by the audience, other aspects of the audience can be utilised as well. Known features of key referents or shared understandings of the context can be used to convey additional meanings. And, as in poetry in literate cultures, in highly oral cultures imagery can be exploited in the moment of the performance to induce additional effects and to excite the appreciation of the audience. Again notice how this may appear to be 'slow' and 'irrelevant' to the mind of the English speaker, but how it prevents us 'rushing' past points (not stopping to enjoy the view) from an alternative perspective.

Imagery

Masellane is a self-spreading rock,
spreading itself out from the start.
A pestle that rattles and jars,
he spoils other people's rhythm,
he stamps though he was not invited.
[a chief of the Kgatla clan], stamping is the symbol of the
largest clan he subdued

Further, once the notion of shared context with a shared sense of possible meanings and referents and a shared sense of history is invoked, there is less need to be explicit in the identification of the meanings to be made since they can be alluded to indirectly in the expectation that the audience will have shared similar meanings before because they will have shared in the making of such meanings before.

Allusion

Because of the shared context of much high oracy communication, it is more possible to convey subtle messages implicitly. Members of the culture will have grown up within a common environment and been introduced to many of the same linguistic resources such as tales and proverbs. Since everyone can be expected to know the same material, it is possible to send messages to others by alluding to material giving a meaning that everyone shares. Consequently, it is not necessary to spell out all meanings fully. The most frequently used devices for allusion are:

- Compressed metaphors (proverbs)
- Standard phrases of identification – usually originating in folktales.

An extension of allusion is the use of symbolism. The shared participation in the creation of meaning will mean that certain symbols of meaning will be drawn on in a repeated manner and, therefore, will become available for use without the laborious process of explicit identification.

Symbolism

Again, owing to the constant reinforcement of particular meanings and ways of expression, it is more possible in high oracy cultures than in high literacy cultures for meanings to be expressed indirectly – for example, by reference to something else that stands for the explicit meaning. These symbols identify both culturally significant meanings and also permit highly complex and multiple meanings to be conveyed with great economy. By reference to the symbol, all the other associations with that symbol are also brought into play and opened up for application to the context of the utterance. For example:

> Right hand for truth; left hand for falsehood
> Food for contentment and well-being

The use of these symbols means that the audience is expected to derive meaning from the story without explicit telling. In the above examples, the audience is enabled to draw on their full range of associations with food – their own experiences of it and of the social relations that surround it. Similarly, in referring to left and right hands all of the other associations with handedness and the activities that those different hands partake in are also brought into the range of meaning making.

These powerful features of oral language that derive from the shared nature of its use and the additional resources for meaning making that this shared context provides will be interpreted very differently if they are manifested in writing. However, ideas such as allusion and symbolism are among the most difficult to negotiate effectively in writing – drawing as they do on sophisticated understandings of cultural environment.

The poetic qualities of highly oral cultures

In the above sections we have been highlighting some of the poetic aspects of oral communication and suggesting that it is a feature of spoken interaction, the usefulness of which will not be obvious in most forms of written communication.

Somali culture is characterised as follows according to Putman and Noor (1993), who have published a webpage on the Center for Applied Linguistics website.

Somali culture:

- is fundamentally egalitarian (to the point of anarchy)
- has a cultural valuing of poetry and oratory
- engages in discourse that is seen as challenging or testing.

And that according to Robinson (1999: 6):

> [For Somalis] *Poetry can be used as a means of sending messages, spreading propaganda, justifying a political point of view, competing for public status and transmitting cultural wisdom in proverbs and sayings.*

Furthermore, according to Lewis (1993b: 146–7):

> *Somalis have a 'strong sense of cultural nationalism' … the success of the 1900 to 1920 struggle for independence was crucially dependent on the then leader's 'power of oratory and genius … as a major oral poet.'*

These features are again difficult to transform in ways that will be useful in early second language writing. But whereas poetry conveys images of unity and the

sharing of affect, it is not always the case that oral language is used in this way, as is hinted at in identifying the political role that oratory and poetry play in Somalia.

Oral language is not necessarily overtly supportive

The notions of 'safety' are not necessarily as culturally inclusive as they have been assumed to be in recent language teaching methodologies.

Turton (1994: 26) in relation to the Mursi and Nyangatom speakers of Ethiopia notes that:

> the activity of warfare itself and not just the joint rituals with which it concluded, can be seen as a common ritual language, a system of shared meanings by which groups make themselves significant to each other and to themselves.

This comment suggests that in certain cultures at least, acknowledgment of the individual through some sense of individualised challenge could be seen as more inclusive than a more generalised and amorphous sense of risk reduction in which it is regarded as inappropriate to intrude on someone else's behaviour – particularly if that person is an adult. Lewis' point about Somali culture being democratic to the point of anarchy is one way of thinking about this. In such cultures, the metaphor of challenge may be less one of exclusion and more one of acknowledgment. To challenge may not be to threaten but rather to recognise and incorporate the reality of the difference.[18] The entitlements to challenge may not be evenly distributed within the society and there may also be other rituals attaching to both the presentation and resolution of the challenge such that the challenge may need to be presented in quite particular ways, and those ways may differ for different members of the culture. Such routines are familiar in, for example, the manner in which stand-up comedians 'work' an audience within an English-speaking culture, but are not normally seen as part of the role of a 'teacher'. Public speakers are also culturally recognised users of some elements of the 'challenge' dynamic in large gatherings.

Features of interaction in highly oral cultures

As indicated previously, a highly oral culture is not a non-literate culture; the features of oral interaction in highly oral cultures are not simply the absence of features that characterise literate cultures. Mohamed and Omar (2000: 47) point out that:

> The most influential books in the Arab-Islamic culture have always been accompanied by oral explanations which have been handed down from one generation to another.

In work comparing Arabic and English, Mohamed and Omar (2000) have developed the following way of capturing some of the differences between the languages and relating them to features of the organisation of the cultures. In doing this, they have drawn on the work of Hofstede (1991), who attempted to identify some of the general parameters of cultural variation (at least as they related to people employed by IBM in different countries). Hofstede argued that some cultures could be distinguished according to the extent to which individuals were granted space to behave in a manner that suited them (individualist) compared to cultures in which the actions of individuals automatically had implications for other members of the same group. In the latter group of cultures, choices to act in particular ways have to be made in light of their consequences for the individuals' relationships with and responsibilities for others (collectivist).

In addition to the dimensions of individualism and collectivism, there is a third dimension along which, according to Hofstede, cultures can also be distinguished. Using this dimension, cultures can be distinguished according to the extent to which members of the culture are able to assume a shared interpretive framework and therefore communicate indirectly (high context) or are required to make meaning explicit and communicate directly (low context). A related aspect of culture is, therefore, that in 'writing', high context cultures expect readers to be responsible for making sense of what is said/written whereas low context cultures expect the speaker/writer to be responsible for framing the language in such a way that the reader does not have to do (much) work to understand what has been intended (writer-responsible). Mohamed and Omar (2000) set out the differences along these dimensions between Arabic and English (see Table 13) and point out that Arabic is an oralised culture whereas English is a 'literate' culture. Note that in their framework, this does not mean that Arabic is not written and should not be taken to imply that there is not extensive literature and literacy in Arabic.

Table 13   Interrelationships between cultural and cohesive contrasts: Arabic and English

Arabic	English	Arabic	English
Collectivist	Individualist		
High contact	Low-contact	Oralised	Literate
High context	Low-context		
Reader responsible	Writer-responsible		
Context-based	Text-based	Repetition-oriented	Change-oriented
Generalised	Specified		

Mohamed and Omar go on to indicate some of the features of the texts that are produced within these two broad cultural frameworks. Arabic texts are located within a context so that lots of meanings can or should be inferred. In contrast, English texts are meant to make their meanings explicit, and relationships between different parts of the text are drawn directly to the reader's attention. Consistent with the notion of explicitness, English texts are structured around change and changing references. Even if there is a linear structure to them, the relationships within that structure are varied and novelty is a feature of later sections. In contrast, Arabic texts refer back to the same central concepts (either directly or indirectly). To the extent that the same concepts are referred to in Arabic texts, these texts are additive (or can be assumed to be additive) whereas English texts with their variability provide contrasts and ways of developing that do not 'simply' add to what was there previously.

Implications for teachers in ESL programs for adult immigrant learners

We have argued that highly oral cultures are not just cultures without (or with low levels of) literacy. Highly oral cultures, such as those from which many learners from changing client groups in the AMEP come, have ways of using spoken language that are different from the literacy-oriented approaches to language use that are evident in more technologically focused societies. Oracy in a language means an understanding of the purposes of different types of spoken texts, and practices associated with oral language use, in the same way that 'literacy' involves an understanding of the purposes of written language, and the ways in which written texts may be produced and used. While this is at least an implicit understanding in learners, it is one that ESL teachers need to understand and to be able to analyse explicitly in the English of their students.

We emphasise that in discussing 'highly oral' and 'highly literate' cultures, we are not seeking to set up a dichotomy of 'either x or y'. It is a matter of emphasis, rather than alternatives. In a highly oral culture, spoken language is used to achieve many of the functions achieved by written language in more literate traditions, and spoken language is shaped in order to achieve these ends. This wide set of purposes and the understanding of the flexibility of oral language are available to the learners.

In assisting learners to develop proficiency in English, teachers in programs such as the AMEP need to bear in mind that oracy is not just the absence of literacy. Learners from highly oral cultures come to their learning of English with different assumptions and perceptions about language use and interaction in spoken and written English compared to learners from highly literate cultures. In assisting these learners, teachers may find it more productive to understand what they observe in their students' use of spoken English in terms of the practices and possibilities of highly oral cultures, rather than in the conventions and expectations of cultures with a stronger orientation towards literacy. In assisting these learners to develop skills in using and producing texts in written English, teachers also need to be mindful of the need to assist such students in developing an awareness of the significance of literacy and its relationship with spoken language in the technologically oriented societies they have moved into.

Notes

14 This was not so true of some of the early waves of immigrants who came from rural backgrounds in the Mediterranean. However, at the time of their arrival in English-speaking countries, many of these immigrants either found work in occupational categories regarded as 'skilled or semi-skilled', and lived and worked in English-speaking countries at a time when high levels of literacy were not required or even expected of them. In time, it was often their children who assisted (and still assist) them in situations where English literacy is required. Many of these immigrants also had little experience of ESL programs, as they found employment very soon after arriving in the new country.

15 There is a similarity in this to the manner in which, for example, Chinese and English writing are distinguished as writer responsible and reader responsible texts (Hinds 1987). In the former, it is possible for writers to leave items of information out of the text in anticipation that the reader will be able to work out what is required. In the latter, it is the responsibility of the writer to supply all the information so that the reader is not required to do any additional work in determining what is being referred to. The distinction that we are making between highly oral and highly literate languages is a stronger version of this distinction and extends further the nature of the continuum along which we can distinguish between languages.

16 An oral language text can take many forms, from a short poem, through a complete spoken dialogue to an extended piece of 'oral literature' such as either sung religious texts or folk tales (see Tabouret-Keller et al 1997).

17 We note again that these are no more than tendencies. Features associated with high oracy cultures can be found in specific contexts in high literacy cultures. It is 'simply' that more of them are found more frequently and across a wider range of contexts in highly oral cultures. Similarly, features attributed to 'writing' are not equally present in all high literacy cultures.

18 This 'cultural preference' may, of course, not be restricted to members of that culture. Individuals regardless of cultural background may derive their sense of identity precisely from such a sense of challenge. Parents of adolescents will be familiar with one manifestation of this in Anglo-Australian culture!

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Chapter 4: The influence of prior learning

Lynda Yates

When adult students come into our language classrooms, they bring with them a wealth of experience accumulated over a number of years in a range of domains and contexts. One of these is their experience of schooling. Although there has been considerable interest in the influence on language learning of a range of other factors – such as age (for example, Birdsong 1999; Stevens 1999; Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow 2000; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2001), language background and cultural influences (for example, Hinkel 1999; Swan and Smith 2000) – prior educational background has not always received its due attention in the literature, despite the rather self-evident fact that what immigrant learners have met before in the way of instruction will inevitably mould in some way their expectations of the language learning experience that awaits them in the host culture.

Work on language socialisation has illustrated the importance of early language and interactional experiences in the acquisition of not only language, but also the conventions and norms underlying its use (for example, Ochs 1988, 1996; and see also Nicholas and Williams, Chapter 3, this volume). Just as people are socialised at an early age into certain ways of speaking so, too, our earlier experiences of education and classrooms can lead us to believe that certain ways of approaching study and learning both inside and outside the classroom are 'normal' and 'right', and these impact on our expectations of any new educational experience in a range of ways:

> *From an early age, students (and teachers) are socialised into expectations about what kinds of interactions are appropriate in class, about how texts should be used, about how they should engage in teaching and learning processes.* (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 196)

We become socialised into particular 'cultures of learning', that is, shared sets of assumptions about how to act and interpret actions in the classroom. These may range from ideas about how learners and teachers should participate in a lesson, to what the ultimate goal of education should be. Moreover, as with many

aspects of cultural knowledge and belief, these frameworks of interpretation appear as self-evident and 'natural' to members of a culture and may not be subject to critical examination.

These cultures of learning derive from the broader social, cultural and historical traditions within a community, such as views of the role of text and literacy, of childhood, and of learning and teaching. In cultures where schooling is common, children will be socialised with their first school experiences, and take them for granted as adults. Even where schooling is more erratic, the effects of the prevailing 'culture of learning' may still be strongly felt in religious life, in attitudes towards scholarly pursuit, and in many areas of public life.

It is not only what actually happens in the classroom that matters, but how we perceive what is happening, and our role in relation to it. 'Cultures of learning' play a fundamental role in how learners make sense of what they see in the classroom, how they interpret an activity or a request, and what they expect to do or achieve. While it is important to be aware of such distinctions in any teaching endeavour, it is particularly crucial where the teacher and learner may have been socialised into different teaching cultures, and thus may have expectations and assumptions based on deeply held values of which they may not be entirely conscious. A mismatch in presuppositions about what constitutes appropriate goals or behaviour in the classroom can impact considerably on a student's learning.

My aim in this chapter is to shed light on the nature of the cultures of learning with which the adults from the three focus groups may be familiar, to discuss what issues may arise as a result of their prior educational experiences, and to suggest some ways forward for both teacher and learner. In doing this, I do not wish to imply the superiority of any particular 'culture of learning'. As Gu (2003) reminds us, any approach to learning must be understood within its context, and what works in one culture will not necessarily produce the same success in another. Nor do I believe that once learners have been socialised into one culture of learning, they are incapable of modifying their approach to learning in response to their needs, or to a new context. Language learning is shaped by a whole complex of social and cognitive factors which interact in subtle and often unanticipated ways (Gu 2003). Learning cultures are only one small part of this. I would add one further caveat: the discussion of any kind of generalisation about learning approaches in a culture brings with it the danger of promulgating and maintaining unhelpful and misrepresentative stereotypes (Stephens 1997).

This is not my intention, and the following discussion of approaches to learning in different cultures should be read with the understanding that within any learning culture there is also inevitably an immense diversity of learning styles and approaches.

Teachers can certainly benefit greatly from an awareness of the previous educational and cultural influences that their learners may have experienced, not only for the insights these can give into the expectations and attitudes that impact on their perceptions of the language classroom, but also for the way in which this awareness can make explicit teachers' own, often unexamined, cultures of learning. I will start with an examination of the cultures of learning which have been influential in the educational experiences of the learners in this study, and then move on to consideration of how we might approach adult language classrooms from an intercultural perspective which allows the learner to look for a 'third cultural space' (Kramsch 1993) in the way they learn English as well as in the way they use it.

Cultures of learning

Impact of cultures of learning

Although the importance of culture in the way language is used has received increasing attention (for example, Hall 2002), there has been relatively little work on how previously acquired cultural expectations of the classroom influence later language learning. Work in this area has largely contrasted different traditions of, for example, writing (for example, Clyne 1983, 1987; Connor and Kaplan 1987; Kaplan 1988) or approaches to further study (for example, Stephens 1997). Some work in the USA has highlighted differences in the patterns of interaction considered appropriate in school by native American communities and mainstream Anglo-American culture (for example, Phillips 1972, 1990), and participation patterns of groups from other cultures (for example, Sato 1990); and work from a socialisation perspective has highlighted the role of culture in the classroom (for example, Poole 1992). In the following two sections I focus in particular on the two cultures of learning which have been influential in the previous educational experiences of the learners followed in the study reported in this volume: the Chinese and Islamic traditions.

Cultures of learning in China

Throughout China and elsewhere in Asia, the teachings of Confucius have had a considerable influence on cultural attitudes in general and also on perceptions of

the goals and conduct of learning. Educational approaches in these 'Confucian-heritage cultures' (Biggs 1996) often differ noticeably from those taken by the increasing number of western teachers working with learners from this area. This has fuelled quite a lot of interest in comparisons between teaching in western and Asian traditions (for example, Ellis 1995; de Courcy 1997; He 1997; Littlewood 1999, 2001; Scollon 1999).

Of course, we cannot assume a uniformity of educational approach across all of the cultures which have fallen under the influence of Confucius. China itself is a vast country, with a huge variety of different types of schools across geographically and economically different areas; in the countryside and in the cities; with a general or more 'specialist' focus; and across a wide range of different ethnic groups. However, within China the system of education has long been strongly centralised (Cortazzi and Jin 1996), and the use of Mandarin as the language of national unification has imposed a spoken and written standard of uniformity, whatever the vernacular. Moreover, despite the immense economic and social changes of recent times, it appears that traditional approaches are still influential in the culture of learning (Cortazzi and Jin 1996).

Scollon (1999) argues that, whereas Chinese cultures of learning owe much to Confucius, western approaches to education derive from the thought and teachings of Socrates, and that these rather different philosophical roots result in some fundamental differences between the cultures of learning. While we should certainly be cautious in the use of generalisations such as these (both the terms 'Chinese' and 'western' cover a huge range of very diverse ethnic and national cultures), Scollon's insights into the underlying philosophical differences between the two traditions can illuminate some of the differences in assumptions and practices which characterise approaches to teaching in Chinese cultures, and in Anglo-western adult language classrooms. Here, I explore some of these differences in terms of the perceived goals of education, approaches to instruction and text, the roles of teacher and student, and patterns of classroom participation considered appropriate in both traditions.

In a Confucian tradition, argues Scollon (1999), wisdom is seen as the primary goal of education, whereas in a western Socratic tradition the search for knowledge through dialogue with the teacher or logical argument is seen as central. Although a certain focus on virtue is characteristic of both traditions, wisdom in the Confucian sense has a stronger moral aspect, so that the moral standing of the teacher is crucial. There is also a stronger didactic element, as wisdom is seen as resulting from learning knowledge, and morality is seen as innate rather

than dependent on reasoning (Scollon 1999: 18). In a Confucian tradition, the focus is, therefore, on passing on to students the best of what accomplished scholars have written and taught. Conversely, the Socratic tradition tends to emphasise thinking for oneself, and the use of reason to work for an objective justice and truth.

In pursuit of Confucian goals, teaching methodologies in China have traditionally been knowledge-oriented, tightly-controlled and teacher-centred. This tendency has been encouraged by the exigencies of providing education for a huge and expanding population (over 1.3 billion people), so that class sizes are frequently large by western standards, and lessons with 60 pupils or more are common in schools (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). In addition, China's centralised exam-driven approach to credentialling fuels an emphasis on assessable, written products, and uniformity in teaching approaches and texts. Although the recent one-child policy is having an effect on future numbers of school children, a side effect appears to be that parents are more than ever interested in the schooling outcomes for their child, as this is their one and only chance, and they are keen for their child to 'succeed'. This was recently underlined for me as I asked after the 17-year-old daughter of a Chinese visitor whom I had not seen for some time. His response to my routine question 'And how is your daughter?' was 'Very good, but she is not good at maths!' His immediate and automatic reference to the difficulty his daughter was having in passing the exams she needed for entrance to a 'good' university education highlights the enormous pressure on students to succeed in line with the expectations of their parents, and the great pressure on teachers to ensure this success.

The ideographic nature of the writing system used in Chinese has also influenced approaches to education in China. Under the national curriculum, 2600 characters must be learned by the time a child is 13, and since the script provides very little phonetic support, these must be learned through memorisation (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 177)[19]. Traditional approaches to language instruction have therefore stressed rote learning and a bottom-up progression to the mastery of language, that is, from the learning of characters, to the learning of words and phrases, followed by attention to sentences, then paragraphs and finally text.

Classes from kindergarten to university level often follow a similar basic approach characterised by teacher-fronted instruction, the provision of clear and careful models, and clear identification of what is to be learned and how this should be done. Classes tend to tackle the same activity at the same time in a disciplined way regulated by the teacher. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) report that, in

commenting on their classes, Chinese teachers value conformity and cooperation, the use of models, analysis, repetition, recitation and memorisation. The approach to teaching thus emphasises memory and imitation rather than critical analysis. As one very successful Chinese learner of English commented during a study of learning styles in China: 'Learning English without memorising words, that must be daydreaming!' (Gu 2003: 86).

An ancient Chinese proverb, 'Learn 300 Tang poems by heart and one becomes a poet', illustrates the traditional belief that mastery may precede enlightenment; that is, that learning something by heart, even if it is not yet completely understood, is a useful route to eventual understanding. Such beliefs have permeated attitudes to learning in Chinese cultures so that Chinese background students may believe strongly that they should commit something to memory in order to understand it, a belief that is less common among western students and their teachers. A similar sentiment is captured in another popular saying: 'Meaning reveals itself after a hundred times of reading' (Gu 2003: 97). Such assumptions are crucially different from those widespread in the west, where teachers are encouraged to ensure that students understand the subject matter before they are asked to learn it.

In China and other Confucian heritage countries, texts are typically treated with more reverence in language learning than they are in current communicative approaches to teaching and learning in the west. This can be seen in the traditional exposition method of teaching which is widely adopted at all levels in Chinese schools and universities in foreign language lessons, and in which the text is seen as a major source of language input for students. Typically, each text is prepared intensively beforehand by both students and teachers. Indeed, although traditionally students may not in fact ask many questions in class of their teachers for various reasons (see page 59), teachers feel the need to be able to answer any possible question about the structure and form of the text. Failure to do so would embarrass both them and the student. Lessons then usually revolve around the text. The students may first read the text aloud, with the teacher making corrections. The teacher may then use questions to establish literal comprehension, and then go on to explain new words and grammatical points. Various kinds of drills and exercises may follow, and assessment usually relates to the grammar and vocabulary items rather than to being able to communicate using similar language (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 183).

Thus, from the early years, texts are used intensively as the basis of language learning, and are studied in minute detail in class where they are analysed with an emphasis on the learning of vocabulary and grammar. Although students will have typically prepared the text at home, in class they will expect primarily to listen to the teacher's explanation, and memorise, rather than seek to communicate through the language. Intense study and memorisation of texts are seen as crucial to mastery of the language. Although Gu's (2003) qualitative study of two successful EFL learners at a Chinese university focuses specifically on the learning of vocabulary, his account of how each studies an assigned text allows a fascinating insight into how the text is approached as a learning tool, even though each of the two learners adopts a distinctly different approach to their study. One concentrated on learning new words in a detailed, intensive way, while the other was more concerned with global understanding of a text, and only focused on new words which were particularly crucial or interesting. Yet both used the text as a source of both intentional and incidental vocabulary learning, perhaps because they were studying English in an EFL context in China and did not get much exposure to English outside the classroom (Gu 2003: 97). Such intensive study of text is less valued in Anglo-western classrooms, however, which tend to place a higher premium on understanding, and the development of a more critical stance towards what they are reading and hearing.

Teacher and student roles

The traumas of the Cultural Revolution notwithstanding, teachers have traditionally enjoyed a high status in Chinese society. Confucius lived at a time of great upheaval and believed strongly in the need for order, which he thought could best be found within hierarchical social structures. Although seniors in any relationship (such as teacher and student) enjoyed considerable power, appropriate behaviour and mutual responsibility ensured that this power was not abused (Bond and Hwang 1986). The self and social relations are conceived of as being interconnected within a social hierarchy maintained through harmony and characterised by attitudinal warmth. In other words, although a superior has significant power over a junior, both must behave responsibly within this hierarchy, and the senior is bound by a 'duty of care' to the junior.[20] The teacher-student relationship is generally conceived of as hierarchical (Hofstede 1994; Lee-Wong 1994), and teachers are accorded a 'guru-like' status, in which they are seen as dispensers of personal wisdom rather than of objective truths (Scollon 1999). However, unlike Anglo-western notions of hierarchy, there is no contradiction between hierarchical superiority and social closeness in Chinese conceptions. Thus, a teacher should not only be strict and wise, but also warm, considerate and attentive. This still seems to be the case today, despite the current financial

advantages of other occupations and the consequent problems with recruitment and stability within the profession (see Cortazzi and Jin 1996). Indeed, recent economic and social trends seem to have reinforced the importance of discipline in schools, as they fill up with the children of the one-child policy, whose home life may have emphasised indulgence rather than self discipline and obedience (Cortazzi and Jin 1996).

As noted above, teachers usually exert strict control of behaviour and speaking rights inside the classroom, and command deference outside. Consequently, criticism and contradiction are considered disrespectful. This is the case even for the relationship between adult students and their teachers. A recent study of perceptions of the relationship between tutors and post graduate students in China and Britain suggested that Chinese tutors and students still view the relationship as both more hierarchical, and socially closer, than did their British counterparts. Chinese students in Britain therefore expected to have more contact, discussion and self-disclosure, help, and a closer affective bond with their tutors than did the British students, who felt that such closeness would signal favouritism and bias (Spencer-Oatey 1992: 243).

The patterns of participation, seen as desirable in Chinese cultures, frequently differ from those expected in adult language classrooms in many western contexts. In a Confucian tradition, there is a greater emphasis on the teacher's role as a model and source of learning, so that although teachers may pose questions, these are likely to be rhetorical, and they will often provide the answer themselves (Scollon 1999). In their study of Chinese university students' attitudes, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) found a reluctance to question the teacher in class time. Many felt that this was imposing their own interests on those of the class, and that questions, if asked at all, should be posed after class time. Thus, in Chinese learning cultures, questioning by the students is likely to be seen as challenging both the teacher's authority and class harmony. Such feelings may be underpinned by a sense that if teachers made their lessons clear enough, questions would be unnecessary.

In contrast to this view, Scollon (1999) argues that western teachers see themselves as akin to midwives in the way that they guide the student through rational logic and argumentation to the birth of truth and new ideas. Learners are therefore expected to take some responsibility for the path of their intellectual development, and so disagreements and challenges to a teacher's authority are taken as signs of engagement (Scollon 1999: 18). Such a view was supported by many of the western teachers in China surveyed in Cortazzi and Jin's (1996)

study, who felt that questions showed involvement. The timing of the question was important, however. While the Chinese students reported that they considered it was more sensitive to ask questions after class, their western teachers welcomed questions during class time, both so that they were not detained for too long after the lesson, and so that all could benefit from the answer.

Thus while teachers in Australia may take personal involvement and active, verbal participation as signs of cooperation and learning, this is a judgment rooted in our particular culture of learning, and such participation may not be perceived in this way in Chinese classrooms. Cultural mismatches of this kind were found in the expectations of Australian learners and their Chinese teachers in de Courcy's (1997) ethnographic study of a late-immersion class in Australia. The study followed a group of adults who were being taught by teachers from People's Republic of China (PRC). Dissatisfied with the 'passivity' apparently expected of them in the classroom, the students complained that the teaching process was not viewed as two-way by their teachers. The teachers, however, perceived the learners' expressions of need as an insult and a challenge to their authority, rather than part of a process of communication.

In different cultures, there are different conceptions of what an individual is and how they relate to the communities within which they live (see, for example, Markus and Kitaayama 1991; Morisaki and Gudykunst 1994). Thus the role of the individual within the group and expectations of group interactions may be perceived rather differently in Chinese learning cultures and Anglo-western cultures. Hofstede (1994) claims that, whereas in individualistic cultures, such as Australia, the United States and Great Britain, the teacher is seen as dealing with individual students, in collectivist cultures, such as Chinese cultures, the student is conceived of more as a part of the group, and will be reluctant to self-select to speak out in front of the class unless sanctioned to do so by the group. Sato (1990) reported a similar phenomenon among Asian-background learners in her analysis of classroom turn-taking patterns. She conducted a study of turn-taking patterns in an ESL classroom, and found differences in the way that students from Asian cultures interacted in the lesson. They tended to self-select, that is volunteer, contributions to class discussions, less often than their non-Asian peers. It seems that they had been socialised into different expectations of what is appropriate behaviour in the classroom. Learners from backgrounds where unsolicited contributions are considered less appropriate, might therefore show their engagement in the lesson in ways which do not involve speaking out and asking questions, such as by assiduously preparing texts before the class.

Group work, too, may be perceived differently, and Chinese students may prefer to work in study groups outside the classroom where they can support each other in preparing or reviewing a text for class, rather than inside the classroom where it is more important to access the wisdom and knowledge of the teacher (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). This different orientation to the group means that discipline is often handled differently in Chinese and western contexts. Conflict is avoided, and 'shaming', that is, invoking the in-group's honour, will be seen as an effective disciplining measure. Paradoxically, China's one-child policy has reinforced the tendency to highlight this collectivism in schools, since schools now have to deal with children who have not been socialised into cooperative play by siblings (Cortazzi and Jin 1996).

In this section I have tried to illustrate how learners who have had experience of Chinese schools may have been socialised into a culture of learning which is somewhat different from that commonly practised in Anglo-western adult language classrooms. In the following section, I would like to consider the educational cultures that learners from Iraq and Horn of Africa may have experienced before their arrival in Australia.

Cultures of learning in Iraq and Horn of Africa

The extent of Islamic influence

While it would certainly be unwise to attempt to treat Iraq and Horn of Africa as in any sense monocultural with respect to education, nevertheless, I would like to briefly consider some of the commonalities that may arise as a result of the impact of Islamic traditions of schooling which often predate any other kind of formal education in many areas of the Middle East and North Africa.

From the early part of the seventh century, Islam spread rapidly north through the Middle East and south into Africa as Mohammed and his successors were successful in their conquests on the battlefield, and traders and scholars from the new empire travelled further afield. However, while large sections of the populations conquered were converted to Islam, some communities in the area have remained Christian. The Assyrian Iraqis followed in this study, for example, come from a Christian community which lived in the area before Islamic conquest, and whose people retained their traditional Christian beliefs. However, in areas of Islamic conquest, even in those countries with strong Christian communities, such as Ethiopia and Eritrea (where 50% of the population are Muslim), Arabic literacy through religious education has been an important influence on views of good learning (Hailemariam, Kroon and Walters 1999).

The area which is now called Iraq formed part of a number of great civilisations before becoming the centre of a powerful Arabic Islamic civilisation, whose hub, in the capital Baghdad, remained an influential intellectual and trading centre for centuries until it was sacked by the Mongols in 1258. Islam has therefore been a very powerful force in the development of cultural attitudes and approaches to education. For most of the population, schooling was only available through a system of Koranic schools run by mosques, right up to the time of World War I. In recent years, however, schooling has been controlled and subsidised by the government, who made six years of schooling compulsory for all, in theory at least. However, access to education has not always readily been available in many rural areas. Apart from some instruction in Kurdish in the north of the country, the language of schooling and literacy in Iraq has been Arabic, even for the Assyrian-speaking Christian population followed in this study. Islam has therefore remained a dominant religious, moral and cultural force in the country.

Although home to three world literate traditions/religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, the countries of Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, and particularly Somalia and Sudan) have been much influenced by Islamic schooling, and literacy in Arabic through Koranic schools that were, and in many areas still are, often the earliest or even the only form of schooling available. Somalia, for example, is predominantly Muslim. Until the rise of formal education in the post-colonial period, Koranic schools provided restricted literacy in Arabic for religious and sometimes trading purposes for its largely nomadic people. Somali was only a spoken language. Literacy in the Somali language developed with a rise of nationalism following the collapse of colonialism (see Nicholas and Williams, Chapter 3, this volume). However, although there have been some highly successful literacy campaigns, nevertheless it seems that literacy is not as central to Somali identity as it is for other communities in the region (Lewis 1993: 154).

In the recent troubled times of civil war, only Koranic schooling has been available in many areas of Somalia, particularly for the rural poor. These schools have been independent of government and curriculum supervision, self-maintained, and only a token payment is made to the religious teacher. Education in such schools has often been a prerequisite for formal schooling, since children are required to read from the Koran for their entry interview to formal schooling (Naidoo nd).

Islamic traditions of education have been influential also in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Although Ethiopia became Christian early, and its rugged terrain discouraged Islamic conquest, it has long been surrounded by Islamic territory and the population is today half Muslim. In Eritrea, too, particularly among the people of the lower-lying areas which tended to convert to Islam, Koranic schools have been a local means of education for large sections of the population, and in Muslim areas the community language is often Arabic so that most elementary schools in these areas use Arabic as the medium of instruction (Hailemariam et al 1999).

Teaching and learning in Koranic schools

Muslims believe in Allah as the one true God, in his prophet Mohammed and in the holy book of Islam, the Koran, which is considered to be the infallible word of God. It is the earliest, and regarded as the finest, work of classical Arabic prose, and is an integral part of Muslim prayer and ritual occasions. Muslims are expected to read and appreciate the Koran in Arabic wherever possible, and to recite from it at length (Wagner 1993: 42), and this has encouraged the development of Koranic schools whose traditional aim was primarily to train people to read and be able to recite the Koran in its original form.

However, the Koran is a rather abstract and metaphorical work (Dawood 1973: 10), and the ability to both recite and interpret the Koran must be guided by masters with expertise in how this is done, using the appropriate phrasing and pronunciation. It was given by the Angel Gabriel to Mohammed, who memorised it as he could not read or write. During his lifetime, it was written down on any material that came to hand, so that a full version of the various revelations and verses was not complete until some time later, and at this time it was not ordered chronologically by the editors. Moreover, because it was written down in a kufic script, which did not indicate vowels, various readings are allowed by Muslims. This means that, in order to read the Koran accurately, it is necessary to have the guidance and explication of a scholar who has studied it and can interpret it correctly. This means that the kind of literacy associated with the Koran is very much 'mediated': that is, the expectation is that the reading and interpretation of the Koran will be undertaken with the help of an expert rather than independently (see Spolsky 1986).

Given its centrality in the life of Muslims, the study of the Koran has been a major force in the development of literacy in the Islamic world through a system of Koranic schools. These range from large, well-resourced seats of learning in the cities, to poor, one-room, single-teacher institutions in which pupils are typically of primary age, and study together in classes of mixed age and ability, and which are the only source of education for the community. The goals of education in such schools and their impact on the teaching methods, and the conception of the role of teacher and student are discussed below.

As with any system of education, there is a wide variety in the type of knowledge and skills offered in different schools. However, all share the crucial goal of teaching children the word of God as it is written in the Koran. Thus, unlike the often explicitly secular aims of schooling in many western cultures, there is traditionally a close association between religious morality and the goals of schooling. For example, in Australian state schools religious education may be offered as an elective subject. In contrast, in Sudan, the first two of the five major purposes of education, as stipulated in the law, are specifically religious in nature.

- The consolidation of the religious doctrine.
- The establishment of an independent society, and the trust in God and in self-reliance.
  (UNESCO: The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports for Sudan)

This strong moral dimension to schooling has implications for attitudes to teachers and texts in the classroom. Learners with experience of such systems of education may have expectations regarding the moral role of teachers, and the nature of language and literacy which differ from those prevalent in adult language classrooms in the west.

In Koranic schools, the crucial role of teachers is to ensure that Islamic values and morals are taught and modelled. Traditionally, teachers are scholars of Islamic jurisprudence. They may be more or less competent, ranging from barely literate with limited religious training in poor rural schools, to someone working in the city who has memorised the entire Koran and is an expert scholar. The teacher is typically a religious leader with absolute authority in the classroom and high standing within the community outside (Wagner 1993).

As noted above, recitation of the Koran is an integral part of Muslim prayer and ritual, and memorisation of the text is a traditional cornerstone of the faith. This means that the ability to recite the Koran verbatim from memory is highly prized as the mark of a good scholar, and the rote learning and recitation of large sections of the Koran is considered to be an essential part of study. However, as the text cannot be understood without the guidance of an expert, the role of the teacher as the source of knowledge and models is crucial (Wagner

1993). In this tradition, as we saw in the discussion of Chinese approaches above, mastery is thought to aid comprehension and may therefore precede complete understanding. Traditionally, therefore, in Koranic schools, there is a strong emphasis on training and oral modelling in preparation for the memorisation and rote-recitation in unison of the Koran. While there is usually practice in letter formation and writing, this is traditionally largely reproductive in comparison with the focus on creative writing and self-expression characteristic of Australian primary schools. Strict obedience from pupils is demanded.

The nature of the Koran as a religious text has shaped the way in which literacy is taught and perceived in Koranic schools. Because it is written in classical Arabic, the language of the Koran is usually remote from the language that children speak at home, even for those in Arabic-speaking areas, where a different but related variety will be spoken.[21] However, the Koran is the word of God and therefore immutable, so it cannot be adapted as other foreign language texts can be. It may not be simplified or modified for pedagogical purposes, (that is, no vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions and so forth), but must be learned in its original written form in the manner of poetry. In addition, where Koranic schools are the only source of education, children may only learn religious literacy, and not a literacy that is functional for everyday living. In addition, this is done in a language which is not their home language. They may therefore view the products of formal learning in school as important as a mark of learning, but of limited applicability or relevance to their everyday life (see Bloch 1993).

Such early educational experiences may influence learners' expectations of the nature of language and literacy, and of what should happen in the classroom. In the following section, I attempt to draw out some of the ways in which prior experience in the cultures of learning described above might impact on how learners approach their study of English in an Anglo-western classroom, and in the final section I consider the challenges that these pose for both learner and teacher.

Prior experience and expectations for adult language learning

The view of learning in both Chinese and Islamic traditions emphasises the transmission of knowledge from expert sources, with a consequent belief in the authority of both the teacher and the text. In both, therefore, teacher-centred methodologies, which rely on mastery and memory, have encouraged a strong product-focus with an emphasis on the reproduction of knowledge regulated by

examination. While learners with experience of these two great traditions of schooling will have had very diverse experiences, and their reactions to this experience will be varied and complex, they may also share some tacit expectations relating to the goals of learning, how these are to be achieved, and what the role of teacher and student should be. I summarise these briefly before going on to consider how the teacher working within an Anglo-western tradition might take these into account in the language classroom.

Knowledge, learning outcomes and methodology in the Chinese and Islamic traditions

In any system, western or non-western alike, a strong focus on outcomes can make life miserable for those who do not experience success. Such 'failures' are likely to have a devastating effect on a learner's confidence, and yet, paradoxically, the demanding nature of these schooling experiences may also have left behind traces at least of the unexamined assumption that a good education *should* be like this, that the curriculum *should* be demanding, and that authoritarian approaches to teaching and learning *are* appropriate.

Students used to the strict discipline more typical of classrooms in China, the Middle East and North Africa may actually find it difficult to take the more relaxed adult classes they find themselves in as serious places of learning. Participants in the project referred to Iraqi schools as 'tough', and miscommunications, humiliations and beatings at the hands of the teacher were described as commonplace. However, although they, themselves, suffered under these conditions, and they generally report great satisfaction that their families were experiencing very different conditions in Australia, they also seem to harbour the feeling that the approach to schooling here is not quite so serious. Chinese parents, too, have at times complained to me that the curriculum in Australia appears to be too 'light'. In a study of Chinese immigrants in Australia, the lack of respect shown to teachers, the student practice of arguing with teachers and their apparent lack of discipline were commented on negatively by participants (for example, Fung and Mackerras 1998).

As far as reactions to teaching methodology are concerned, the emphasis in both traditions on the mastery of knowledge has meant that the imitation of models, memory and recitation, often in groups, may be seen as important (Wagner 1993; Cortazzi and Jin 1996), and such activities may therefore be both expected and considered more appropriate in the classroom than 'freer', apparently less outcome-oriented, activities. Learners may therefore expect to learn what has been

modelled as correct, rather than be responsible themselves for recognising and deducing patterns to practise, and may look to the teacher to provide the correct answer, explain the major language points and direct learning very closely.

Assumptions of this kind may also colour views of what constitutes 'hard work' as a learner. In Chinese educational cultures there has been a strong tendency to believe that success may come to anyone, provided they work hard enough. This is related to the idea that mastery may precede understanding (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 181), and means that it is perfectly acceptable for the whole class to work on the same task regardless of individual ability, since the slower ones may catch up through hard work. A western teacher's concern with assigning work at an individual's current level of competence, in line with learner-centredness approaches common in more communicative language classrooms in Anglo cultures, may be misunderstood as unnecessary and even disadvantageous for the student.

As noted above, the goals of education traditionally involve gaining knowledge from experts, and an important means of doing this is through the study of texts. Both traditions put a very high premium on mastery of traditional texts, and certain assumptions about the nature of the text and the reader's stance in relation to it follow from this. Firstly, since their first learning culture valued traditional, often challenging, poetic texts, it may be that learners will perceive the use of simplified texts as an underestimation of their capacity and even as belittling. Moreover, while in the west we tend to emphasise paraphrase, digestion and critique of an author's work, the tendency in both the Chinese and the Islamic tradition to revere both texts and scholars may encourage learners to reproduce rather than work more creatively with a text. As Scollon (1995) notes, this might be done from the most noble of motives, but can result in charges of 'plagiarism' from a western perspective.

Teachers and students

Although they are very different in nature, concepts of knowledge in both the Chinese and the Islamic cultures of learning have a strong moral dimension. Students from these cultures may therefore expect that the teacher will be some sort of moral model. Moreover, students may expect teachers to provide assistance on a wider range of topics than those covered in the classroom, and outside class hours. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988: 71) argue that in cultures where power-distance relationships are high (that is, hierarchies are seen as more natural), there may also be a tendency for what they call greater 'personalness',

that is, the tendency to view individuals as whole persons rather than merely that person in her specific role. A teacher, therefore, will be considered a teacher and consider herself a teacher even outside school, and her responsibilities towards her students will also extend to after hours. Moreover, the broad view of knowledge and wisdom evident in each culture means that a teacher's expertise may be seen as covering a wide range of academic, as well as personal, topics. This was clearly illustrated for me when one of the Chinese students whom I was teaching for a two-week period asked my advice on whether she should marry her fiancé or not.

In a recent study (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 187), 135 Chinese university students were asked to say what, in their opinion, made a good teacher. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the description above of Chinese learning cultures, the most cited attribute by far was that teachers should have 'deep knowledge' (67%). However, personal qualities such as 'patience' (25%) and 'sense of humour' (23.7%), 'Is a good moral example' and 'shows friendliness' (both 21.5%) were cited ahead of professional skills, such as 'arousing students' interest' (17%). This latter teacherly quality appeared to be similar in its importance to the more general ability to teach 'about life' (17.5%). Similarly, the quality of being 'warm-hearted and understanding' (16.2%) was just as important as using 'effective teaching methods' (16.25%), and it was far more important to the respondents that their teachers were 'caring and helpful' (14.8%) than that they 'explain clearly' (6.7%). Evidently, while the ideal that a teacher should be knowledgeable is still alive and well, students experienced within a Chinese system of education are also likely to expect that their teachers display personal qualities and understanding in a broad sense.

In the same study, respondents were asked to say what they considered to be the attributes of a good student. Again, unsurprisingly, the most cited quality was 'is hardworking' (43%). This was followed by 'is sociable'(18.5%). 'Paying attention to the teacher' (15.5%), 'being active in class' (14.8%) and 'cooperating with the teacher' (11.8%) were also often cited as important, as was the undertaking of 'independent study' (11.1%). It is interesting to note the relative importance for these students of being 'active' in class appears to cover mental activity, in the form of active mental engagement and exploration. Cortazzi and Jin concluded from the students' comments that they:

> are not passive – they are active, reflective, independent thinkers but, importantly, such qualities are differently aligned from ways in which western teachers expect them to be expressed. They are less manifest

in the classroom, but, in many students' minds at least, they are already an inherent part of 'being a good student'.

(Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 191–2)

In summary, prior experience in cultures of learning which are very different from those currently practised in Anglo-western language classrooms may lead students to have a different view than do their teachers of the goals of education and of what classes can and should give them. But is this necessarily a problem, and, if so, what can the teacher do about it? I tackle these questions briefly in the following section.

What teachers can do: The 'third' place in cultures of learning

As educators socialised into Anglo-western traditions of communicative language teaching, the cultures of learning described above may appear overly teacher-centred, somewhat mechanical, repetitive, and short on opportunities for personal involvement and experiential learning through communication. Important skills in speaking and listening appear to be overlooked, and we may doubt the students' level of involvement where we do not see active participation through questions.

While we may be convinced that our approaches are more successful in producing the kind of language learning that we consider important, we should also bear in mind that there is no culture-free perspective from which to make these assessments, and our learners may see things very differently. Students previously educated in a learning culture influenced by traditional Chinese or Islamic approaches may feel, for example, that those very rote-learning and imitation strategies which western teachers decry actually give them some feeling of achievement and progress, which they do not get from more communicatively oriented classes. If learners feel that memorising something may help them to understand it eventually, then they may feel frustrated with western approaches that delay this stage until later. Indeed, as Gu (2003: 74) points out, western concepts used to describe different aspects of learning may not fully describe the concepts and activities as they are practised in China. Biggs (1996) distinguishes between at least two types of memorisation, 'rote' learning, which refers to the mechanical memorisation of something which is not completely understood, and 'repetitive' learning, in which repetition is used to ensure that something is remembered. It may be that the concept of 'rote learning' as it is understood in the west does not fully equate to the act of memorisation as commonly practised in Chinese cultures (Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse 1996: 77, cited in Gu 2003: 75).

Furthermore, what works in one context may not necessarily be so successful in another. Large class sizes and a centralised, exam-driven system militate against the use of more communicative, and learner-centred, approaches in China, and in contexts where teachers and resources are limited, teacher-centred, input-oriented approaches may well be more egalitarian, since they allow the delivery of the means for success to all in the class, not just the few who are able to participate, or who are more talkative (Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 178). Chinese and Islamic scholars have consistently achieved exceedingly high educational levels in all areas, including language learning, for centuries. The issue here is not of the superiority of one method over another, but on the way in which prior experiences will influence the way both teacher and learner will perceive and react to activities in the classroom (see also Nicholas and Williams, Chapter 3, this volume). I do not believe that we should impose our methods because they are necessarily 'better' (although we may believe that they are); rather, I think it is useful to be armed with the insight that our learners will come with different expectations and patterns of behaviour which will not necessarily help them make sense of what they see in our classrooms, and this uncertainty may even make them lose confidence in our learning culture, almost before they have started.

Such potential mismatches in learning cultures pose challenges for both parties. Learners coming to the west may find many of our aims and methods unclear and potentially unproductive. For our part as teachers, we may find their apparent lack of independence frustrating, and consider their desire to be taught rather than to communicate as an abdication of their responsibilities as students. This may be particularly evident where a teacher values the focus on the development of a skill, such as speaking, while the student may value the focus on a product, such as the acquisition of new vocabulary or grammar points. An example of the kind of mismatch that can happen is given in Cortazzi and Jin.

Student:	*I've really enjoyed these classes, but what did I learn?*
Teacher:	*You spoke every week.*
Student:	*But what did I learn?*
Teacher:	*You learned to speak!*
Student:	*But what can I take home? I have nothing in my book, no notes, no grammar.*
Teacher:	*But you can speak English now.*
Student:	*Will that help me in the exam?*

(Cortazzi and Jin 1996: 186)

Each was evidently using rather different criteria to assess the effectiveness of the class. From the teacher's perspective, the class had provided plenty of opportunity for speaking and so the student had gained proficiency in this important skill. However, the student had failed to be convinced of the usefulness of this skills focus taken in the class; from her rather more exam-oriented, outcome-focused perspective, the class had been disappointingly unproductive.

It seems likely that different teaching approaches bring different advantages depending on the context. Teaching approaches which focus more on communication will no doubt improve learners' communication skills, while those that focus more on accuracy and recall will strengthen these aspects of language use. It does not seem unreasonable to argue, therefore, that almost any approach to learning, if responsibly conducted, will be effective to some extent for those who believe in, and engage with it. We should be wary of the kind of linguistic and cultural imperialism (Phillipson 1992) that regards our own culture of learning as naturally superior and seeks to impose it unreflectively on another.

Of course, as teachers we do believe strongly in the methods and activities that we use in the classroom. I do not wish to suggest that the professional teacher should abandon the fruits of all their training and experience in favour of a teaching approach which only takes into account the preferences of the learner, and not the expertise of the teacher. Rather, what I am suggesting is a 'softly softly', tolerant view which will seduce learners into an understanding of the new learning culture in which they find themselves through the gradual introduction of those activities we believe to be most useful, while at the same time allowing learners to hold onto what they value most about the teaching cultures with which they are familiar. Teachers are therefore involved in a two-way adjustment: some *accommodation* of their own teaching in the direction of the learners' expectations, and some *re-socialisation* of the learners in the direction of their own.

Accommodation can take place in a number of ways. For example, while their personal style may not be particularly authoritarian, teachers can nevertheless ensure that they are perceived to be completely serious about aspects of classroom organisation in order to gain the confidence of learners used to a 'tougher' approach to education. This might involve making sure that the completion and correction of homework and set tasks is carefully monitored; punctuality is expected, and absences followed up on. Classroom contributions and time on task can also be regulated in ways which are pleasant and 'adult' but which nevertheless signal concern, using, for example, humour or appeal to classroom

procedures. Teachers of adults are often reluctant to pursue these aspects of classroom management too assiduously, for fear that the students will feel they are being treated like children. Rather than resenting them as intrusions into their personal space, however, the students may see these attentions as signs that the teacher really cares about their progress, and is setting the moral and professional tone which they should emulate.

As far as the content and teaching methods in the class are concerned, it is relatively easy for teachers to include a mixture of activities ranging from the strictly controlled to the freer, practice type, with a stronger emphasis on the former in the early stages of the course. Once teachers have won the students' confidence through the use of the more structured activities, they can go on progressively to freer activities, always ensuring that they provide clear models, resolve ambiguities on what a 'correct' answer might be, and set clear goals with clear outcomes. As in any kind of teaching, clear instructions will be particularly important. Alongside the use of previously unseen texts, they can also assign texts which have been previously 'prepared' by the students at home. Students might also respond well to homework in which they must learn (and be tested on) what they have covered that day in follow-up activities at home.

Even in more communicative classrooms, teachers are in a position to control speaking rights, and can use a range of different strategies to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak in different contexts, to the whole class, in groups and in pairs, when they feel that the learners have the confidence. Controlled contributions, with reduced opportunity for error, might be easier for some students, particularly in more public contexts. Although they may not be able to rely on student questions as a sign of levels of understanding and commitment, teachers can still elicit responses to specific, targeted questions of their own.

At the same time as they are winning the students' confidence through the use of techniques that are more familiar to them, teachers can also embark on a gradual program of 're-education' to the cultures of learning of the host culture, not only so that they can become more adventurous, but also to help them understand more about the broader cultural context in which they and their children are now operating. Students can be gradually 'trained' in methods and activities which they might at first find unfamiliar, ensuring, of course, that they are also introduced to the aims and benefits of the exercise. In this way, spontaneous questions can be encouraged, perhaps after some more controlled work on the form and role of questions. Group work in class can be introduced, at first with very clear, structured outcomes and clearly assigned and regulated roles for each

group member to play. Risk-taking behaviours, such as the ability to read a text quickly without needing to understand every word, can be introduced through speed-reading and gist-reading activities, and an explicit focus on reading skills rather than language content. In speaking, controlled drills can give way to freer drills, and then to structured and semi-structured role-plays and so on.

While we may not be in a position to know exactly what our learners' previous educational experiences have been, nor how these have impacted on their views of learning, nevertheless we need to be conscious of the important role we play in their resocialisation into new cultures of learning. In this, as in any area of learning, it is useful to progress from areas of familiarity to the more novel, and it is therefore helpful to have some idea of the kinds of attitudes and activities that have formed them as learners. Armed with these understandings, we can draw on our expertise as teachers to both cater to, and extend, their zones of comfort to help them become more effective learners of English.

Notes

19 The Chinese writing system is not alphabetic, but uses characters called ideographs to represent morphemes. A reader must learn these ideographs and cannot deduce how a word is written from the way it is pronounced.

20 That is, they have an obligation to ensure the well-being of anyone over whom they have power.

21 There are different varieties of Arabic. Classical Arabic is the variety which is revered as the variety in which the Koran is written, although it is not spoken as a local language. Across the various regions of the Arab world, different local varieties of Arabic are spoken by the people. In addition, Modern Standard Arabic is the standard used for pan-Arab formal and written communication. Thus, the Arabic learned from the Koran will not be the Arabic used either in informal conversation or more formal contexts.

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Section 2:   Perceptions of learning and teaching

Chapter 5: The pieces of the pattern: Learner backgrounds and profiles

Alan Williams and Lynda Yates

The design of this study allowed us a unique insight into the varied backgrounds and learning circumstances of 20 newly arrived English language learners from Iraq, Horn of Africa and People's Republic of China. In this chapter, we present an overview of the learners followed, and briefly discuss some aspects of their backgrounds and circumstances which seemed to impact on their experiences, perceptions and identities as language learners. In the final section of the chapter we outline the profiles of six of the learners to illustrate in more depth both the factors that they brought to the learning process, and how they reacted to their language learning experience in the AMEP.

An overview of the learners

This section provides an overview of the backgrounds and circumstances of the participants in the individual case studies (see Chapter 1), before examining in more detail some of the factors which impacted on them as learners. The participants consisted of ten males and ten females who had all recently started learning English in the AMEP and were selected (as described in Chapter 1) from three groups which program providers felt they would like to know more about: six were from Iraq; six from Eritrea; four from Ethiopia; and four were older (over 45 years old) Chinese learners from People's Republic of China (PRC). As is commonly the case with refugees, they came from a range of backgrounds and frequently represented displaced or minority groups in their country of origin. As detailed in Chapter 1, interview and written data was collected from the learners and they were observed in class for the period that they were able to participate in the study, which for various reasons, ranged from one to four ten-week terms (see Table 1 in Chapter 1, page 12).

Table 14 (page 82) summarises the learner backgrounds. These data were in part gathered from the centres in which each studied English, and in part from bilingual interviews with them. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 69 years old, had varying levels of educational background, and came from different religious and ethnic groups. Those from Iraq were all Christians from the Assyrian minority who constitute less than 5% of the population of Iraq and

Table 14   Summary of learner backgrounds

Name	G	Family living arrangements	Age	Origin	L1	Religion	Education (yrs)	Language literacy	English (yrs)	Previous occupation
Andrea	f	Spouse, two children, mother-in-law	46	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	4	Arabic	0	Home
Linda	f	Spouse, four children	32	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	6	Arabic	1–2	Home
Sue	f	Parent, siblings	18	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	8	Arabic	1–2	Home
Kane	m	Spouse, five children?	52	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	6	Arabic	1–2	Carpenter/Electrician
Ray	m	Spouse	29	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	12	Arabic	2–5	Mechanic
Ilia	m	Spouse, five children	47	Iraq	Assyrian	Christian	6	Arabic	1–2	Army/Prison
Zena	f	Spouse, son, daughter-in-law	61	PRC	Mandarin		8	Mandarin	0	Statistics in marketing
Zara	f	Spouse, step-son and daughter	47	PRC	Mandarin		5	Mandarin	0	Factory
Joe	m	Spouse, daughter, two grandchildren	68	PRC	Mandarin		17	Mandarin	2–5	Radiologist

Continued

Name	G	Family living arrangements	Age	Origin	L1	Religion	Education (yrs)	Language literacy	English (yrs)	Previous occupation
George	m	Spouse, son, daughter-in-law	69	PRC	Mandarin		6	Mandarin	0	Factory worker, then manager
Esther	f	Spouse	26	Eritrea (Sudan)	Arabic	Muslim	11	Arabic	>5	Student
Carrie	f	Spouse, no children	25	Ethiopia (Kenya)	Oromo	Muslim	6	Oromo	>5	Student
Zeinab	f	Spouse	26	Eritrea	Arabic	Muslim	10	Arabic	1–2	Housekeeper
Abe	m	Brother, relatives	22	Eritrea (Sudan)	Tigrinya	Muslim	4	Tigrinya/Arabic	0	Mechanic
Nigel	m	Brother, relatives	19	Eritrea (Sudan)	Tigrinya	Muslim	6	Tigrinya/Arabic	0	Student
Fern	f	Separated, no children	30	Eritrea Ethiopia	Amharic	Christian	8	Amharic	5	Home
Elsie	f	Mother, siblings	23	Eritrea (Sudan)	Arabic	Muslim	12	Arabic	<1	Home
Andrew	m	Alone	28	Ethiopia	Amharic	Christian?	12	Tigrinya	n/a	Jeweller
Alex	m	Sibling (wife and children in transit)	24	Ethiopia	Tigrinya Amharic	Christian?	6-10	Tigrinya	n/a	Car driver Shop assistant
Harry	m	Sibling (separated from family)	20s	Ethiopia	Tigrinya Amharic	Christian	6-10	Amharic	n/a	Mechanic

come originally from the north of the country. They have elementary levels of education, particularly the females. For all of them, English is at least their third language, as they spoke Assyrian at home and learned to read and write Arabic in school, where the use of Assyrian was not allowed. They had come to Australia via Turkey, Lebanon or Greece, and seemed to have strong networks and support in the community, which has been present in Australia for at least 20 years. They all lived with their immediate family. One was single, and lived with her parents, four brothers and two sisters. The others were older and lived with their spouse and children, except for one male in his twenties whose wife was pregnant with their first child. The males had had a variety of trades including carpentry, mechanical work and time in the army. None of the women had had any work experience outside the home.

The participants from Horn of Africa were much more diverse in origin than the participants from the other groups. Six came from Eritrea. Of these, five were Muslim and had come to Australia via Sudan. Three of them reported speaking only Arabic, while the other two spoke their local language, Tigrinya, as well as Arabic. The sixth Eritrean in the study was Christian, spoke Amharic and had been educated in that language, and had come to Australia via Kenya. Three of the four Ethiopians had also come via Kenya, while one had spent some time in Sudan. Three of the Ethiopians were Christian and spoke Tigrinya and Amharic, while the Muslim spoke and was educated in another local language, Oromo (see Hailemariam, Kroon and Walters 1999). Ethiopian and Eritrean communities have been established more recently than the Assyrians or the Chinese. This, together with the diversity amongst these immigrants from Horn of Africa, seems to have resulted in less support for these participants in their community than there was for the other two groups. However, the church was instrumental in helping one of the females, Fern, who appeared to have suffered domestic violence and had parted from her husband. These learners were generally younger and, for the most part, had slightly higher levels of education than the Iraqi group. Although family ties were important to them, their family situations were generally more complicated, and their immediate families had fractured under the stresses of the circumstances they had left and the exigencies of refugee life. While most lived with a family member of some kind, they had often lost or been separated from other family members, and this caused them some concern. One of this group lived alone.

The older Chinese, on the other hand, all lived with their children, and sometimes with grandchildren. They had all lived and worked for most of their lives in the PRC, mostly in various occupations connected to factory production of some sort, and had only come to Australia later in life. One was a little younger than the others and she worked as a kitchen hand to help support herself and her retired husband, while the other three were retired. One of these had been a radiologist who had completed a university education in China in the 1950s. He was the best educated of all of the participants in the study. The remaining Chinese had only basic education.

With such a wide range of backgrounds, it is neither possible nor useful to isolate the impact of one particular variable on the learning of English, and this was never our aim. Instead, we would like to explore the way in which some of these background factors interrelate kaleidoscopically to influence some of the attitudes and experiences of these learners.

Some factors which impact on learner identity

Gender, age and level of previous education all impact on the ways in which the learners approached the learning of English within the AMEP. In examining these factors in more detail, we take the view that they interrelate and are, at least in part, socially constructed. That is to say, the impact of gender, age and level of education on attitudes and modes of learning is not only a matter of biology, or of objective measures such as the number of years spent at school, but is also related to the sense that the learners (and their teachers) made of these factors as they constructed their identities as learners. Thus the way the learners themselves regarded gender, age and their own prior educational background was also important in tracing the impact of these factors on the learning experience.

Gender

In this section we would like to trace some of the influence on the participants' language learning of their lived experience of being female or male, both in their countries of origin and in Australia, and of how this interacted with a whole range of factors such as their previous cultural experiences and levels of education, their engagement in learning, the opportunities for learning inside and outside the home and the classroom, and their goals and progress in English.

Except for the Chinese group, each subject was interviewed by a researcher of the same gender to minimise discomfort, and maximise empathy. The Chinese were all interviewed by one of the female researchers who had lived in China for some time. This seemed to work quite well, in that men often seemed able to establish a comfortable rapport through stereotypical male interests of football

and so on which allowed the participant to relax. They were also able to share male perspectives on experiences of family, work and other life experiences. Indeed, one male felt so comfortable that he deliberately sought out one researcher in his place of work in order to seek help with a personal problem, even after the data collection had been completed. The older women with families seemed to warm to domestic topics, and conversations with the female researchers often revolved around families.

There seemed to be a consciousness among the participants from Iraq and Horn of Africa that cultural values with respect to gender were very different in Australia than had been the case in their country of origin. When asked directly about whether they were happy participating in mixed gender classes, all reported that they were, and we saw no examples of direct discrimination on the basis of gender. However, indirectly there was evidence that women experienced aspects of their learning differently, and that this often related to cultural attitudes held in the community, as well as to classroom behaviour. We found that female learners were more often reluctant to contribute in class and contributed less frequently than their male counterparts, and in their oral interviews with us they tended to appear to be more reticent to talk, even through an interpreter.

The female Iraqi interpreter used on the project, whom we will call Eva, was from the same Assyrian community as the learners, and had been a teacher in Iraq. When interviewed about her experiences in Iraq and on the project, she was clear that cultural attitudes in her home country encourage female learners to doubt their competence in language learning:

Example 1: Eva, week 35

Eva: Males more confident than female. He is more confident and encourage himself to learn more than female. Female, even if she knew many many things, maybe more than the male, but because she's shy, she embarrassed, sometime … Even myself, sometime honestly, like when there is like a conference, or meeting, and there lots there males more than females, I feel myself I'm very, very strong, but sometimes if (XXXX), if I'm not you know, get myself all together, when I'm shy or embarrassed sometime, I can't, I lose words, I don't know. I can't remember many many words in English. Yeh, sometime I'm thinking it's from the past, you know, the things that has happened to us in the past, and our country.

Interviewer: *And what kinds of things happened in the past, do you think, that would encourage that kind of feeling in you now?*

Eva: Because they keep saying 'Look, there is a difference between female and male'. This is the thing. They always think that the male has got the power, is more strong. He's the best. He can do everything and because you are female, maybe you're not 100% strong as a male. But as I'm telling my husband, in this country, after all these years, honest I can prove myself, I'm stronger than ten men, you know. But how you can encourage all these females to be really strong, and they accept the idea there is no any difference between how much the male can learn and how much we can learn as well. Yeh, it take time. It take time.

Interviewer: *And how do you think that this plays an important part in language learning?*

Eva: Yeh, yeh. Even to talk, just in case 'Oh, maybe I'm going make mistakes' you know. I know many women she say 'Oh, I know this word, but I couldn't say it'. 'Why you couldn't say it? Have a look'. It means she's, she's shy, she can't prove herself, you know. I hear it from many womans in the community, like after five, six years, or whatever. She say 'Oh, if' like, 'when I come to Australia, I'm like now, maybe I will learn more in this 500 hours'. I said 'But why you didn't learn at that time?' She said 'I don't know why'. They don't know what's the reason. They think because they are newly arrived they have many things to settle, many problems, they don't know, you know, how to put everything together. But no, this is not the reason, no. I believe the reason is she wasn't confident at that time.

She reports that the women may be particularly sensitive to the kind of joking and class comment that sometimes accompanies a learner's attempts to speak in class.

Example 2: Eva, week 35

Eva: I don't know because sometimes I hear, specially with the female, they really they shy, they embarrassed and like, a male start laugh if she make a mistake or they make fun at the classroom. She think they talking about her because she can't speak the language.

In Iraq and Horn of Africa, literacy rates of females are generally lower than those for males, and levels of education are also generally lower (UNESCO Institute for Statistics), which may affect the general status of women and thus influence the confidence of the female participants in the study. Moreover, as noted above, only one of the non-Chinese women had worked outside the home, and so they had not necessarily been able to gain confidence from these kinds of experiences. Zeinab, however, who had worked as a housekeeper in Saudi Arabia, was noted by her teacher as being more outgoing and confident than the other Horn of Africa females followed in the study. When the younger women in the study talked in terms of studying in order to have a job in Australia, it was usually in the traditional realms of aged care, fashion and beauty. The older women were not job-oriented: Andrea, 47 years old, married and with two children, did not wish to seek employment, and Linda, 32 years old with four children, would like to get a job eventually but felt that her husband would not let her.

However, even those women with higher levels of education were often reported by their teacher to be quiet in class. Thus Esther, who had 11 years of schooling, is described as shy and lacking in confidence. Fern, too, who went to school for eight years, and Elsie who attended for 12 years, are similarly regarded as being quiet in class. Of course, this could simply be a characteristic of the particular women who participated in the study, although it is worth noting in this respect that it is likely to be the more forthcoming and outspoken learners who would agree to participate in such a study in the first place. It seems, therefore, that these women, through their reticence in class, may have restricted their opportunities for participation and practice of spoken English in class.

Related to this is a certain invisibility in the class that did not seem to be the case for the men, so that when asked about their progress in spoken English, the teachers of some of the female learners almost seemed to have to work harder to remember who they were. This seemed to be the case for two of the three female Iraqi participants, and at least three of the five women from Horn of Africa.

Some of the teachers seemed to have to think for a little before they could recall the speaking performance of these learners, so little did they spontaneously participate. In one case, the researcher sitting in the class was able to identify a contribution made by a particular learner, whereas, under the pressures of normal teaching, the teacher herself had not seen it. It appeared that several of the women were almost 'invisible' in class, because they did what was asked of them, said very little and made little fuss.

It was also noticeable that many of the women tended to take shorter turns when they were conversing in English, and even through their interpreters, they were not always as forthcoming as the men. Interviews in English with the Iraqi women, for example, were characterised by short turns, which had to be elicited very patiently. The women seemed hesitant to speak and anxious about saying something wrong. Indeed, it was very difficult to get female members of the community to agree to participate in the project at all! Although two of the three Iraqi male participants had similarly low levels of education, they spoke in longer turns and were more prepared to speak out, both in interviews and in class. The third male was even more noticeably talkative. He was both younger and better educated. Thus it seems that, though level of education may affect a learner's confidence, perhaps the women felt this more. It seems that both in private interactions with the researchers and in more public interaction in classes, the men were more likely to take risks and be courageous in their language learning:

Example 3: Teacher 10, week 35

Interviewer: *Yeh. So do you think that gender makes a difference to language learning in any way then?*

Teacher 10:   Well, if you just look at this little group and what I see in front of me. I think the males are more sort of, ready to take risks, I think. Although some of the women are quite good too in that group. Like I said there's a little group there where maybe for different reasons they are quite outspoken too. In the speaking and listening area the males tend to be more ready to take risks, but often they get very hesitant when you do reading and writing.

The roles fulfilled by women also impacted on the opportunities they had for learning or speaking English outside the classroom. They reported fewer outings, and these were more likely to be with others, than did the men. The younger men, for example, reported going to clubs and meeting friends, whereas the

younger women did not. As far as the time available for the study and practice of English is concerned, the data suggests that the non-Chinese females, in particular, spent a lot of their time on domestic tasks, and often did not go out as much as the males. When the women talked about social gatherings, it was often together with details of food preparation, whereas the men, although they also spoke of cooking, also reported sitting down and socialising, playing games and talking with friends more often than the women did. Although Andrea reports that her daughters gave her absolutely no help in the house, the general impression from the female participants was that women often share the domestic work in a household, whatever their family role.

Those women with husbands and children were centrally involved in home-making and childcare, and those living with their siblings often also had child-care duties. For example Elsie, who was single and lived with her mother and siblings, was regularly between 30 and 45 minutes late in the morning because she took her young brother to school. Her teacher reports that this meant that she missed the revision phases of the lesson, and many of the more relaxing, communicative activities. This made life difficult for her teacher:

Example 4: Teacher 11 about Elsie, week 1

Teacher 11:   She's always late, so she's never kind of switched on with what we're focusing at at that moment as she walks in, and I usually have to, it distracts me. […] and so it takes my time, it takes me away from the rest of the class. I have to explain and, they are always trying to catch up.

Similarly, asked why she was also regularly late for class, Zeinab reported that she prepared things for her husband in the morning.

When the participants were asked whether it was more difficult for a male or a female to stay on a language program, several conceded that women found it more difficult because of their domestic responsibilities. In fact, Linda was only able to participate in the project for one and a half terms because of difficulties in arranging childcare for her four-year-old son. Classes were only run in the morning at the centre she attended, and her son was unused to getting up early and cried when left. This meant that, even when a childcare place became available, she was unable to study in a regular class and had to attend the library class instead, which did not suit her needs, or her level. Her husband, however, attended the morning class. Among the Chinese participants, too, childcare was

an issue, since their children often had children of their own. Indeed, the wife of one of the males could not come to class at all because she was looking after her grandchildren. Her husband, however, was attending. Another, Zara, left before the end of the study in order to look after her grandchild. The men also reported participating in childcare, but perhaps less centrally and this did not interfere so much with their study of English. For example, they were more involved in transporting children to and from school, since they were more likely than the women to drive, and this sometimes made them late or obliged them to leave early.

There was also some indication that some of the women were in subordinate positions in their marriages. Fern seemed to be the victim of domestic violence and eventually moved out of the accommodation she shared with her husband. Linda, as noted above, felt that her husband did not fully take her desires into account. He was better educated than she had been, and this seemed to encourage a view in the household that his education and needs should come before hers.

Age

Two issues that emerged in relation to age among the project learners were perceptions by the older learners that their age impeded their learning, and some reticence among younger learners about being in classrooms with learners they perceived as old.

Although one teacher, at least (Teacher 6 in an interview in week 8), was quite adamant that age should not be a barrier to learning, the learners aged over 45 tended to see themselves as old and reported that they found it harder to learn than younger students. The older Chinese learners made frequent reference to their age and the difficulty they had in remembering language items. This was true even for Zara, who was considerably younger than her compatriots at 47 years old. The Chinese sometimes attributed these learning difficulties to their memory.

Example 5: Zena, week 12[22]

Zena: … For people like me, in my age, probably if you tell me too much I can't remember … If the teacher gives me too much I would be nervous because I can't remember but I have to say it's my problem, not the teacher's problem.

Example 6: Joe, week 31

Joe: … The main problem is the memory. I forget so easily. If I learn here and then I can hear from the computer

and learn, but if I didn't review at home, then I just forget it.

Interviewer: *The problem with the memory, have you always had a problem with your memory?*

Joe: Not really a problem, because just ageing. I'm 69 years old now.

Interviewer: *So do you think it's more difficult if you're older to learn English?*

Joe: Yes. Possible. I have no confidence.

Eva, the interpreter, who had had experience with newly arrived immigrants from the Iraqi Assyrian community over several years, suggested that learners' age-related difficulties were closely bound up with cultural and individual perceptions of age. However, she also felt that this might change as they spent longer in Australia, where attitudes to age are different:

Example 7: Eva, week 35

Interviewer: *So, do you think that this perception of age, where people come into the AMEP, not to your class, but to the AMEP, do you think this makes any difference to how they see themselves as learners?*

Eva: Maybe in the beginning when they not accept the idea. That, she say, 'Oh, I'm very old. What I'm gonna learn?', you know. They think themselves they are very old. In my community, at age 45, 50 they think themselves they are very, very old. They not useful, just to sit home, look after their grandchildren. You know, this is the idea.

But when you encourage them, in the community, 'No, look you're not old, you can do many, many things', when they start, when they notice that they prove to do something, no I believe they are doing very well. They will change their idea. They will change, yeh.

This comment on the cultural variability in the notion of age provides an interesting insight into the issues mentioned by the learners. It also raises questions about how far the problems the learners saw as related to their age were a result of the perceptions they have of themselves, and how far they were related to the actual physiological changes of ageing. As Eva suggests, it may be that different

cultural and social groups regard people as 'elderly' and characterise the effects of ageing at different biological ages. In those countries where life expectancy is in the late 40s or early 50s, people who may be regarded as relatively young in Australia may be regarded as quite elderly. The perceptions of immigrants may only alter slowly after they have been in a new country for some time, and have become aware of different demographic patterns and experiences in their new environment. It is outside the scope of this study to determine whether there was any physiological basis for the perception of the learners that their age inhibited their learning, but it is reasonable to postulate that because the older learners saw age as an impediment to their learning, it probably was, as it influenced their construction of their identity as learners.

Younger learners reported some unease at being in classes with learners they saw as much older than themselves. It was unclear how far this discomfort related to the superior status given to older people, or to their learning pace. In week 8, Elsie (23 years) said:

Example 8: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: I think one can't be comfortable to sit like with other students who is 70 years old. I would be comfortable more with people at my age group.

Similarly, Sue (18 years) said that she would prefer to study with people of her own age (see Example 9). She seemed to associate age with greater levels of experience and therefore knowing more, and so it was difficult to tease out how far her own relatively modest level of education, compared to that of older learners, played a role in her feelings:

Example 9: Sue, week 35

Interviewer: *Now I want to think about the different age of people in the class. In the class there are people of different ages. Do you think this makes a difference when you're learning English?*

Sue: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: *What difference does it make?*

Sue: Yeh, she said 'When there is a woman in my class, older than me, I believe they can't learn equal like, in the same way.

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Sue: But like if I'm going to the classroom with my age, I believe we can learn different way, more than what we're learning now.

Interviewer: *So, would* [Sue] *like to see classes that were divided according to age, so that the younger ones go together in one class and the older ones go together in another class?*

Sue: Yes.

Interviewer: *Yes? Mm. What difference does she think that the age makes? How does it affect the way you learn a language? Or is it just that you like to be with people your own age?*

Sue: She's saying 'Because, like there is a woman older than my age, at least they got more experience than me'.

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Sue: Like I learned as much as in my age, for my age I learn before in the past. But like, for example, there are some women in my class they have more experience, they learn more than me, which it's make different in the class so we not equal.

Interviewer: *Mm. More experience of what?*

Sue: Because they learn more at school. More opportunity to go to school. Years, more years than what others did at school.

Interviewer: *So is it age that is the different thing, the important thing, or is it how much you've been to school before and studied, do you think?*

Sue: Age.

Interviewer: *So if you're older it's more difficult to learn?*

Sue: Yes.

Interviewer: *But if you have more schooling, is it easier to learn, do you think?*

Sue: Yes.

Interviewer: *What way does she think that being at school, or having had more schooling, makes it easier to learn English?*

Sue: She said 'Of course they learn more, you know, they have more experience'. I said 'In which way?'. She said 'I don't know, but they know more than us'.

Interviewer: *Oh, OK. They know more and do they learn more quickly?*

Sue: Yes, of course.

The interviewer's attempts to disentangle Sue's attitudes to age and prior experience highlight an issue for younger learners from cultures with hierarchical social structures and family ties where older people are regarded with considerable respect. On the one hand, there may be older people who learn more slowly for a variety of reasons. On the other, older people may have more education and world experience with which to make sense of the new material they are learning. In either case, younger learners who have been raised to show respect to their elders may be disadvantaged. They may be reluctant to provide answers to questions that their seniors have not been able to answer, thereby showing disrespect, or they may feel intimidated by their greater world, and sometimes educational, experience. Clearly, these factors interrelate, and the full impact of age itself as a chronological fact, aside from the background variable of educational level, which we discuss in the following section, cannot be understood in isolation.

Level of education

As can be seen from the overview of the learners, their levels of previous education varied from only four years of primary school (Andrea, Abe) to 17 years of primary, secondary and then tertiary education (Joe). Most had between six and ten years of schooling. The learners from Ethiopia and Eritrea had more experience of schooling than might be expected of learners from these groups given the low societal literacy rates in the countries from which they originally came (UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

In examining the project data, we did not identify a clear or simple relationship between level of education, and progress in English. Joe, the university-educated learner, for example, appeared very similar to his age peers in his progress in English, although his teacher did see him as someone who could offer help to newcomers in the class. As noted above, age and level of education seemed to interact. Joe notes that if he were younger, he would probably be happier in a class which progressed a little faster. Those who were older and had less education perhaps lacked the confidence of their better-educated age peers, as Teacher 5

suggests in comments about Andrea early in the study. She also suggests that successful experiences of learning in the AMEP can mitigate the effects of age and level of education as the learners grow in confidence:

Example 10: Teacher 5 about Andrea, week 1

Teacher 5:   From my interpretation of it, she's displaying all the things that you would expect from perhaps someone with a minimal educational background, especially learning in an L2, or sometimes it's their L3 or whatever. Specially someone who, I mean she's not very old at all, but she's not 19 or 20, you know what I mean, so coming back to school, learning again, you know, there are all these barriers. But I think it's brought her out of herself and given her more confidence and you know, when she smiles her whole face beams because she can do something.

Some of the teachers did comment that students with only a basic education were not as flexible as other learners in their approach to learning in ESL classes, as these comments about Sue and Zara, both of whom had only elementary education, illustrate.

Example 11: Teacher 6 about Sue, week 27

Teacher 6:   We did reading information text. Now when we do reading information text Sue's fine when we do the things that we've done many, many times. Like we do the days, we do the dates, we do times, we do addresses, but then there might be something like the, at the end of the task that might require a little bit of, thinking beyond what you've learnt, and that's where she's completely lost. She can't do that. Like she won't go just a little bit beyond that. She stays strictly within the boundaries of what she has already learned. She says Sue is not a risk-taker and will not think anything out, prefers the 'facts' that are in front of her.

Example 12: Teacher 4 about Zara

Teacher 4:   And I think at the moment Zara is still quite rigid about her learning. She prefers to sit in the chair and just learn

on her own. And from me, when I'm teaching in front of the class. She'll just repeat. She'll just stay there and repeat it on her own. And I need to actually say to her 'Go and work with XX, or go and work with X. And she will be happy to do that, but she needs direction.

Some of the older learners, see for example Andrea and Ilia below, also reported that they lacked confidence in their learning as a result of their lower levels of education:

Example 13: Andrea, week 12

Andrea: 'I believe I can't achieve anything but I will try to learn some English just to help myself sometimes when I go to Centrelink or to see my family doctor, or whatever. Just a few simple things at least I can, it's useful for me.' I said 'OK, why are you saying that I can't achieve anything now, because age, or what, just let us know why. She said 'No, because in Iraq I never been at school. I only went to school only four years in primary and so', she believed, no she can't do anything.

Example 14: Ilia, week 8

Interviewer: *Why do you think other people are learning better than you?*

Ilia: Well, I think maybe.

Interviewer: *OK. Right.*

Ilia: Well they might be in different situations. Their life might be easier than I have. They're younger than me. I'm about to be 50, I don't expect myself to learn as … [unintelligible].

Thus the variables of age and levels of education interrelate, and the impact of these background factors on the learners derives, at least in part, from their own self-perceptions. While younger learners who have had short, interrupted or unsuccessful experiences of schooling may be able to regain in confidence more quickly, as they are less encumbered by family circumstances and other pressures of age, their older classmates may have more difficulty. Since confidence and a belief in one's own abilities are crucial to success in language learning (see, for example Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999) on the effects of age and

low perceptions of self-worth on foreign language anxiety), older learners with lower levels of education may be at a particular disadvantage unless they are able to construct more positive learner identities for themselves.

Profiles of six learners

The following brief biographical sketches are designed to give some sense of the experiences and circumstances of the learners involved in the project. They have been selected to provide a picture of the breadth of human experience and the circumstances learners bring to adult ESL classes. The countries of origin and languages spoken have not been identified in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Profile 1: F1

F1 attended school for a few years in the capital of her home country, where she moved from her birthplace in the north. Her father was a waiter and did odd jobs at a reception centre, and her mother stayed at home to look after the family, as is typical in her culture. Neither could read, nor write. She is the oldest of four children, and quite enjoyed school, but left after a few years because her mother became pregnant with twins and became unwell. At first she felt pleased with this move, but later came to regret it. Her older sister lived with an aunt and qualified to be a primary teacher, and F1 seems to regret that she did not do this. Her younger brothers also had the opportunity to study for longer than she did. F1 married at 16 when a cousin came to her family with a good financial proposal. Her family needed the money in order to help with a house. In her community, marriage at 14 or 15 is common, and so she and her family agreed. F1 no longer thinks that marriage at this age is a good idea.

F1 is married with children; the youngest is still at home. Her childcare responsibilities mean that she cannot attend her preferred class; instead she has to attend a class at another time of day, which does not give her much help with the skills she wishes to improve. F1's husband speaks better English than she does and is better educated. She seems to suffer from this, in that he seems to control what happens in the family and perhaps takes her needs less seriously. When asked about her goals, she says she doesn't want what happened to her to happen to her children – she wants them to continue as far as they can in their education. She wants to learn English so that she can at least say something when she is shopping. Ideally she would like one day to get a job. She seems to miss at least one class out of four, possibly because of childcare responsibilities.

Profile 2: F2

F2 attended school for several years continuously in her country and then left school and stayed at home. She comes from a Christian family who were farmers, and is the middle child of eight children, both boys and girls. She came to Australia with her husband. Teachers comment that she looks weighed down by the world, but she does not speak to them of any problems. In fact, she is not a spontaneous contributor to class discussions, although she works well on any task set, and will answer a direct question. She does not have the confidence to ask questions in class, although she has many to ask. She often comes late to class, for reasons which were never clear, and this interferes with aspects of her language learning. The teacher reports that she does not look relaxed in class, and often misses out on the more communicative activities which occur earlier in the lesson. However, F2 reports that what she really wants to do in class is 'to be able to speak'.

F2 is not a risk-taker. She says she gets scared if the teacher asks a question, even if she is close by. She likes to work in a group because other people there might be able to help her with the answer. She achieved Certificate 1[23] by week 16 of the project, and a steady rather than dramatic progress is reported by her teacher. 'I think just seeing her increasing confidence is probably the main achievement, that she is more able to share with others and work with other people.' At a certain point she started to look happier, perhaps because she has moved out of the house she shared with her husband. Domestic violence is suspected to have been involved, but we had no direct evidence of this. She says that she wants to do nursing/aged care. By week 27, her teacher reported modest progress, particularly in reading.

Outside class, she no longer lives with her husband, and is in accommodation which appears to have been arranged through her church, which seems to play an important role in her social life, particularly at festival times.

Profile 3: F3

F3 was born in a village in the north of the country and then moved to a city in the north with her family. There she attended primary school, but did not finish the final year. Like others in her community, she spoke her native language at home, but since it is not allowed in school, she learned to speak and write in the national language once she started primary school. She had to repeat her second and fifth years, which means that although she spent several years at school, she did not obtain a leaving certificate. She didn't enjoy school, which she describes

as 'tough'. She liked some teachers, who explained things well, but others beat her, and so she decided to leave, although she did not enjoy 'sitting at home' either. She is the middle child of four brothers and two sisters. The family came to Australia via two years in a third country where the family lived for two years. She did not really learn the language there and said that finding a job was difficult. She was brought to school by her older brother who works with a family friend working with granite. Another brother is a *taekwondo* expert. In her home country, the older brother and father ran ice-cream shops. She currently helps her mother with shopping, cooking and other household tasks. She says that she wants to study, and mentions university, but she also says she wants to be a hairdresser or a beautician, which is what her close friend wants to do. She is not keen to marry.

In class, she is punctual, but was absent quite a few days in the later weeks of the project and appeared to have been unwell. In class she is quiet, but works well. She does not volunteer information, but will contribute when asked. She usually sits with people from her own language group, and is compliant if moved to sit with others, but will always return to her place. Her confidence to help others has grown, and the teacher reports that her reading and writing is improving slowly, although she does not say much. She sometimes finds that the more extrovert members of the class dominate, and she doesn't like it when they call out the answers in her language.

Profile 4: M1

M1 is aged in his twenties, living in rented accommodation with a sibling who works. He speaks a regional and a national language, and is literate in the national language. His parents were merchants who bought and sold crops and grains. Both were literate in the national language. He has another brother and a sister living as refugees in a country bordering their country of origin who are experiencing difficulties, including trying to come to Australia to be reunited with their brother. This anxiety makes it hard for M1 to sleep. He expresses grief at his separation from his father and siblings. (It is not clear from the data that his father is still alive.) He hopes to be able to sponsor his brother and sister in their application, but is not fully aware of the system. He is seeking help from a Migrant Resource Centre. He expresses different aspirations – to one day go to university, but more clearly to train and work as a nursing aide in a hospital. He is pleased at his success in achieving Certificate 1, but is also anxious that he is nearing the end of his 510 hour entitlement (see Chapter 1), and that he will

not complete Certificates 2 or 3, and so his English will not be adequate for him to pursue further study.[24]

M1 reports that he has few friends in Australia, though he enjoys mixing with the other students in his English classes; he sits with different people each day in class. He reports feeling isolated from the community in which he lives. While attending AMEP classes M1 experiences difficulties with housing that mean he misses classes or is late.

In early interviews he says he understands what is covered in class, but would like more time in class to discuss and practise using the language covered. He says he enjoys working on computers as it helps his English, and accessing the Internet 'keeps him up to date'.

By the end of the project he was working in a factory in a suburb a long way from his home. He has a car and drives to work.

Profile 5: M2

M2 is a young adult, who lives with a younger brother. They are living with a distant cousin. He is literate in his native language and also speaks a language of regional significance. He went to school for several years in his country of origin, then lived as a refugee in a neighbouring country – where the language of regional significance is spoken – for 3 years. He has experienced considerable family disruption, has siblings overseas, and the whereabouts of his parents and some other siblings are unknown – it is possible that they are dead. He is now in contact with a sister in another country and both hope for some ultimate re-unification. Here in Australia M2 feels he is responsible for his younger brother. During the time of attending AMEP classes, both were told by their cousin that they will need to move out of his home, as he has some other relatives arriving from overseas who he needs to accommodate, and that they all can't fit in the house. For a few weeks the issue of where they will find housing becomes the primary focus of the brothers. It interferes with their attendance, but more significantly interferes with their concentration.

M2 wants to learn English in order to work, and to do further study. He is interested in qualifying as a mechanic. At the end of his first term in the AMEP he leaves to attend a TAFE[25] course (despite advice from his teachers). However, after several weeks he found the TAFE course too difficult and returned to the AMEP.

In the early part of his participation in the AMEP, M2 reported that he uses English as often as possible outside the classroom, but he reported that there have been situations where he has been misunderstood. He tended to talk in strings of isolated words and phrases. His teachers reported that he is often late to class, and that he is isolated within the class. He doesn't sit with his brother, but sits alone (they often arrive at different times), he sometimes responds to requests in ways that suggest he hasn't understood what he was asked. He likes copying and takes extensive notes. He says he really enjoyed a whole day excursion that involved a boat trip to a seaside suburb.

Profile 6: M3

M3 is retired from the workforce. He attended secondary school in his country of origin, and worked in the textiles industry for all his working life. At the end of his career, he was managing other staff. He lives with his wife in the house of his 38-year-old son and daughter-in-law (who don't have children) in an outer suburb. He has another adult daughter living in the country of origin. He is an active gardener, and he grows flowers and vegetables in the garden at the house. He found it very difficult on arrival, and says it was like being deaf and not being able to speak. He didn't go out for six months for fear of becoming lost. At first, he found English classes difficult, and complains, in early interviews, that the teacher has not taught some things he would like to know such as 'Bankcard' and post office, but he has learned how to use English to go shopping. He and his wife were lonely at home as both the son and daughter-in-law work, and they find that attending class has put them in touch with others who speak the same language and are in the same age group, and this has led to socialisation with this group, in class, but not out of class, because travel to and from the outer suburb is difficult.

M3 says that it is hard to learn and remember because of his age. He says that, as he started in the class after other students it was hard to catch up, but he is learning as the class continues. But he says that by the time he gets home he feels he has forgotten everything from class. He feels that classes are at a higher level, and that he needs something 'very basic' – he started in the AMEP class after attending a community class for older learners but found that was too advanced for him.

In later interviews he complains that he feels he is being held back by the teacher repeating material and going slowly in order to cater for newer members of the class who come in at a lower level.

M3 talks positively about an excursion and says he thinks more experience of learning language through real experience of what he is learning would make it easier for him to remember things. He constantly says that age makes it difficult for him and others to remember and to learn. He talks positively of a supplementary class he attended where there was information about daily matters such as bills and dealing with 'survival matters'.

Conclusion

This brief sketch of learners who participated in this study illustrates the complexity of the lives of learners in adult ESL classes. The metaphor of the kaleidoscope comes to mind as we consider the many dimensions of their experience prior to immigration, and their circumstances in their new lives, and the position of their communities and families in their new countries. The diversity of experiences and circumstances raises particular challenges for those who are supporting them in their learning of English. Even these brief sketches illustrate how different their backgrounds are. Experiences and sets of circumstances combine to give each individual learner a particular profile, and contribute to their identities as learners.

Firstly, there is the challenge of understanding the learners, with their unique characteristics as well as the experiences they share with other members of their communities. An awareness of the communities that learners affiliate with, and their circumstances in the new country will also assist in understanding the circumstances of particular learners, and assist teachers in knowing how to apply curricula and assessment practices.

Secondly, there is the need to structure provision of services in ways that meet their needs, so that classes are organised to accommodate the needs, preferences and constraints of different groups of learners, and of individual learners in those groups.

Thirdly, in providing access to the learning of English, learners need to develop positive identities as learners, and to be affirmed and respected, and to have their background and experiences acknowledged. Helping learners develop the English language skills to be able to communicate is an important way of affirming and respecting them, but they also need insights into the ways and expectations of the new culture and society so that they can understand how they may project themselves effectively to that community.

As patterns of immigration and settlement constantly change, teachers and

administrators in ESL programs must deal with changing client groups and different patterns of individual lives in the kaleidoscope. We hope that the discussion we have provided in this chapter has provided a useful insight to a small part of the pattern.

Notes

22   In all examples from student interviews, the interviewer comments are in italics, the students' comments are in bold where they speak in English, and in roman print where the interpreter speaks for them.

23   Certificate 1 is the first level of the CSWE (Certificates in Spoken and Written English), which is the nationally accredited curriculum framework of the AMEP. It is assessed through certificates which correspond to four levels of English language proficiency. At each level, statements of learning outcomes in the form of language competencies in oral interaction, reading and writing are provided (NSW AMES 1998).

24   Certificate 2 is generally considered to be functional level English, whereas Certificate 3 is more equivalent to vocational level, and would be necessary for most further study.

25   TAFE = Technical and Further Education colleges where students pursue vocationally oriented courses.

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Chapter 6: Language learning strategies

Helen Lunt

Language learning strategies are the:

> *actions, behaviors, steps or techniques … used by learners to enhance learning. Specifically, these strategies facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information.*
>
> (Oxford, Lavine and Crookall 1989: 29)

> *special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information.*
>
> (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 1)

An investigation of strategy use can shed light on the learning process of language learners and, in so doing, help provide a knowledge and understanding of the individual's specific ways and stages of learning. Knowing how their learners learn, and the level of their achievement, enables teachers to be more effective in assisting language learners towards the ultimate goal of independent and successful language use.

Research into learner strategies has grown substantially since the 1970s. Four major phases can be distinguished. In the first, data was collected and used as the basis of profiles of good language learners (Rubin 1975; Naiman et al 1978). These activities from the first phase were followed by studies which concentrated on the collection of self-report data indicating learners' use of particular strategies (Politzer 1983; Politzer and McGroarty 1985; O'Malley et al 1985), and the consequent classification of learner strategies (O'Malley et al 1985; Oxford 1990).

As part of the second phase of activities, O'Malley et al (1985) distinguished three major types of strategies (see Appendix 1, page 130):

- metacognitive
- cognitive
- social mediation.

Metacognitive strategies include processes such as 'planning', 'self-monitoring' and 'self-evaluation', and are those which make use of the learner's knowledge of their own cognitive processes. Cognitive strategies include 'note-taking', 'repetition', 'deduction', 'resourcing' and 'translation', and are those strategies directly related to the performance of learning tasks. Social mediation strategies are concerned with the ways in which learners interact with other speakers who speak the target language and include strategies of 'cooperation' and 'asking for clarification'.

In the late 1980s (the third phase), programs of strategy training were developed, based on the assumption that successful strategies could be taught and used to good effect by less effective learners. In this phase, materials were produced for learners to develop their strategies and for teachers to train learners in the use of strategies (Wenden 1986; Wenden and Rubin 1987; Ellis and Sinclair 1989a, b; Willing 1989; Oxford 1990; Oxford et al 1990). These materials were generally well received by teachers, and viewed positively in the training of learners, despite few benefits of the effects of training being found (O'Malley 1987).

More recently, the fourth phase has seen research conducted into other influences on second language learner strategy use, such as proficiency (Chamot and Küpper 1989), motivation (Dörnyei 1990, 1994; Crookes and Schmidt 1991; Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret 1997), personality type (Ehrman 1990; Oxford and Ehrman 1993), aptitude and style (Sternberg 1995), and cognitive style (Littlemore 2001).

Chamot and Küpper (1989) are of particular interest here because of their findings on learners of lower levels of proficiency, such as those in this study. Unlike earlier studies which had concentrated on investigating only 'good' learners (Rubin 1975; Naiman et al 1978; O'Malley et al 1985), Chamot and Küpper examined the strategies of learners across all levels of proficiency, in their study of high school language learners. They found that the level of language proficiency had some bearing on the strategies used by learners. Learners at the beginner level were using a narrower range of strategies than learners at higher levels of ability. In addition, they were depending mainly on the cognitive strategies of repetition, translation and transfer. Chamot and Küpper also found that use of particular strategies was common across levels; for example, no learners made extensive use of social or affective strategies, and all of the learners reported using cognitive strategies more than metacognitive strategies. Of these, planning, rather than monitoring or evaluation strategies, were the most reported.

Also pertinent to the current study are the findings of Littlemore (2001). In examining the communication strategies used by language learners, Littlemore drew, in part, on the cognitive style model from mainstream psychology, of Riding and Cheema (1991), discussed below. Littlemore found that learners were predisposed to use certain strategies, which accorded with their underlying, cognitive style. For example, learners with a holistic cognitive style used more communication strategies based on comparison than did those with an underlying analytic cognitive style. Although Littlemore's findings are related to the use of communication strategies only, they suggest that the underlying cognitive style of the learner could be influential in the use of strategies generally. In the language learning classroom then, it seems that most benefit could accrue to learners when their cognitive style is recognised, and they are encouraged and assisted to use those strategies to which that cognitive style predisposes them.

Cognitive style

Outside the field of second language learning there have been many taxonomies developed of the different approaches which learners may adopt to learning. Different style models have been developed based on the learning process (Kolb 1976; Honey and Mumford 1986, 1992), on instructional preference (Price, Dunn and Dunn 1976, 1977; Dunn, Dunn and Price 1989), on cognitive skills development (Reinert 1976; Letteri 1980; Keefe and Monk 1986) or grounded in orientation to study (Schmeck, Ribich and Ramaniah 1977; Biggs 1978, 1985; Entwhistle 1979).

To Riding and Cheema, though, such a diversity of styles was unhelpful and so, searching for underlying dimensions that cut across individual differences they identified two cognitive style dimensions (Riding and Cheema 1991):

* the *wholist-analytic style* dimension which reflects the way in which an individual *organises* information, in parts or as a whole; and

* the *verbaliser-imager style dimension* which reflects the way in which an individual *represents* information, in a verbal or visual form.

Each style dimension is a continuum and each is independent of the other. Thus, an individual learner could, for example, be an analytic on one dimension while being an imager on the other, or a wholist on one dimension and a verbaliser on the other.

In terms of the characteristics of the wholist-analytic style dimension, wholists tend to see the totality of a situation, are able to have an overall perspective and can appreciate the total context. Analytics, on the other hand, see the situation

as a collection of parts and will often focus on one or two of these at a time to the exclusion of the others (Riding and Sadler-Smith 1992). In a language classroom, then, wholists may find it easy to have an overview of a specific task, for example, but they may have difficulty in seeing the structure of words, or tenses, and in pulling out pieces of the text to illustrate certain points. Analytics, on the other hand, may be good at analysing information into its parts, and at identifying similarities and differences. However, they may focus on one aspect to the exclusion of others and so may have a problem with integrating information into a whole.

The second dimension, the verbaliser-imager dimension, measures how an indvidual represents information during thinking, that is, verbally or in mental pictures. Those who represent information through words are labelled verbalisers. Those who represent information in a visual form are labelled imagers. Verbalisers learn best from text, and perform best on language-mediated tasks, while imagers find concrete and readily visualised information easier, and perform best on concrete, descriptive, imagery-based tasks and learn best from pictorial presentation. Therefore, an imager may find it helpful to 'translate' a page of text into a diagram or picture which represents the same information in visual form.

In short, because of differences in their cognitive style, learners are likely to react and perform differently to particular formats of material which are presented to them in class. The way in which information is organised and presented, rather than the material itself, may interact with the learner's cognitive style, their learning strategies and, consequently, may affect their efficiency in learning. Although they may learn from formats which they find less appropriate, learners are likely to sense which format of material or presentation they prefer. Sometimes, they may not be aware of their cognitive style, and it may only be with developing self-awareness, perhaps with the help of a teacher, that learners come to recognise which formats they find most useful.

Identification of strategies

The data on learners' strategies emerged from the interviews which were conducted with the learners and their teachers. Observation of learners in the classroom was an additional, but limited, source of data since learning strategies are generally internal processes, or mentalistic (Cohen and Scott 1996), and as such, are unobservable. Only the overt use of strategies, such as the cognitive resourcing strategy of using a dictionary, or the social mediation strategy of cooperating with another, were observed in the classroom.

For the purposes of this paper, the interview data was coded on a framework of three strategy types: metacognitive, cognitive and social mediation (O'Malley et al 1985) and analysed using the computer package NUD*IST (as discussed in Chapter 1).

The strategies discussed here are not necessarily those which learners believed, or found, to be the most important in their learning, nor are they necessarily those which learners used most frequently. Rather, they are those strategies for which most evidence was found in the data. This is because this data were exploratory in nature and did not specifically focus on particular aspects of the learners' experiences; thus learner strategies were not a focus. Had this been the case, different examples of strategy use might have emerged.

Much of the strategy use which was revealed in the data was consistent with the findings of Chamot and Küpper (1989) for beginner learners: greater evidence was found of the use of cognitive strategies, such as repetition, translation and resourcing (for example, using a dictionary), than of the use of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring or self-evaluation. Use of the social mediation strategy of cooperating with another, though, was widely reported.

Findings

Social mediation strategies

Included in the classification of the learning strategies of O'Malley et al (1985) are two social mediation strategies: 'Question for clarification' and 'Cooperation'. The use of both strategies was found in this data, but there was considerably more evidence that the learners used the strategy of 'cooperation'.

Question for clarification

The strategy of 'question for clarification' is defined as 'eliciting from a teacher or peer additional explanations, rephrasing, examples, or verification' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120).

Learners were observed in the classroom asking for, and receiving clarification from each other and also from the teacher. Analysis of interview report data though, revealed that while both male and female learners asked for clarification from other learners, most questions for clarification that were directed to the teacher were from male learners, such as Ilia, Kane and Ray (see Chapters 1 and 5 for further information about the participants in this study).

Example 15: Ilia, week 8; Kane, week 16; Teacher 2, week 16[26]

Ilia: There are some things that I can't understand, but will ask the teacher to repeat and repeat again so that I can understand.

Kane: Er, there's things that we don't understand. We ask friends of ours, or sometimes we ask the teacher.

Teacher 2: Um, Ray … he's confident with in asking me questions about words that he doesn't understand, phrases, is this correct, is this not.

The use of strategies, though, is complex. The learner's choice and efficient use of strategies occurs within a particular context which comprises any number of single, or interacting, factors. Some factors may be internal to the learner while others may be external, teacher-influenced, and so beyond the learner's control, but together these factors shape and affect the use of strategies by the learner. Here, the use of 'question for clarification' seemed to have been influenced by internal factors: a lack of confidence (as exemplified by timidity, shyness or embarrassment), a low level of English proficiency, and previous educational background, as well as by external factors such as situations where the learners are seated in the classroom by the teacher, rather than selecting their own seats.

Some learners, all female, reported feeling scared, embarrassed, or shy in the classroom and so lacked the confidence necessary to ask questions of a teacher:

Example 16: Fern, week 12; Andrea, week 12

Fern: And when I, if I have a question I can't because I'm scared of asking.

Andrea: … Before I don't understand what's going on in the class. Now it's much better. Before it's a bit hard to communicate because I felt shy, embarrassed. I don't know what to say, I don't know how to answer, I don't understand. Now it's much better …

Another learner, Elsie, was not able to overcome her shyness and risk embarrassment, even though she had many questions that she really wanted to ask the teacher:

Example 17: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: The way the teacher teaches us is really good. But sometimes you've got too many questions to ask and one feels shy to ask all the time, to ask too many questions. Once I can ask a question and later on, I've got another question to ask and another one. So I find it very embarrassing to be asking the questions all the time.

In addition, probably because of her previous educational background, she was loath to make any suggestions which could be perceived as undermining the teacher's authority:

Example 18: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: I don't know really what could make this embarrassment less. The teacher has her own way to teach us. When I come, a new person like me, to tell her to change your way, or your strategy with us, she will say 'What is going on here? You came here to change my style?'

Joe too, did not wish to question the teacher's authority, but found himself in something of a dilemma when the teacher placed a newcomer beside him, encouraging that learner to use the strategy of asking Joe for clarification. Joe believed that his own learning was compromised:

Example 19: Joe, week 16

Joe: Sometimes the teacher would put someone, the newcomer, to sit beside me and told me to give some help to that person, because I've been here for longer than others. Then if that person keeps asking me questions during the classroom times then I can't concentrate on listening to the teacher. Then I believe my studying would be affected.

And yet he realised that newcomers needed his help in asking for clarification:

Example 20: Joe, week 16

Joe: … when I first came here I would desperately need someone else to give me some help. I can understand that. I'm mostly happy to offer my help but just in reality I have to, it has to be balanced, just find some way to make it balanced.

The learners' low level of English proficiency (the majority of learners in this study were beginners) was another internal factor which influenced the effective

use of the strategy of 'question for clarification'. Perhaps linked to the factor of shyness, the low level of proficiency may have precluded the learners from posing a question for clarification, in English, as Zena, a learner in a bilingual class, reported:

Example 21: Zena, week 35

Zena: … we can ask the [bilingual] teacher and the teacher will explain in [L1]. But for a teacher who only speaks English, then there is no way we can do that.

The findings here serve to highlight the factors which can impact on the learner's effective use of asking a 'question for clarification'. In doing so, they emphasise the need for a strong awareness of those influences so that a comfortable situation of 'asking for clarification' in the classroom can be engendered.

Cooperation

The strategy of cooperation is:

[the] *working together with one or more peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral or written performance.*

(O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120)

Some learners reported seeking cooperation with others, such as a spouse, or a grandchild who had knowledge of English, when outside the classroom. Such help, however, was not always constructive and might well have discouraged the learner (see Linda in Example 22 below), or caused embarrassment or loss of face (see Joe in the same example):

Example 22: Linda, week 16; Joe, week 12

Linda: … when I'm going home, my husband sometime checking my writing, he said 'look, this one is wrong, this is wrong, what you did here is wrong'.

Joe: I just read a little bit of English and I tried to practise English with my grand-daughter, but she complained that my English too bad, [she didn't] like to hear my English … My is English too bad … You can imagine my feeling when my grand-daughter laughed at me, laughed at my English pronunciation.

Inside the classroom, a strong preference was found amongst the learners for cooperating with each other. This may have been a reflection of learners' cultural backgrounds, in which cooperative rather than individual effort was valued. Alternatively, the preference may have been a result of the learners' lack of confidence in their own proficiency in English, or the teachers' encouragement and expectations of learners' behaviour. The teachers' management of the observed classes indicated that there was a general expectation that learners would cooperate with others, by working in a pair or as a member of a group. Reports of learners choosing to work alone in the classroom were rare.

Most learners indicated that they chose to cooperate with others, and overall, the main reason given for using this strategy of cooperation was the support which a group offered, and the help which was shared between the group members. For Andrea though, it was not only the support which she liked; she revealed that working in a group enabled her to copy the work of others:

Example 23: Andrea, week 12

Interviewer: *But what do you like best, to work by yourself or to work with other people in a group?*

Andrea: As a group because sometimes we help each other.

Interviewer: *So because you can help each other it's better.*

Andrea: No, copy.

Her teacher confirmed Andrea's behaviour in the group situation, and suggested that such a dependence on others was undermining her development as an independent learner.

Example 24: Teacher 13, week 16

Teacher 13:   … I've just noticed with a lot of the written work that Andrea gets a lot of help from the other people in the group, the other ladies that sit with her. … the spelling of words, filling in words in a cloze for example, or something like that, she often relies on the other people.

Interviewer: *And do you think that helps her or hinders her?*

Teacher 13:   Oh, I think it probably hinders her, just because she's not really attempting to do things on her own. … They're like a crutch for her, … and it's just easier for her to see

what the others are doing and just copy them. … Yeh, often she she'll ask, other times she'll just take the paper across and sort of copy.

Usually the learners routinely worked with, or sought help from, the same friends in the class, often those of the same language group. Observation notes revealed that most learners sat in the same place in the classroom, an observation which was corroborated by Kane's teacher:

Example 25: Teacher 2, week 16

Teacher 2:   Yeh. In the class it's … divided into sort of three areas, the Turkish people, not necessarily all Turkish, but sit on one side, and the middle is the Arabic speakers … Kane always sits in the same, Ray always sits sort of directly facing me,

Interviewer: *Right.*

Teacher 2:   and, and even though it's not sort of marked they tend to know that they go and sit there. Whether they feel comfortable in that position …

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Teacher 2:   but … very rarely do you find people changing tables or changing

Interviewer: *Right.*

Teacher 2:   yeh, they don't.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Teacher 2:   No, I've noticed over the over the term that they always go back and sit at the same seat.

Kane, however, believed himself to be more flexible than the teacher had observed:

Example 26: Kane, week 16

Interviewer: *… does it matter what language the other students speak? If they speak Turkish or Hungarian, or Chinese? Do you work with them as well, or do you try to sit next to somebody who you can speak Assyrian or Arabic or*

Kane: It doesn't matter. Whoever sits there. On the contrary, I find more pleasure to sit and talk to a Chinese or Turkish or something.

Interviewer: *Right. OK. 'Cause some people like to sit next to a person who speaks their own language.*

Kane: It doesn't matter for me. …

Interviewer: *… Sometimes it's that's easier to work out an idea in a language that you know already. So you can work more deeply with a familiar language. Sometimes it's harder to work in an unknown language.*

Kane: It's, that's correct, we can understand more that way. But even if he's sitting over there, I can ask him.

Cooperating with others, working with them in seeking and giving help was seen as a useful way to build confidence and make progress. Again, however, the findings indicate that the use of the strategy of 'cooperation' was not context-neutral, but was influenced by certain factors, largely external to the learner. The composition of the group (in terms of age and L1) as well as its size affected the ways in which learners were able to make use of the strategy.

The teacher of Elsie, a young woman from Horn of Africa, had observed that she was not totally at ease in a group situation:

Example 27: Teacher 11, week 1

Teacher 11:   … I've watched her in groups and she just sort of sits there, and she generally talks more to the people next to her …

               But generally in class, Elsie's not, … she's not sort of what I'd call totally relaxed, but that may be just the body language she's demonstrating to me. … generally she's a quiet, serious member of class. But I think she's loosening up, opening up, you know, relaxing within the group.

Elsie herself supported the teacher's observation, but also identified the reason for her feeling 'out of place' in such a situation. Although appreciating the mixed language and cultural backgrounds of the others in her class, she believed that, at the age of 22, there was too great an age difference between herself and

other learners in the class for her to cooperate comfortably, suggesting that strategies are not context neutral:

Example 28: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: … With the mix it's good I think, because everyone has got some information about something, has got his own culture and will exchange things, information about our countries. But the things is with the age, like I told you before, I think one can't be comfortable to sit like with other students who is 70 years old. I would be comfortable more with people at my age group.

Sue's effective use of the strategy of 'cooperation' was limited by the size of the group. According to one of her teachers, Sue was at ease when the size of group with which she needed to interact was small:

Example 29: Sue, week 35

Teacher 10:   … she interacts well with people at her table. If she's asked to go and work with someone else, she'll do that, she'll do that very, you know, happily. And she'll work, she'll do what you've asked her to do and she'll complete whatever the task is.

However, Sue herself reported that the 'working together with one or more peers to solve a problem …' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120) sometimes involved this being done in the context of a noisy, whole-class group. When, for example, one learner was writing on the board and other members of the class were calling 'Put there, do this, do that' in their own language, Sue found this confusing, and preferred the teacher to overtly manage the situation:

Example 30: Sue, week 35

Sue: … I believe the teacher give the advice what to do at the board. It's more useful than everybody start saying something, you know, in their own language.

Interviewer: *Mm. OK. Why, why do you think it's not a good thing?*

Sue: Because everybody say something different, and you don't know, you know,

Interviewer: *Mm. Mm. So is that confusing?*

Sue: Yeh.

The use of the social mediation strategy of 'cooperation' was generally seen as beneficial to learners. However, by its nature, the use of this strategy is dependent on the contextual factors which, in the classroom, may be beyond the control of the learner. To capitalise on the use of this strategy then, the composition of a classroom group needs to be compatible, as far as possible, with the needs of the individual learner. Clearly, this requires a careful assessment of the learner, through observation and dialogue, to find out if a particular learner feels 'out of the group' or confused on the basis of such factors as age, gender, L1 and friendship. Yet, against this assessment of individual needs must be balanced the growth of confidence and the ultimate goal of the language learner: to become an independent user of the language outside the classroom, in the target language community.

Cognitive strategies

Resourcing

The cognitive strategy of 'resourcing' is defined as 'using target language reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, or textbooks' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119). In this study, the use of dictionaries was observed in the classroom by researchers, and was reported widely during interviews with teachers and learners, but apart from the reports of Chinese learners using an electronic dictionary, most accounts of dictionary use were of learners with 11 or 12 years of previous education. The findings suggest that for those learners with lower levels of previous education, and so without the skills necessary to use one, consulting a dictionary was not an easy strategy. Even for those with considerable secondary education, the use of a dictionary caused problems, particularly in the classroom situation; learners believed that they had tended to be left behind by the teacher when they tried to use a dictionary.

In classes where learners have various levels of previous education some learners may need explicit teaching of dictionary skills. Conversely, more time could be spent in developing other strategies, such as looking for contextual clues, which can encourage learners to become less dependent on the resource of a dictionary. For learners with low levels of proficiency, though, neither task is simple.

Ray's teacher (Ray had 12 years of previous education) indicated that his previously acquired study skills helped him use this resourcing strategy effectively, but contrasted his use of the dictionary with the behaviour of other students in the class, whilst identifying ways in which Ray used his skills to help others in the class:

Example 31: Teacher 1, week 8

Teacher 1:   Ray has study skills in that he can use a dictionary … He looks up a word, a new word comes up and I explain it and he sort of gets it and then he thinks 'I'll look it up'. So he looks it up and then he says 'Oh, teacher, that has many different meanings' … he uses the dictionary a lot. And sometimes, he'll, I'll be going on about something and he'll just tune out and look up, because he wants to do that …

… whereas some, if they get the general gist, oh, yeh, yeh, OK. It saves them looking up, it's too much bother, you know. But he likes to look up in the dictionary … so that's indicative of someone that has that many years of education. Whereas the people with primary school education they tend not to look at the dictionary.

… some of the other students weren't clear on what a word was, … And he had he had looked it up in his dictionary, but he sort of helped the other students out. So he was, he's good in that way.

For the Chinese speakers, the availability of an electronic dictionary enabled quick comprehension of the meaning of an English word:

Example 32: Zena, week 35

Zena: When we go out, like if we look at the name of the shop or a word, what we do is we use our dictionary, our electric dictionary, and punch the letters in and find out, oh, well, what does that mean. And we understand.

However, for Elsie, from Horn of Africa, the quick feedback available to learners with electronic dictionaries meant that, with her 'normal' dictionary, she was left behind and so disadvantaged when the teacher quickly moved on in the lesson:

Example 33: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: … they are mainly from China and they use dictionaries, spoken dictionaries I think. We do have other dictionaries, the normal one. When the teacher is giving us some words or something that we can't understand what is it, we have to search for that in the dictionary. At the time

when we are searching for the word, the teacher will be gone to another thing, but with those people I think they just use their dictionaries and the word will come up. So, I think it's quick for them and not for us.

These comments of the learner again emphasise the context-bound nature of strategy use. Here, using a dictionary, generally considered a highly productive strategy, was rendered useless when the context of the classroom, an external factor beyond the control of the learner, was not sensitive to the particular learner's needs.

Repetition

The cognitive strategy of 'repetition' is the imitation of 'a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119). Learners, particularly those at lower levels of proficiency, found repetition to be useful and necessary. However, the findings here underline the need for the constant assessment of the learner's progress. Ascertaining the level of readiness of the learner to move on is important, if learning is to be maximised. Learners, such as those in this study with limited hours available, need to know that the time for their learning is used to best advantage and that they are making steady gains in their ability to function in the target language.

Many learners reported that the strategy of repetition was useful to their learning of English, in the learning of vocabulary, and in improving pronunciation and handwriting. Elsie needed repetition when learning new vocabulary, but believed that she made insufficient use of that strategy:

Example 34: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: There are lots of things that I've learned in the class and I use them but when I find some new words I will write them down. But the problem is, I'm not going back to those words, or I'm not repeating them or sentences or anything I was learning.

For Nigel, from Horn of Africa and unfamiliar with Roman script, the repetition of copying was useful in practising his handwriting:

Example 35: Nigel, week 20

Interviewer: *But when you practised your handwriting … were you trying to copy something?*

Nigel: Yeh, copy from book.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Nigel: Any book.

Interviewer: *Any book.*

Nigel: Yeh, in home from newspaper, newspaper handwriting is good, because computer I think yeh? I copy from newspaper

Interviewer: *Right. Did you just copy the letter shapes? One letter then the next letter*

Nigel: Yeh and full stop and the question mark.

Nigel's teacher, though, reported that despite his repetitive practice, he still lacked the writing speed of other students:

Example 36: Teacher 7, week 8

Teacher 7:   … Nigel actually has a nice handwriting. His handwriting is much neater and developed than Abe.

Interviewer: *OK. Do they take longer to complete something than the other students?*

Teacher 7:   Yes, definitely. And when the others might have written five or six lines, they might have written one or two.

For Esther, also from Horn of Africa, repetition was important in everything, but particularly in the slow repetition of pronunciation:

Example 37: Esther, week 8

Esther: It's for everything, any repetition for everything is important, … I think when it is slow for us, just slowly, slowly, slowly, we find it much easier to say it after her, or after him. So it's for the pronunciation and for another thing, the exercises like we are doing, this exercise or this point, when she repeats it, and we say it after her, the pronunciation will improve I think.

As well as expressing a need for repetition which involved them in the imitation of a language model (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119), some learners appreci-

ated the repetition, or 'recycling', of material taught in class by the teacher. One teacher spoke of the benefits to the learners' memory of such 'recycling':

Example 38: Teacher 4, week 16

Teacher 4:   Oh there's still quite a bit because even those work sheets that I've used I'm going to use it again, because it's a form of revision for them. They forget, you know, and so it's good to use because of the work sheets are survey ones and so you can actually get them to go round and do it again, so I think it's really useful in that respect.

Andrea reported that the repetition of material in the class assisted her comprehension and memory and, consequently, enabled her to feel more at ease in the learning situation:

Example 39: Andrea, week 23

Interviewer: *OK. And what activities do you find useful this term?*

Andrea: … I feel more comfortable because [the teacher] tried to repeat many things even in different ways, some of them, but still I can tell it's not something new. At least it's something I hear before. And she tried to repeat sometime the sentence, like today and after two days, she tried to ask me again

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Andrea: which is really good, you know, I remember everything.

Not surprisingly, though, too much 'recycling' by the teacher was perceived as a problem by some learners. Once they knew and understood what had already been taught, they tired of the activity or material, and wanted to move on.

Joe reported at his week 12 interview that he wanted less 'recycling' by the teacher and wanted to move forward, although he realised that the reason for the repetition by the teacher was the arrival of new students in the class:

Example 40: Joe, week 12

Joe: I hope … the teacher can teach us something new then give up a couple of times to practise, then move forward, teach something else, then we practise all the time. But I know it's not something the teacher can resolve because

new students are coming all the time and she has to care for these newcomers.

In week 31, Joe reiterated his opinion, but also revealed his strategy for dealing with the classroom activities which did not meet his needs; he talked to his friends about other things:

Example 41: Joe, week 31

Joe: … because the new people come in. They don't have any knowledge of that, so we have to learn again. So keep on learning and learning the same thing. Still the same thing. … If I'm not interested in what the teacher is teaching, … we'll talk other things (laughs).

Memory

No discrete strategies within the O'Malley et al (1985) classification are identified as 'memory' strategies. Rather, those strategies which aid and support memory, and consequently the use of the language learned, are encompassed in the category of cognitive strategies. Nevertheless, some discussion of memory is included here because of the many reports which were made, during interviews, of the problems which learners had with memory in their learning of English. Reports were made by both teachers and learners:

Example 42: Teacher 2, week 16; Teacher 6, week 8; Joe, week 31; George, week 31

Teacher 2:   … and even though you know sometimes I've explained to him how to correct it, you know, go back up, the next session, he would have forgotten that. So, … he won't remember from session to session,

Teacher 6:   … I have the feeling that he has problems with his memory because he seems to be forgetting quite a bit of work.

Joe: The main problem is the memory. I forget so easily. If I learn here and then I can hear from the computer and learn, but if I didn't review at home, then I just forget it.

George: Yeh, of course I want to learn but just can't get it into my brain … I just forget everything when I go home.

Older learners accounted for the lack of memory as a function of ageing even though they indicated that, previously, memory had not been a problem:

Example 43: George, week 31

George: Yes, ageing is a problem for memory, but when I was in [my country] it was not a problem for memory.

Perhaps because of previous educational experiences, or of their beliefs about the nature of language learning, learners placed great importance on the ability to remember, and difficulty in doing so became a cause of anxiety:

Example 44: Zena, week 12

Zena: If the teacher gives me too much I would be nervous because I can't remember …

Zena also believed that the management of her memory problem was her sole responsibility and not that of her teacher. In other words, unlike the use of strategies, outlined above, which were bounded by the context set by the teacher, Zena's use of strategies to aid her memory were to be context-free and independent.

Example 45: Zena, week 12

Zena: … it's because of my problem, I can't remember it. That's my fault. I don't want to interrupt the teacher's activity because of my problem.

Yet, one teacher's comments indicated that she was aware of the memory problem faced by learners, and did take some responsibility for its management:

Example 46: Teacher 4, week 16

Teacher 4:   … because you don't want your students to feel stressed because there is too much and they can't handle it. So I think as a teacher it's my responsibility to make sure that students don't get stressed too much …

In general, however, the conscious use of a variety of strategies to aid memory was not evident in the data, either from the perspective of the learners, or of the teachers. When first asked, in week 1, Joe could not think of any strategy he used to support his memory. Later, however, Joe related how he tried to 'recite' at home and, in doing so revealed that in trying to aid his memory in this way, he had made use of several other strategies. Before using the cognitive strategy of 'repetition' he had used a metacognitive strategy of 'functional planning' in which he planned for and rehearsed 'linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119):

Example 47: Joe, week 12

Joe: Every time when the, whatever the teacher told me I will try to remember and recite it at home, so next day when the teacher asks I can repeat.

Zena tried to support her memory by using the cognitive strategy of 'translation' (using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language) (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 120):

Example 48: Zena, week 27

Interviewer: *So when you have something in class, do you always try to remember?*

Zena: Yes. And I use [L1] to remember the words.

Some weeks later, however, Zena reported that she had become over-dependent on the use of translation as an aid to memory, but was finding it difficult to break the habit she had formed:

Example 49: Zena, week 35

Zena: The disadvantage is, when I started learning English, I didn't have any language skills. I didn't know alphabetical order. So I used [L1] to make myself understand and remember. But now, the problem is I can't get rid of [L1]. So it is a problem.

Only the cognitive strategies of 'translation' and 'repetition' emerged from the data as being specifically directed at improving memory. The use of other strategies might well have been encouraged by teachers, or used by learners, but no evidence of their use was found in the data. It was clear, though, that some learners had been thinking about ways of enhancing their memory, and consequently their learning of English, and articulated these ways, sometimes as suggestions, in interviews. The implication of these reports for language teachers in the classroom is that as well as considering the range of strategies which learners might use, teachers need to consider the cognitive styles of learners. Greater support for the learner's memory may well come when the teacher tries to match the type of material, and the way it is presented, to those cognitive styles; material for verbalisers (Riding and Cheema 1991), for example, may well be presented in a written form or as a discussion, that for imagers may be best presented as a diagram, picture, as a demonstration or an excursion out of the classroom.

For example, Alex believed that more interaction, such as discussion, in the class would make particular language learning situations more memorable and so help his comprehension and English language development:

Example 50: Alex, week 12

Interviewer: *So you would like more time answering questions to the teacher, with the teacher saying 'yes' or 'no' or 'do this' or 'do that'.*

Alex: Yeh. More discussing in the class…

Interviewer: *OK.*

Alex: And then that makes would be remembered and would be grasped and the use of the language, the vocabulary, the words will be obvious …

George reported that, instead of just listening to the teacher, he was better able to remember what he 'was told' when, for example, he had been involved in the 'concrete' task (Riding and Cheema 1991) of doing his 'own research':

Example 51: George, week 12

George: Last year the teacher just said, taught us, taught us, and we just listened. Nothing else. So I feel difficult to remember everything. But this year the teacher told us something, then give us some work to do …, even let us to find out the answer by our own research, so I feel this helps me to remember what I was told much better.

George's comments also revealed that, as well as preferring a concrete task, his preference was for some visual input in the learning process – in the following examples, a demonstration by the teacher, or a visit to the zoo:

Example 52: George, week 35

George: It's easy for students to learn. Even though we can't understand 100%. Like today she showed us a comb when we didn't understand …

Interviewer: *Mm. So she demonstrates. That helps you understand?*

George: Yeh.

George: … [if] you have a lesson about animals, take us to the zoo, to see the birds, to see kangaroo and tell us this

bird, show to us, and tell us, we can remember. And easy for me to remember. …

Interviewer: *Mm. So you think that would be helpful, things like that, going out of the classroom? That would help you learn more quickly and help you to remember?*

George: At least, if we go out once I will remember a few things. But, at the moment, in the class, I don't remember anything. … When the situation is now, in the class, I said 'OK I understand that'. After I go home, I forget it.

Interviewer: *Mm. But if you had a picture in your mind,*

George: Yeh, it's easier to remember in that case.

George's comments indicate that he had thought carefully about the way he preferred to learn. They also suggest that, in thinking in such a way, he had made use of at least one metacognitive strategy, that of 'self-evaluation' (checking the outcomes of one's own language learning against a standard after it has been completed). He had also gone some way to using the metacognitive strategy of 'self-management' (understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions) in that he understood the conditions that helped him learn, that is, to use a cognitive strategy of 'imagery' (using visual images to understand or remember new information) (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 119). Unfortunately, his role as a learner meant that he was not in a position to make full use of 'self management' by 'arranging for the presence of those conditions'. Again, the learner's use of a particular strategy was bound by the context of the classroom. This lack of control, in some situations, over their environment and learning raises the importance of teachers being aware of the different strategies that students might employ to enhance their language learning.

George's reports also suggest that he may well have been an 'imager' on the verbaliser/imager style dimension (Riding and Cheema 1991). Although verbalisers may have learned well from oral presentations, George found it difficult when 'the teacher just said, taught us, taught us', preferring a visual presentation. Imagers, such as George, may best be presented with material in the form of a diagram, picture, a demonstration, or an excursion out of the classroom, so that they can then access the most individually useful strategies for their language learning.

Conclusion

As suggested above, the implication of these reports for language teachers in the classroom is that they need to be aware, and take account, of the individual,

cognitive styles of the learners in their classes by presenting materials in a range of different ways. Then, for part of the time at least, individual learners will be presented with materials in a form which they can more readily organise and represent, and with which, through their choice of strategies, they will be able to interact more effectively. If learners are consistently taught by means of materials which do not suit their cognitive style, it is likely that they will not perform as well as they otherwise might (Riding and Ashmore 1980). Consequently, over a period of time, learners may become frustrated and disillusioned with the class-room learning experience. As reported above, material presented in the language classroom with realia, demonstration, or pictorial representation of text may well help particular individuals.

Perhaps because this study did not specifically set out to investigate the use of language learning strategies, the evidence of strategy use, revealed in the reports of interviews and classroom observations, was limited. Had the focus on language learning strategies been sharper, a wider range of strategy use might have been found. As it was, learners were found to have made use of the social mediation strategies of 'question for clarification' and 'cooperation', and the cognitive strategies of 'resourcing', 'repetition', 'translation' and 'imagery'. Some use was evident of the metacognitive strategies of 'functional planning', 'self-evaluation' and 'self-management' (O'Malley et al 1985).

Nevertheless, the findings emphasise that the efficient use of a particular strategy is complex and is affected by a number of single, or interacting factors which can be internal, or external to the learner and bound by the context of learning. The learner's choice of strategy may be influenced by any of a number of factors: age, level of proficiency in English, previous education, cultural background, past and present life experiences, not to mention a particular cognitive style which can predispose the learner towards the use of certain strategies.

An awareness of such factors though, requires an on-going dialogue between teacher and learner; firstly, to encourage the expression of what learners find particularly helpful and what they do not in their English learning, and secondly, to encourage the use of a broad range of strategies, such that English use outside the classroom, in the target language community, is developed and enhanced.

Notes

26 In all examples from student interviews, the interviewer comments are in italics, the students' comments are in bold where they speak in English, and in roman print where the interpreter speaks for them.

Appendix 1

Classification and definition of learning strategies

Learning strategy	Definition
A Metacognitive strategies	
Planning	
Advance organisers	Previewing the main ideas and concepts of the material to be learned, often by skimming the text for the organising principle.
Directed attention	Deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distractors.
Functional planning	Planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task.
Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of input, often by scanning for key words, concepts, and/or linguistic markers.
Self-management	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions.
Monitoring	
Self-monitoring	Checking one's comprehension during listening or reading or checking the accuracy and/or appropriateness of one's oral or written production while it is taking place.
Evaluation	
Self-evaluation	Checking the outcomes of one's own language learning against a standard after it has been completed.
B Cognitive strategies	
Resourcing	Using target language reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, or textbooks.
Repetition	Imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal.
Grouping	Classifying words, terminology, or concepts according to their attributes or meaning.
Deduction	Applying rules to understand or produce the second language or making up rules based on language analysis.

Continued

Learning strategy	Definition
B Cognitive strategies (continued)	
Imagery	Using visual images (either mental or actual) to understand or remember new information.
Auditory representation	Planning back in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or longer language sequence.
Keyword method	Remembering a new word in the second language by: (1) identifying a familiar word in the first language that sounds like or otherwise resembles the new word, and (2) generating easily recalled images of some relationship with the first language homonym and the new word in the second language.
Elaboration	Relating new information to prior knowledge, relating different parts of new information to each other, or making meaningful personal associations with the new information.
Transfer	Using previous linguistic knowledge or prior skills to assist comprehension or production.
Inferencing	Using available information to guess meanings of new items, predict outcomes, or fill in missing information.
Note taking	Writing down key words or concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form while listening or reading.
Summarising	Making a mental, oral, or written summary of new information gained through listening or reading.
Recombination	Constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way.
Translation	Using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language.
C. Social mediation	
Question for clarification	Eliciting from a teacher or peer additional explanations, rephrasing, examples, or verification.
Cooperation	Working together with one or more peers, to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral or written performance.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 119–20)

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Chapter 7: Second language development: Extending, elaborating and refining English speech

Howard Nicholas and Gillian Wigglesworth

In this chapter we analyse the spoken English produced by the learners in the English elicitation interviews and attempt to delineate the progress they made as they moved through their language program, in an effort to identify similarities and differences across both individuals with different language backgrounds and those with similar language backgrounds. Given that we have only a small sample of learners from each of these backgrounds we make no claim to being able to generalise our findings; rather we attempt to identify the factors that may impact upon the different rates or dimensions of progress of the learners over the period of the study. Our overall argument is twofold. Firstly, over the course of the observations, the learners gain confidence in their ability to speak English and more frequently produce longer and more elaborated turns. However, secondly, there is no necessary implication of the increased readiness to use English for the learners' accuracy in English. The path of language development that we chart is, therefore, anything but consistently incremental.

Reflections on the data

We begin with a brief discussion of the factors that shaped the data we collected. As outlined in Chapter 1, the data was collected in interview situations, which were designed to ensure that we could establish and develop a relationship with the learners over time, and to allow the learner and interviewer to develop a rapport. This was an essential part of the methodology since these learners are unusual in relation to many of those discussed in the current second language acquisition literature in being very low level speakers, in many cases with limited formal education and in marginal socio-political circumstances, that is, facing potential unemployment and in a substantial number of instances with fragmented family structures (for some idea of 'other' groups, see Cook 2002). In the interviews, a concerted effort was made to provide opportunities for the learners to be able to speak at length about a range of topics, and care was taken to ensure that learners would have the opportunity to perform in a relaxed manner. This included a focus on topics that we felt would be meaningful to the learners,

as well as the development of tasks that we felt would be appropriate to the educational and life experiences of the learners in the context of communication with a relatively unfamiliar interlocutor. Where we felt there would be a sense of competition between building rapport and testing the limits of the learners' developing second language (interlanguage) systems, priority was given to promoting the development of rapport in the belief that this would give us a more useful insight into the learners' command of English.

An important feature of this data set is the newness to the second language that the learners reflect. Unlike other studies (see, for example, the extended study of the European Science Foundation (ESF) reported inter alia in Klein and Perdue (1992) and Perdue (1993a, 1993b)), the learners in this study were mainly at the very beginning of their second language learning. In the ESF study (Huebner, Carroll and Perdue 1992; Perdue 1993a: 46ff, 189ff) the four learners of English had been in England for between six and 21 months prior to recording beginning, had sometimes already completed formal instruction programs in English in England and, in one instance, Santo, was judged to be 'quite good' (Perdue 1993a: 108) in English prior to recording beginning. We judged, therefore, that it would be very easy for us to deter our informants if we appeared to be too heavily focused on 'testing' their English.

We believe this approach was appropriate for a number of reasons. The learners were volunteers; the interviews took place in the venues in which they were learning English and, therefore, took them out of their classes. While we were careful to ensure that their participation in the project did not limit their opportunities for instruction, the participants were perceived to be a vulnerable group who might have withdrawn from English language learning if they had felt a sense of pressure. We believe that overall this strategy was successful as the learners were always willing to participate and, generally, became increasingly confident in their interactions with us. Indeed they usually seemed to welcome the opportunity to talk with the researchers, both eagerly coming to the interviews, and not seeking to leave the interviews early. A further indication of their willingness to participate in the interviews was that in some instances, the learners made efforts to arrange alternative times for interviews if an initial attempt to make arrangements had proven unsuccessful. Furthermore, it was quite clear that those who dropped out of the study did so because other events in their lives took them away from the locations where the research was being conducted.

The learners were usually interviewed by the same researcher on each occasion, which allowed a relationship to develop over time. In the cases of learners from

Horn of Africa and Iraq, the interviewer and the learner were of the same gender. In the case of learners from China, the interviewer was female for all of the learners. However, as indicated above, while the interviews were intended to elicit language samples from each of the learners at regular intervals, they were not set up to test or evaluate the limits of learners' capabilities with language in the way that an OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) might do. For this reason, the data are influenced by such variables as the mood of the learner on the day, the rapport that the learners and interviewers were able to develop, and even by such factors as the length of time available to both learner and interviewer. The learner's level of confidence also seemed to be an issue, particularly among the females (see also Chapter 5), who generally took shorter turns and volunteered information less freely.

As a consequence of the influence of these variables, there is no single pattern of change in the learners' interlanguages. There is both variation between individuals, and variation within individuals. In identifying ways in which we can capture the rich complexity of the learners' English, we will employ three terms: extending (roughly, the length of the utterance); elaborating (roughly, the extent to which individual grammatical constituents are expanded); and refining (roughly, attempts to make the constituents and utterances conform to what a monolingual, English speaker might have said in similar circumstances). These terms will be defined more formally below. The intention of using these terms is to portray what the learners are doing with English from their own perspective while acknowledging that they will be coping with competing pressures between attempting to engage in extended and unplanned communication (see Skehan 1998), and producing English that might be regarded as 'correct'.

The result of the competing variables was that some interviews were long and involved, discussing a range of topics, and eliciting a rich source of language for analysis. Other interviews appeared to result in a question/response approach in which the responses were often monosyllabic and there appeared to be a lack of enthusiasm or interest in the process. The following is an example of this contrast. In week 20, Ilia (see Chapters 1 and 5 for further information about individual learners) engaged in lengthy exchanges such as the following, in which we see him continuously adding further information with little direction from the interviewer. While each turn is little more than a single utterance, the episode is characterised by the continuing efforts by Ilia to produce such utterances. It is possible to think of this as revealing something parallel to what McCroskey and Richmond (1987) and others (MacIntyre et al 1998) have referred to as 'willingness to communicate':

Example 53: Ilia, week 20[27]

Interviewer:	*Ah. OK. Right. Why did your family go to Baghdad?*
Ilia:	**Er, some problem we have here. Problem**
Interviewer:	*Yes, yes.*
Ilia:	**All Cord (Kurds?) in Iraq.**
Interviewer:	*Yes, yes. Right. Yes. I remember there was a war and Turkey was involved as well, wasn't*
Ilia:	**No, Baghdad.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh, but in the war*
Ilia:	**Yeh, war**
Interviewer:	*The Kurds were*
Ilia:	**Kurd, Kurd**
Interviewer:	*Yeh, the Kurds were fighting against Iraq*
Ilia:	**Kurd in Iraq, just in Iraq.**
Interviewer:	*Just Iraq. And no Turkey?*
Ilia:	**I don't know. Iraq very small.**
Interviewer:	*Yes. I thought, I don't know. Because the Kurds have problems with Iraq*
Ilia:	**with Iraq, yeh.**
Interviewer:	*and with Turkey*
Ilia:	**Now good. Now this for Kurd, this for Iraq**
Interviewer:	*Right. OK. That's after the United States*
Ilia:	**Eh, United States**
Interviewer:	*separated them out. Yeh. But, but your family has no problems with the Kurds.*
Ilia:	**No.**
Interviewer:	*No. OK. But when a war like that starts, you need to go somewhere that is safe. If there is a war here*
Ilia:	**Eh.**
Interviewer:	*Then you need to go*
Ilia:	**Yeh, yeh.**

Interviewer:	*to a safe place, to Baghdad. So you went to school in Baghdad, did you?*
Ilia:	**School in Baghdad, just eh, four years.**
Interviewer:	*Just four years. Ah, OK.*
Ilia:	**Four years, finish that.**
Interviewer:	*Right.*
Ilia:	**Seventy-one, finish.**
Interviewer:	*Finished school. OK. Right.*
Ilia:	**Now 30, 30 years I don't go to school.**
Interviewer:	*Ah, yes. And now you have to come back to school here. It must be hard work.*
Ilia:	**English my problem.**
Interviewer:	*Yes, yeh. Do you enjoy learning English? Is learning English fun?*
Ilia:	**Yeh.**

However in the following interview, the nature of Ilia's contribution was noticeably different. The interview was conducted by the same person, in the same room, and with the same recording equipment. Ilia's contributions were essentially limited to repetitions of the grammatical structure that he had been practising with his teacher in the lesson immediately prior to the interview and single word closed responses. While the extract below appears to indicate a willingness to answer, the differences from the previous example can be seen in the manner in which the single word responses in Example 54 close down the conversation. They provide a literal answer to the question asked, but do not extend the information that is provided. This is the key contrast with the previous recording. It may have been the presence of an interpreter at this later interview that caused inhibitions for Ilia, but aside from that there was no obvious other difference in the context.

Example 54: Ilia, week 23

Interviewer:	*Yeh, yeh. OK. The, when your children come home from school, when your daughters come home, do they read books from school to you? Do they read you stories from school?*

Ilia:	(Arabic)[28]
Interviewer:	*Yeh? Do you tell them stories?*
Ilia:	(Arabic). No.
Interviewer:	*No?*
Ilia:	(Arabic). (Interpreter) Yeh, they have stories from school, in Arabic. They have homework, they do. **Homework**.
Interviewer:	*Homework. Right. Do they, do they have stories, fairy tales, that they bring home from school?*
Ilia:	(Interpreter) Yeh, they have.
Interviewer:	*Do you know some of those fairy tales?*
Ilia:	(Interpreter) (Arabic). No, I don't know any.
Interviewer:	*No? No?*
Ilia:	They just kid's stories that they read at home.
Interviewer:	*Because I heard a story, I know it as 'Little Red Riding Hood', but I think in Iraq it's the story of Leyla and the Wolf.*
Ilia:	(Interpreter)
Interviewer:	*You don't know that? Oh, OK.*
Ilia:	Yeh, I think it is Leyla.
Interviewer:	*Leyla, yeh.*
Ilia:	I don't know it was (unintelligible). I don't remember it.
Interviewer:	*No? Do you know other fairy tales like that from Iraq?*
Ilia:	(Interpreter) (Arabic) There's a lot of fairytales. I can't (Arabic). He was busy, you know. He hasn't got time to go to libraries, or books.
Interviewer:	*Books, OK. But sometimes these stories are not in books. They're stories that people tell, sitting down with their children or their friends.*
Ilia:	(Interpreter) (Arabic) Yeh, tell, children. I can't remember them.

As the exchanges demonstrate, in Example 54, Ilia relied extensively on the interpreter and consistently asserted his inability (for example, 'No', 'No, I don't know any', 'I don't remember it.') to contribute to the conversation. One outcome

of this was the interviewer's increasing use of closed questions and increasing willingness to resort to material that could be thought of as conceptually and culturally more accessible, resulting in implicit cooperation between the interviewer and Ilia in the production of less extended language with fewer opportunities for elaboration and refinement. As the extract reveals, Ilia's contribution to the English part of the conversation is very restricted. His contribution is frequently in Arabic, or in English only after the interpreter has already made a contribution (for example, 'Homework'). The English that Ilia produced in this interview is both less extended, and less elaborated, than in the previous interview, but by virtue of the fact that Ilia produced virtually nothing apart from single words in this extract, his English is actually relatively more 'refined', by which we mean that there are fewer opportunities for error so that overall the limited examples of English that Ilia produces in this interview are quite accurate.

Because this was not an OPI-type of interview, we could not expect that the learners were necessarily motivated to produce their best language, or even much language, in any particular interview. We discuss these issues as a caveat to what follows, since it is important to keep in mind the constraints of the data. These constraints mean that we have a 'normal' reflection of the English as used by the learners. The data are not 'pure best performance'. Rather, they represent the kind of English that the learners felt inclined to produce on any given day, with all the variability that this implies. Furthermore, the 'real world demands' of the learners' lives meant that we could not constrain them to appear at a particular time on a particular day so that we do not have a consistent set of interviews for each occasion for every learner. Some learners joined the project after others; some absented themselves for some terms to pursue other interests, and some stopped earlier than others.

We begin by providing an overview of the data from a qualitative perspective. This will be followed by a limited quantitative analysis based on the coding (outlined in Chapter 1), which was applied to the data. The coding was designed to capture major categories that would form the building blocks of meaningful communication. Thus, we categorised the data into two major groupings: single constituent utterances (see for example, Ilia's 'United States' in Example 53), and utterances consisting of multiple clauses (see for example, Ilia's 'Kurd in Iraq, just in Iraq', also in Example 53). Since we began this project by exploring new client 'groups', in the quantitative analysis we discuss the learners in the groups that we sought to work with, namely first those from Horn of Africa, then the Iraqi learners, and finally the Chinese learners. We conclude with a

discussion of the factors that we believe may have influenced the learners' second language development.[29]

A qualitative overview

As indicated above, in analysing the data, we will make use of three somewhat overlapping concepts, namely *extending*, *elaborating* and *refining*. We use these terms in part to allow us to discuss the issue of the complexity that the learners attempt to produce in a way that separates this criterion from the criterion of accuracy. This line of thinking traces its roots to arguments originally made in work of the ZISA group (Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann 1981) and continuing in a modified form in the work of Nicholas (1985) and Pienemann (1998). The core argument of this position is that accuracy is an incomplete and, therefore, inadequate measure of learner progress. While accuracy is an important dimension of second language use, it is only one of many, and overuse of it as a construct disguises important ways in which learners make progress in their ability to make use of a new language.

Another feature of the approach that we have taken in this study is that it focuses on conversational behaviour. The notion of *extending* has a particular meaning in this study in that it focuses on the conversational behaviour of the learners when they attempt to lengthen their turns at talk. In contrast, *elaborating* relates to the ways in which learners can go beyond the core linguistic elements in their turns to either add additional clauses through one of two mechanisms: coordination or subordination, or to provide additional morphological features. *Refining* draws attention to the choices that learners can exercise in the degree to which what they say conforms to the norms of monolingual native speakers of the target language.

In the following, these terms will be interpreted in the following ways and exemplified in Example 55 (page 144).

Extending will be taken to mean lengthening an utterance beyond a single constituent. This can be done either by means of a series of single constituent utterances within a single turn (minimal elaboration) or through the addition of clauses via either coordination or subordination. These additions can be more or less elaborated.

Elaborating will be taken to mean the provision of morphological markings (which may or may not conform with the target) or the supply of features not critical to the interpretation of the utterance since their significance is frequently signalled by other elements of the utterance or context.

Refining will be taken to mean the shaping of the utterance such that it contains elements of morphology and syntax that are consistent with monolingual norms or what a native speaker might do in the same situation.

The boundaries between these concepts are fuzzy – as they have to be. When a new element is added to an utterance so that that utterance is extended (lengthened) it can be unelaborated: for example, Ilia's 'Iraq very small' (Example 53); or it can contain an unrefined elaboration: for example, Ilia's 'Now 30, 30 years I don't go to school' (Example 53) where there is an elaboration of the negative from a potential 'no' as in 'I no go to school' to 'don't go', but where this elaboration is still unrefined in the sense that a native speaker would probably have said 'haven't been'.

A refinement is almost by definition a special kind of elaboration such as Ilia's 'I don't know'[30] (Example 53). One consequence of the special relationship between refining and elaborating is that, in trying to clarify the role that attempts at engaging in extended conversation may play in interlanguage development, it is possible to build a contrast between the degree of extension, and the degree of refinement. In this way, we have a means of assessing the attempts to talk at length, and the degree of engagement, with the monolingual native (grammatical) norms for such utterances.

Both of the notions outlined above reflect in different ways the willingness to communicate referred to by MacIntyre et al (1998) – and both interact. While at first glance trying to make an utterance longer looks like something different from an attempt to increase its accuracy, in fact an utterance cannot be lengthened without utilising insights into some grammatical features. Similarly, the act of refining an utterance reflects a willingness to engage with the target language community and its members (see Nicholas 1985). We note that Baker and MacIntyre (2000: 323) point out that for immersion programs in Canada 'perceived competence in French was not significantly correlated with willingness to communicate in French …'. Thus, we make no claim that willingness to communicate is directly related to improvements in command of English. It was, however, a feature that was most significant in the teachers' evaluations of the progress that their students had made (see Chapter 8).

In the following extracts, we can see examples of all three processes and sometimes the ways in which they overlap in context:

Example 55: Sue, week 35

Interviewer: *Oh very good. So last weekend, when you weren't at school, what did you do?*

Sue: **I er, come er go er [XXXX]**

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Sue: **Yeh.**

Interviewer: *Why?*

Sue: **Er I get the shopping this er clothes.**

Interviewer: *Something special?*

Sue: **Yeh.**

Interviewer: *Yeh. Why is there a party?*

Sue: **Yeh.**

Interviewer: *What party is it?*

Sue: **My uncle.**

Interviewer: *Yeh. Your uncle, why? Why does he have a party?*

Sue: **Yeh, is married.**

Interviewer: *Ah, he's going to get married.*

Sue: **Yeh.**

Interviewer: *He's going to get married, or he got married.*

Sue: **He got married.**

Interviewer: *He got married.*

In Example 55 above, the idea of 'extending' can be seen in the response 'Er, I get the shopping this er clothes'. As a response, this demonstrates an effort to add information and lengthen the turn at speaking beyond, for example, a minimal possible response such as 'go shop' or 'buy clothes'. This utterance also contains elements of grammatical elaboration by including 'get the' where 'shopping' would have sufficed to get Sue's meaning across. Sue's final response, though a repetition, is also an example of 'refining' in that it shows how the initial 'is

married' has been refined to a version closer to monolingual norms, 'He got married'. Similar combinations of features can be seen in the following extract from Kane:

Example 56: Kane, week 35

Kane: **All thing good. Reading, writing and learning, good speaking with student and if one student not understand teacher speak again for you. Good lesson. Is good.**

Interviewer: *OK.*

Kane: **No some school Iraq.**

Interviewer: *This is different from schools.*

Kane: **Different**

Interviewer: *How is it different?*

Kane: **Iraq, one, one side woman, one side, no together.**

Interviewer: *OK.*

Kane: **Yeh, or you no speak with teacher. Teacher very no, no good.**

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Kane: **He one time speak for lesson. You understand, no understand, no problem.**

In this example, there are multiple examples of extending. Kane's 'All thing good' can be seen as an extension of a potential 'good'. 'Is good' is also an extension of a bare 'good'. As these examples make clear, there is little refining in the sense of approximation to native grammar. About the only attempt at elaborating some of the required morphology is in the use of 'ing' gerunds or verbs – there is no way to choose between these options here. This example also underlines the fuzzy relationship between elaborating and refining. The '-ing' forms could be regarded as appropriate (particularly if they are seen as gerunds), but they could equally be regarded as inappropriate if they are seen as replacements for something like 'The teacher reads and writes with us so that we learn'. This fuzzy boundary is not a definitional problem. Rather it is an essential element in the language development process. If there were a categorical boundary, there would be very few opportunities for learners to produce target forms and to receive feedback on them. Only because these boundaries are, indeed, blurred can learners gain experience in crossing them and thereby come to make

progressively more use of the target variety (if they 'notice' the boundary that they have crossed) (Schmidt and Frota 1986: 279).

As we have outlined above, there are many different ways in which Kane could have conveyed these ideas. Which particular items and forms could have been intended by Kane we cannot know. Consequently, speculations about the 'correct' target form are arbitrary. For that reason, the notion of refining (rather than a simplistic attempt to assess whether a particular utterance is 'correct') is used to see where the utterance structure resembles more closely a form that could have been used by a native speaker. The following utterances, from Sue, provide examples of refined utterances that are clearly not elaborated, but they are nonetheless appropriate to the discourse context.

Example 57: Sue, week 31

Interviewer:	*How are things? Good?*
Sue:	**Yes thanks.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh? What have you been doing?*
Sue:	**Been doing?**

In each of Sue's responses in Example 57, the utterances are identical to those that could have been produced by a native speaker. In that sense they are refined. However, they are also minimal responses – in one case consisting of a minor clause and in the other a repetition of a discourse-appropriate partial verb phrase. They show no elements of elaboration beyond the discourse-appropriate minimum. There is no reason why they should be so elaborated; they are 'refined enough' as they stand.

As the above examples indicate, this attempt to characterise the complexity of the learners' interlanguage was done in full knowledge of the fact that the learners were engaging in a very specific kind of conversation. It was one on one with a relative stranger, who would not engage in much criticism, but was accompanied by a tape recorder(!). We were, therefore, aware that utterances produced by the learners would reflect both features of conversational behaviour (including non-standard and discourse-appropriate reductions) and features of only partially-analysed grammar (for a more extended argument about these dimensions of language, see Pavlenko 2002). As the following example demonstrates, the kind of conversation that was conducted here has its own characteristics, associated with the notions of unfamiliar interlocutors, a search for 'safe' topics and a consciousness of not moving into areas of potential conflict.

Example 58: Carrie, week 12

Interviewer:	*All right. So* [NAME OF CITY] *is a good place to live?*
Carrie:	**Yes. Good** [NAME OF CITY].
Interviewer:	*What do you like about* [NAME OF CITY]*? Why do you like* [NAME OF CITY]*?*
Carrie:	[NAME OF CITY] **is nice is good.**
Interviewer:	*Mm, why?*
Carrie:	**Because country's very nice.**
Interviewer:	*Why? What's nice about the country?*
Carrie:	**Mm, this country.**
Interviewer:	*So are there other members of your family here? Your husband is here.*
Carrie:	**All my husband.**
Interviewer:	*What, only your husband?*
Carrie:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*Any others of your family here in Australia? Just your husband. So you came together from Ethiopia, you and your husband together?*
Carrie:	**Yes.**

The extract demonstrates how information largely flows from Carrie to the interviewer and how the interviewer is careful not to exercise judgments or to make judgmental comments. This comparative lack of reciprocity in information flow is one of the characteristics of the rapport-building aspects of the interviews. Despite deliberate attempts to build reciprocity into early interviews through the sharing of details of the interviewers' lives, the dominant purpose of the interviews here is to elicit information from the interviewees. This underlying purpose shapes most of the interactions. In consequence, interviewers rarely offered their own opinions and, therefore, rarely took up conversational openings provided by the interviewees. This strategy can be regarded as successful since generally, the learners became more willing over time to talk with us and to provide us with the data that we needed to form a view of their growing control of English. Nevertheless, the strategy could not and did not guarantee uniformity in the data obtained nor the apparent progress that the learners might reveal.

As we have suggested above, these learners not only talk to varying extents in different interviews, they also have multiple linguistic resources to draw on in their constructions of their particular versions of English (interlanguages). In addition to each of the potentials for variation that can be considered internal to these learners, we have the potential for variation that derives from the dynamics of the interaction with the interviewer. Furthermore, we have potential for variation in the manner in which the individual utterances that have been identified above are placed in sequence and used in the talk of these learners.

Despite identifying these areas of potential for variation, the data presented so far seem to indicate that there are more or less consistent patterns for individuals. Abe, Nigel and Harry all appear more willing to produce more elaborated utterances (see Table 15, page 159) than does, for example, Fern. Similarly, Kane and Ray appear quite willing to produce more elaborated utterances than Linda, but Andrea is at least as willing as Ray to produce more elaborated utterances. There is, therefore, no simple pattern of males talking more extensively than females. A similar lack of simple pattern according to gender applies to the Chinese data. Broadly speaking, therefore, this data suggest that there is evidence of individual styles in interlanguage use, even in very early second language development.

One way of capturing the variation is to contrast the following extracts of first and last interviews from some of the learners.

As a learner, Kane is one of those who appears to be engaged and extending in his orientation from the beginning, but, as the following extracts reveal, the degree of extension has increased substantially over the period of the recordings.

Example 59: Kane, week 3

Interviewer:	*Ah. OK. And your first language is Arabic, or Assyrian?*
Kane:	**Arabic.**
Interviewer:	*OK.*
Kane:	**Assyrian.**
Interviewer:	*Assyrian? Mm. And you were born in Iraq?*
Kane:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*And when, when did you go to. Did you go to school in Iraq?*
Kane:	**Yes. I went six years.**

Interviewer:	*Six years. Right. Do you know which years?*
Kane:	**From 56 to 62.**
Interviewer:	*OK. Um, did you live in any other countries before you came to Australia?*
Kane:	**Yes. I live in Turkey two years and six months. Ten months. Two years and eight months**

Example 60: Kane, week 35

Interviewer:	*What can you remember about the very first time that you came to* [THESE ENGLISH CLASSES], *what it was like coming here, what you were looking for?*
Kane:	**First time?**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**I come here for er, for learning English, yeh?**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**Yeh, I stay in the, room 5 first.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**My teacher come, [NAME] now, [NAME], [NAME]**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**One good teacher.**
Interviewer:	*OK.*
Kane:	**Maybe th/two course with me. This teacher is come good, very good.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**This very good school.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh.*
Kane:	**Because one in one no work where to go.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**Three hour in school, three hour in home is day finish.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*

Kane:	**Time good. Eh, some friend have her, I, friend.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	**Arabic and Lebanon, Iraqi. Before I know this friend I had only in the school. Is come good. I no problem.**

Comparing the concluding utterances from Kane in each of these extracts provides a measure of the change in his control of English. Both utterances are relatively extended. They each consist of at least one multiple constituent utterance, but the degree of elaboration is different. In Example 59, Kane produces only one multiple constituent utterance in his last turn 'I live in Turkey two years and six months'. The turn is extended by several further single constituent utterances: 'Ten months' and 'Two years and eight months'. In Example 60, by contrast, the turn contains three multiple constituent utterances 'Before I know this friend I had only in the school', 'Is come good.', and 'I no problem'. Furthermore, this turn contains the elaboration of subordination 'Before … I had only …'. There is, however, less evidence of refinement in the turn in Example 60 than in the turn in Example 59.

Examples 61 and 62 illustrate the changes in Sue's language:

Example 61: Sue, week 12

Interviewer:	*So, let me first of all ask you about your family. You've got, tell me about your family. How many people in your family? How many people in your family? Brothers, sisters*
Sue:	**Brother, sister.**
Interviewer:	*How many brothers?*
Sue:	**How many brother? Er, brother, er, four.**
Interviewer:	*Four brothers.*
Sue:	**Yeh. Sister, two.**
Interviewer:	*Two sisters. OK. How old are your brothers? How old?*
Sue:	**Yeh. Er, um, one six,**
Interviewer:	*Six, yeh.*
Sue:	**12.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Sue:	**13.**

Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Sue:	**16.**
Interviewer:	*Wow.*
Sue:	**18.**
Interviewer:	*So the brother who is 18 is he older than you, or younger than you?*
Sue:	**Older me.**
Interviewer:	*Older than you. How old are you? 18? Are you 18?*
Sue:	**18.**
Interviewer:	*but your brother's also 18.*
Sue:	**Now I 18, er, 18, 20.**
Interviewer:	*Twenty. Your brother is 20. Ah. So he's the oldest?*
Sue:	**No.**
Interviewer:	*So tell me about your sister.*
Sue:	**Yeh sister.**
Interviewer:	*Mm. How old are your sisters? How old are your sisters? Young? Babies?*
Sue:	**No.**
Interviewer:	*How old? 18 like you? Sixteen?*
Sue:	**18, 19.**

In contrast, at the end of the recordings, in week 35, Sue produced the following:

Example 62: Sue, week 35

Interviewer:	*OK. Tell me, on Wednesday, you went to, you went out to Centrelink?*
Sue:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*What did you do? What did you do on …?*
Sue:	**I'm talk, talking with my er er interpreter.**
Interviewer:	*Ah.*
Sue:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	Yeh?
Sue:	**I don't know the English.**

Interviewer:	*You didn't speak English.*
Sue:	**No.**
Interviewer:	*No? Not at all.*
Sue:	**Yeh, talk English** [unintelligible]**.**
Interviewer:	*Ah, OK. Right.*
Sue:	**A job.**
Interviewer:	*Job?*
Sue:	**Yeh. This one er, er, I like job. Me I don't know.**
Interviewer:	*Ah, the Centrelink wanted to give you a job and you didn't like it?*
Sue:	**Yeh. Er, this er school is finish school,**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Sue:	**yeh.**
Interviewer:	*When do you finish school?*
Sue:	**I don't know.**
Interviewer:	*What job?*
Sue:	**Job, I m, I maya, no, no a job.**
Interviewer:	*You don't want a job.*
Sue:	**No, no.**
Interviewer:	*No?*
Sue:	**No. I coming to school**
Interviewer:	*You want to come to school.*
Sue:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh. OK. So after the end of this term, will you come to school?*
Sue:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh? What will you study? Will you study here, or in the TAFE, or …?*
Sue:	**Yeh, yeh, in the TAFE.**
Interviewer:	*In the TAFE. What?*
Sue:	**Yeh, this, er er the take cut er head.**

Interviewer:	*Hairdressing.*
Sue:	**Yeh.**
Interviewer:	*Yeh. OK.*
Sue:	**And this one too.**
Interviewer:	*Ah beauty.*
Sue:	**Yeh.**

Sue's data suggest that there is a substantial increase in her ability to extend her utterances – both to produce more grammatically elaborated utterances and to provide more information.

In Fern's case, the changes are less noticeable in that her utterances in the first recording are contextually appropriate, (largely) single phrase (constituent) responses. What is noticeable is that there is virtually no attempt to provide any extension beyond this minimal response. In part, this will be a response to the scaffolding work of the interviewer, who in this instance frequently poses questions that require no more than a short answer. There is a suggestion in the last parts of Example 64 (nearly six months after the recording for Example 63) that Fern is more able to respond independently and at greater length, but even in these instances, the extent of the longer responses is not nearly as pronounced as in the responses of some of the other learners.

Example 63: Fern, week 3

Interviewer:	*OK, so you do some work at home. Now when you have finished class, do you go straight home to* [NAME OF SUBURB], *or do you go shopping, or? Do you go shopping in the market?*
Fern:	**Sun, Sun, Saturday.**
Interviewer:	*Ah, where do you go shopping?*
Fern:	**Um, um,** [NAME OF SUBURB]**.**
Interviewer:	*Is that a market? Is it a good market?*
Fern:	**Yes.**
Interviewer:	*What can you buy there? What do you buy?*
Fern:	**Supermarket.**
Interviewer:	*Oh, is it a supermarket, or is it a vegetable market?*
Fern:	**Vegetable.**

Interviewer:	*Oh OK. And can you buy the food that you want? What sort of food do you buy?*
Fern:	**Meat. And potato, and onion, fruit.**
Interviewer:	*What sort of fruit do you like?*
Fern:	**Apple, orange.**
Interviewer:	*Did you get apples in Ethiopia?*
Fern:	**Yes, Addis Ababa.**
Interviewer:	*Oh in Addis Ababa, OK. What's your favourite fruit? What do you like best? Your fruit.*
Fern:	**Banana.**

In week 27, there is still a focus largely on shorter utterances, but by now these utterances have extended to multiple constituent utterances and there is some effort to provide information beyond the bare minimum of the first recording.

Example 64: Fern, week 27

Interviewer:	*Mm. OK. All right. Now you were telling me before when you came to Australia, can you tell me when you left your country, where you went on your way to Australia? What did you do? What countries did you go to on the way?*
Fern:	**ee, Ethiopia.**
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Fern:	**Ethiopia I came Kenya.**
Interviewer:	*Right. For how long?*
Fern:	**Kenya four months.**
Interviewer:	*Right. Where did you live in Kenya?*
Fern:	**… s …**
Interviewer:	*Was it a refugee camp, or was it in the city?*
Fern:	**No refu, refugee camp, no.**
Interviewer:	*Was it a city?*
Fern:	**No city. Small village outside.**
Interviewer:	*Oh right. And then after that, what?*
Fern:	**After that I came in Australia.**

The examples cited above give some insight into the appearance and effectiveness of the English produced by the learners. It remains to be seen whether there are larger patterns that appear in any of the groups of learners or across their overall period of recording. For that insight, we turn to a quantitative analysis, where the initial analysis will be of the learners in their 'groups' as defined for this project.

Quantitative measures of language development

It was not possible to code or analyse all aspects of the data. Hence, our focus in this section is whether there is any evidence of either substantial commonalities between the learners (within or across groups) or whether we can determine any evidence across the cohort as a whole to make concrete the teachers' perceptions of the learners' growing willingness to communicate.

The data was coded, as discussed in Chapter 1, into major categories. The most relevant categories for this analysis are the single and multiple constituent utterances. Fern's reply (see Example 63 above) from week 3 is an example of a single constituent utterance:

Interviewer:	*OK, so you do some work at home. Now when you have finished class, do you go straight home to Ascot Vale, or do you go shopping, or? Do you go shopping in the market?*
Fern:	**Sun, Sun, Saturday.**

In contrast, the following from Example 64 above is an example of an utterance containing more than one constituent, a multiple constituent utterance:

Interviewer:	*Oh right. And then after that, what?*
Fern:	**After that I came in Australia.**

In the above example, we see a complete utterance consisting of an adverbial link, a subject, a verb and a prepositional phrase. The contrast between the number of single and multiple constituent utterances (including coordinated and subordinated structures as part of the multiple constituent items) provided an index of the degree of extension in the learner's data. Overall more frequent multiple constituent utterances indicate more extended turns. Below we will discuss some of the issues in this and the way that we addressed them, since, as the examples above indicate, the context of the interlocutor's behaviour will have a significant impact on the extent to which extended turns are appropriate.

The remaining contributor to the category is that of coordinated or subordinated clauses. In this we looked for evidence of the provision of more complex information and relations in the learners' English.

Example 65: Alex, week 27

Interviewer: *OK. If you had all of your time again. If you were beginning again, would you do anything differently from what you did do?*

Alex: **Yes.**

Interviewer: *What would you do?*

Alex: **Now is now … it … is now … every life is … just every you now … is [inaudible] you know, I know to very … little bit too [this] life you know, about this country.**

Interviewer: *Mhmm.*

Alex: **Before just when I came to here, everything is new for me, everything is difficult for me, you know. Now is very … [inaudible] interest to study to just … to liking more one … study. I like to very study too … aa … then I must have to do … too much exercise [inaudible] [to my student] homework like, you know to study [at] home. Someone come here and [and can] help me.**

Interviewer: *Mhmm.*

In Alex's data we see in the last turn particularly evidence of clauses being linked by coordinators and linkers such as 'then', and 'and'. There is also some evidence of subordination, for example, 'before just when I came to here, everything is new for me …'. These are both examples of extension. Another view of extension can be seen in the following, where the learners produce a series of extended utterances in an extended turn, but do not elaborate the grammatical relations within the utterances.

Example 66: Alex, week 27

Interviewer: *How did your teachers react if you were away and then came back or if you were late?*

Alex: **Before when she studying, one teacher, one teacher, she know this, I tell to my about my life, you know, I tell to my teacher. She know, she understand it, I want to you**

know [inaudible] you know. Tell me, just do this one, just don't do this one, don't worry.

The above example presents quite a lot of information. With the exception of the first utterance Alex separates the different ideas into separate utterances: 'she know', 'she understand it', 'I want to you know …'. In Example 66, the utterances are mainly not elaborated. The more frequent presence of utterances containing either or both coordination or subordination was taken as evidence of greater extension.

We also used the multiple constituent utterances as contexts to judge the degree of refinement. For example, it would have been possible for Fern to have said 'and after come Australia'. This we would have coded as a multiple constituent utterance with a missing subject. Similarly, 'and after I Australia' would have been coded as a multiple constituent utterance with a missing verb. As it was, the above example was coded as a multiple constituent utterance with both a subject and a verb. We did not code for other constituents since there were too many other influences on whether or not they could or should have been present in an utterance. In this analysis, the presence of both the subject and the verb was regarded as evidence of greater refinement; that is, a greater attempt by the speaker to provide information that was regarded as necessary in English (though note that both of the above incomplete utterances are quite understandable in the context).

Elaboration was a more complex matter to assess since it was more impressionistic, reflecting a perception of more grammatical material having been supplied than was 'strictly' needed to convey the information, but not requiring that that material be target-like. Some idea of this can be gained from the following:

Example 67: Nigel, week 20

Nigel: **Yeh. And handwriting very bad.**

Interviewer: *Is it?*

Nigel: **Yeh.**

Interviewer: *Why is your handwriting so bad?*

Nigel: **But before I'm not writing English, just Arabic and my country language, like this. Now I write English.**

Interviewer: *Right.*

Nigel: **Then English handwriting no good.**

Interviewer: *Aha. So you need …*

Nigel: **Much now better. Yeh, I need handwriting**

In this example, we see items such as 'I'm not writing' rather than possibly 'no write' and 'much now better' rather than possibly 'now good'. This provision of additional linguistic material is what we have endeavoured to capture in the notion of 'elaborating'.

The nature of the data was such that in addition to the material exemplified above, it included many minimal tokens (for example, yeh, no, okay, thank you). These minimal tokens are an essential part of conversation, but are essentially static linguistic resources and, therefore, cannot reflect growth in control of a linguistic repertoire. The very frequent use of these tokens distorts quantitative analyses since their sheer numbers dominate the calculations, disguising the obvious, but numerically less frequent changes in extension and elaboration that can be seen.

In order to obtain a more realistic picture of the extent of change in the kind of English these learners were potentially capable of producing, these minimal tokens were removed from the calculations below. This has the advantage of providing a view of English that has more potential for expansion such that high proportions of single constituent utterances indicate 'choices' made by the learners to limit their productions where it would have been possible for them to have said more and still be conversationally appropriate. Of course, some of these single constituent utterances are appropriate reflections of the conversational context and of options provided in the context by the interviewer (see Example 57 from Sue above). Our main point is that we have excluded from the data those instances of minimal utterances that (conversationally) have no potential for expansion.

By presenting the contrast between single constituent and multiple constituent utterances across the entire period of interviews, it is possible to control to some extent the inherent variability in the extent of production of English that we referred to in the introduction. Although the variation is not removed, the examination of a number of recordings provides a way of contextualising particular interviews and seeing whether the features of those specific interviews are, in fact, different from those of other interviews.

In this analysis, we adopt three approaches; first we examine the number of extended clauses that occurred in the interviews. These are the percentage of utterances made by the learner that were more than simple single word or minimal response clauses. This provides a measure of degree to which learners are extending their utterances beyond the minimal. Secondly, we examine the degree of refinement the learners are incorporating into their utterances by identifying how many of these extended clauses included both a subject and a verbal element. These are not necessarily accurately used, but they are present. Thirdly, we compare the learners' ability to extend with their ability to refine. This attempts to determine the different approaches learners take when using the language.

To reduce the complexity of the tables, the tables included in the text give percentages only of the features under discussion. However, because the nature of the data was so variable it is important to recognise that there were often substantial differences in length of the interview texts. For this reason, the full tables (including raw scores) are provided in Appendices 2–7.

Horn of Africa learners

Table 15 below gives the overall percentages of the number of extended clauses versus single word utterances for the Horn of Africa learners in each of the weeks in which they were recorded.

Table 15   Percentage of extended clauses used by Horn of Africa learners*

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Esther	29.17		56.86	40.38						
Elsie	43.90	66.93	81.82							
Zeinab	21.43			38.46	44.78		45.83			
Abe			65.52				56.95	53.85		
Nigel	36.36	44.44	58.57	61.02	47.06	80.25	62.92	42.86		
Fern	17.02	18.28		40.35	45.95	31.19	33.33	33.77		
Carrie				34.78	66.94					
Alex				50.00	85.71		82.05	85.42		
Harry				62.50	79.69	79.09	75.00			

*   A blank cell means that no data were collected from that learner at the time. Andrew was omitted from this analysis as he only completed two language elicitation interviews and one of these did not record because of a faulty tape.

As Table 15 shows, some learners joined the study late, others left 'earlier' and some were more regular than others in their participation. For most of these learners there is a steady, though relatively small, increase in their ability to incorporate extended clauses into their language, with five of the nine learners producing at least 50% of complex clauses in their interviews towards the end of the study. This can be seen most clearly in Elsie's, Zeinab's, Alex's and Harry's results, where the pattern is consistent, but also in the results for Nigel and Fern, subject to the note that for these learners there is greater overall variation and, therefore, also some reduction from the peaks of the middle weeks. There will never be a time when single constituent clauses disappear, since there will always be conversationally appropriate contexts for their use. Hence, the 'ideal' ratio is not 100%, even with the minimal tokens removed. The high degree of variability between the learners in the ratio of extended to single constituent utterances, nevertheless, does not disguise the fact that the learners either increase their overall proportion of extended utterances quite substantially or (as with the case of Nigel) are more variable because they start from a relatively high base and produce lots of English. No Horn of Africa learner decreased overall on this measure of extension from beginning to end of the recordings.

As a measure of refinement, we examined multi-constituent clauses for the presence of both a subject and a verbal element. These did not need to be correct or complete, but they were required to be present, and are used as an illustration of the developing refinement of the learners' language. These are shown in Table 16. The presence of subject and/or verb both supplies necessary information in the addition of phrases within a single clause (elaborating) and provides a means of constructing a sentence that is closer to what a monolingual might say under similar circumstances (refinement). This provides a reflection of the extent to which the learners have noticed the relevant features in the input and have begun to internalise those features so that they become part of the learner's interlanguage.

Table 16 reveals a high degree of variability in the extent of refinement. Esther increases her degree of refinement over the two terms of her attendance, as does Zeinab who attends over three terms. However, Elsie, who only attends for one term, does not show a similar increase, but remains at an overall higher level than Fern. Abe was absent for one term of the data collection period as he left the program to take up more career-oriented training elsewhere. However, he returned after one term once he realised that his language skills were not adequate and that the other training environment did not offer him the opportunities for and support in learning that he could get in the AMEP. The increase in his refinement

Table 16   Degree of refinement for learners from Horn of Africa[31]

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Esther	16.67		53.33	66.67						
Elsie	50.00	45.00	50.00							
Zeinab	100.00			50.00	52.63		67.86			
Abe			52.94				59.57	53.85		
Nigel	100.00	60.00	6.90	70.0	76.92	66.67	89.36	100.00		
Fern	28.57	35.71		26.19	17.24	16.98	22.73	12.50		
Carrie				66.67	9.68					
Alex				0.00	66.67		81.40	60.61		
Harry				68.42	44.44	70.91	62.50			

over this three-term period is marginal. Nigel, who attends for three terms, appears to maintain the improvement he demonstrates in his second term throughout. Fern, on the other hand, does not appear to improve. Carrie was present only for two sessions a few weeks apart, and Alex commenced work with the project later than some others, but appears to have rapidly focused on the production of refined utterances and to have remained stable in the proportions of refined utterances that he produces. Harry maintains a relatively steady pattern over two terms. This indicates that there is no single pattern of change. Learners do not consistently produce more extended utterances over time; neither do they necessarily refine their utterances more over time. However, as can be seen by the comparison with the data in Table 17 (page 162), those learners who are regarded by their teachers as having improved over time, are those who have an overall higher proportion of refinement than of elaboration (Esther, Zeinab and Nigel). The other learners, who appear to reveal no, or marginal, improvement have a higher degree of elaboration than of refinement (Elsie, Abe, Fern, Carrie, Alex and Harry). This indicates that the extent of participation in conversation as measured by the amount of grammatical encoding in an utterance is not a necessary predictor of improved accuracy. Conversations with such learners may be quite easy, but their manner of using the language does not necessarily lead to improvement in their control of the grammar.

Comparison of the learners' extended utterances, versus their more refined utterances, is given in Table 17. This is done on the basis of each term, rather

than each interview, in an attempt to reduce the level of variability that occurred between interviews. Calculations involved a comparison of the proportions of extended and refined utterances produced in each term.

Table 17   Extension versus refinement

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Esther	equal	+ extend		
Elsie	+ extend	+ extend		
Zeinab	+ refine	+ refine	+ refine	
Abe	+ extend		equal	+ refine
Nigel	+ refine	+ refine	+ refine	+ refine
Fern	+ refine	+ extend	+ extend	
Carrie		+ extend		
Alex		+ extend	+ extend	
Harry		+ extend	+ extend	

Table 17 shows that there is a much greater propensity for the learners to extend their utterances than there is for them to refine them. There is no consistent pattern of extending first and refining later (compare Abe and Fern) nor one of refining first and extending later. Thus, extension as documented in Table 15, does not automatically lead to refinement, and nor does the relationship appear to operate in the opposite direction. The learners appear to differentiate between a willingness to communicate, and attempts to refine the nature of that communication.

The Iraqi learners

Of the six Iraqi learners, two of the male learners (Kane and Ray) demonstrate the highest proportion of extended utterances from early on in the data collection process. Andrea, Sue and Ilia use extended utterances increasingly throughout the period of the study, and Linda appears to follow a similar path although there were only three data collection points for her. It is also noticeable that the English productions of both Kane and Ray are dominated by more elaborated structures, but that this kind of structure is much less frequently present in the majority of the productions of Andrea and Sue. Clearly, Ilia and Sue remain the least extended in what they produce, but towards the end of the period, Sue appears to have begun to extend more, but Ilia has not made any substantial

change – unless it is to reduce the degree of extension. If we compare the overall averages, Ilia averages 27.94, but Sue averages 31.70, so that she is marginally more extended overall than Ilia. Again, therefore, there is no single pattern for the group as a whole. The only unifying observation is that the general trend for extension is similar to that of the learners from Horn of Africa, either stable or upwards, presumably reflecting an increased willingness to communicate which, over time, will make increased demands on the kind of English that the learners will need to produce. Even those learners from Iraq who are most variable, reveal a generally upward trend over time. This signifies a general increase in the willingness to communicate – or at least the willingness to engage in extended communication. As with the learners from Horn of Africa, it remains to be seen whether this translates into consistently greater refinement over time and experience.

Table 18   Percentage of extended clauses used by Iraqi learners

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Kane	56.00		63.95		64.56		77.78		56.47	81.19
Ray	43.90		79.07		64.21		77.50	69.23		
Ilia	12.50	22.70	41.38	34.10		38.20	26.7	20.00		
Andrea	30.23	16.67	51.82	49.57	48.89	46.15	51.22	57.14		
Linda				36.49	31.65			50.00		
Sue				13.16	26.67	11.48	37.50	26.09	42.14	64.86

When we examine the measures for refinement for this group (Table 19, page 164), the most consistent pattern of overall increase is in Ray, with only the early peaking in week 8 interrupting a progressive increase in refinement. Kane remains fairly consistent across the whole period, after a relatively low beginning and Andrea also appears to demonstrate some improvement. While the figures appear to suggest that Sue also improves over the course of the study, in fact the raw scores here were so small that no conclusions can be drawn from this. This also applies to Sue's data. The overall level of refinement in the two cases of Sue and Ilia is deceptive since the number of extended clauses is comparatively small. Thus, the contrast between the figures for extension and the figures for refinement in the learners from Iraq show that the patterns do not move in the same direction. Whereas the general trend in extension is upward, there is evidence of

very substantial variation in refinement and, with strong cautions, even some evidence that the apparently more stable proportions of refinement could be trending marginally down.

Table 19   Degree of refinement for learners from Iraq

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Kane	68.18		51.43		66.67		33.33		54.65	58.65
Ray	50.0		83.33		57.89		59.46	79.25		
Ilia	100.00		60.0	55.56	8.33		43.75	80.00	0.00	
Andrea	9.09	0.00	22.92	30.30	16.67	36.00	72.2	40.00		
Linda				52.63	90.00			50.00		
Sue				0.00	0.00	66.67	66.67	100.00	65.12	54.55

Consistent with the findings for the Horn of Africa group, the data in Table 19 suggests that there is no simple connection between the way in which language is extended, and how it is refined. This is further exemplified in Table 20. Here we can see that while Kane and Ray show similar degrees of extension and refinement, this is not the case with the other four learners in this group. Ilia, Linda and Sue all have greater refinement in their language, but rely on simpler language, while Andrea uses more extended language, with less refinement.

Table 20   Extension versus refinement for Iraqi learners

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Kane	equal	equal	+ extend	+ extend
Ray	equal	equal	equal	
Ilia	+ refine	+ extend	equal	
Andrea	extend	+ extend	+ extend	
Linda		+ refine		
Sue		+ extend	+ refine	equal

As with the Horn of Africa group, the data again suggests no consistent relationship between extension and refinement, neither in the extent of these two activities nor in the sequencing. While there is a lesser presence of refinement in the Iraqi

learners than in the Horn of Africa learners, weeks where refinement dominates are neither consistently earlier nor consistently later in the learners' experiences (compare Ilia and Sue).

The Chinese learners

The Chinese were a group of older learners, all in the 45+ age group, who were enrolled in a bilingual class (see Chapter 9). The Chinese all attended very regularly, although Zara left before the end of the study to look after her grandchild. It is notable among this group that, with the overall pattern of extension, the proportion is relatively low throughout and appears not to increase over the course of the study. These learners were clearly the most elementary at the beginning of the study, however, and this fact is probably reflected in these measures.

In week 16 their teacher said:

Example 68: Teacher 4, week 16

Teacher 4:   Yes. And that's very different from the early weeks that she was in the class.

Interviewer: *In fact they all did. They all got up and moved around the class.*

Teacher 4:   So I must say they have done very well in this aspect of, like, being willing to change. When I first met them, most of them would just sit where they are and not move. And as we do the different activities in class, pair work and get them moving around the class, they are slowly getting the idea that it is a way to learn and learning doesn't just happen by sitting where you are all the time and repeating and learning by rote. It did take a long time before they realised that I must say, but I can see the change. Having said that, you know, I do find too that sometimes if I don't remind them, they sort of have a relapse, some of them.

Note that in relation to the patterns in Table 21 (page 166), although the proportion of complex utterances appears relatively low for Joe in the first session, in fact he only produced 29 utterances in total in this session (see Appendix 6, page 178), which means the data may not be representative. However, the data from the remaining sessions are more likely to reflect Joe's 'usual' style. In only two instances is the proportion of complex utterances over 50% (weeks 8 and 27)

and these are the only two instances of this pattern in the entire group. This contrasts markedly with the other groups, where only Zeinab, Fern, Sue and Ilia do not have at least one interview where the proportion of extended utterances is over 50%. It is noticeable that for all four Chinese learners, the overall trend tends downward. There are some rises in extension in the intervening weeks, but all of the final recordings show less extension than in the early recordings. This is not obviously the case in the other learner groups. Equally, the Chinese group contains no learners who reveal substantial growth in the refinement of their English over the time of the recordings (unlike, say, Sue).

Table 21   Percentage of extended clauses used by Chinese learners

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Joe	6.90	26.32	61.54	32.65	47.50	38.78	41.38	52.94	28.57	23.33
George	7.55	12.22	31.03	22.22	12.28	18.4	25.00	36.11	17.39	26.47
Zena	5.41	1.32	18.18	16.36	14.10	25.00	29.31	11.43	37.5	17.14
Zara	31.11	12.90	48.84	26.42	34.62	32.52	26.32			

Thus, although Table 21 presents the extension measures for the Chinese students, this is done more in the interests of consistency with the rest of the cohort, than for any insights it provides. These learners were less advanced than the Iraqi and Horn of Africa learners, and thus the percentages are calculated on very small numbers (see Appendix 6, page 178). In general, there is overall, less evidence of extended utterances in the data of the Chinese learners.

These Chinese learners are universally using less refined language, and much less language, than the other learners in the study and all show a similar pattern in the sense that their language is more refined than extended. Again, not very

Table 22   Degree of refinement for learners from China

	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Joe	0.00	46.15	63.64	27.27	41.67	30.30	55.56	62.5	66.67	20.00
George	0.00	10.00	55.56	87.50	71.43	40.91	50.00	85.71	33.33	0.00
Zena	0.00	0.00	75.00	33.33	40.00	27.27	23.53	33.33	0.00	18.18
Zara	21.43	41.67	61.11	75.00	22.22	35.84	33.33			

frequently (for example, Joe in weeks 8 and 23 through 32, George in weeks 8, 12, 16, 23 and 27 and Zena in week 8) can we find more than 50% of the utterances refined. Despite this overall low percentage compared to some of the percentages achieved by the other groups, the extent of refinement is still greater than the extent of extension.

Table 23   Extension versus refinement for Chinese learners

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Joe	equal	equal	+ refine	+ refine
George	equal	+ refine	+ refine	+ refine
Zena	equal	+ refine	+ refine	+ extend
Zara	+ refine	+ refine	equal	

The analysis in Table 23 provides further support for the arguments made above that for the Chinese group, refinement is, indeed, more in evidence than extension. There appears to be a proportionally much greater effort by these learners to refine their utterances than to extend them. This may suggest that the Chinese learners adopt similar approaches to their language learning in the sense that they focus more on refinement than on extension. This in itself may be related to their confidence in relation to language learning.

Discussion and conclusion

The limited number of case studies here means that it is not possible to make generalisations about either the groups or other factors such as gender. And the variability between the learners means that it is potentially dangerous to work with averages. Nevertheless, some features can be drawn out that appear to characterise the group as a whole. Firstly, all learners need both single constituent utterances and multiple constituent utterances. Secondly, extension is not the same as refinement, and one may predominate over the other in different learners. Thirdly, refinement is not the same as accuracy. Fourth, all learners are different. These observations indicate that we should be very cautious about attempting to draw simplistic interpretations.

Unlike studies such as those reported in Klein and Perdue (1992), we have not attempted here to describe the details of the mechanisms by which learners present information within utterances and texts. In the powerful arguments of Klein and Perdue (1992: 38ff), it is seen that learners draw on two distinct general mechanisms, a device of 'agent first' for action utterances (which is recognised

in sequences of a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase and optionally a second noun phrase or an alternative device for 'presentational' utterances in which the verb appears first followed by the name of the thing/entity 'appearing' in the discourse (see also Huebner, Carroll and Perdue 1992: 116ff). In part this was because the learners with whom we were working were much more restricted in their vocabulary than those in the ESF study. Our beginning learners were predominantly dependent on the scaffolding provided by their interlocutors and in many cases relied heavily on the interpreters to convey concepts such as those that were the focus of the ESL study. None of the learners in this study would have been familiar enough with the technical terms of their field of employment to use words such as 'wedge' (see Klein and Perdue 1992: 28).

Like the ESF study (Perdue 1993b: 258), we have found that second language learning is a complex and highly variable task. There is variable evidence for these learners as to whether they progress from what Perdue et al (1993a: 258) characterise as the very early stages to a basic variety, since some of the learners produce only minimal utterances. On the other hand, other learners move substantially beyond the pragmatically constrained basic variety of the ESF study into much more grammaticalised communication, as is evident in the excerpts we have cited. In doing this, they individually and to an extent also in response to group characteristics, respond to different imperatives in different ways.

The data suggest that there is a very important distinction between extension and refinement and that extension does not automatically lead to refinement. The learners are all perceived by their teachers and shown in the data presented here, to be producing increasingly extended English over time. While it is unlikely that much refinement will be able to occur if there is no extension, the presence of extension of itself does not result in increases in refinement. Consequently, there is much more variation in the extent to which refinement increases – indeed for some of the learners there appears to be little evidence of increases in refinement.

There is clearly a need for learners to be enabled to notice the features of refinement either on their own or with the assistance of teachers. Whether these learners are 'ready' to refine what they have begun to extend and elaborate is an issue that would require a separate investigation.

Beyond these broad differences that appear to hold for the cohort as a whole, there are also differences that appear to reflect either features specific to certain individuals or features particular to groups (or their circumstances). Some learners are simply more extended and/or more refined from the outset. For example, Kane and Ray are consistently more extended than Andrea; Esther is more extended than Fern. While there is a predominance of males in the more extended category, this is not universally the case. It is also worth noting that the differences between the males and the females are smaller with the Horn of Africa learners than they are with the Iraqi learners. It is much more difficult to discern gender-based differences among the Chinese learners, though there is a slight tendency for the Chinese males to display greater refinement than the Chinese females. It is interesting to observe that there is much more extension in the Iraqi and Horn of Africa learners than there is in the Chinese learners. We are not able to say whether this reflects background culture, age or their instructional experiences. It is unlikely to be a simple reflection of any single one of these factors.

Clearly, some learners are capable of, and do learn, to refine their English, but not all do this and not all do it in the same way. Nevertheless, as is explored in other chapters, many of the teachers perceived that their students had gained substantially in the area of confidence. The data in this chapter suggests that the teachers' perceptions may be more a consequence of the ways in which the learners have participated in the conversations than a consequence of the level of grammatical refinement in their English. More effective participation in conversations is not trivial; that the learners feel they can do this and are perceived as being able to do this indicates that substantial gains have been made during their time in the AMEP. However, the variability in the data suggests that the way those gains are utilised by different learners varies substantially. Accuracy would be an inappropriate way to capture the substantial changes that have occurred. Equally, however, to the extent that gains in extensions and elaborations are occurring independent of gains in refinement, there is a need to consider the nature of teaching interventions that will not compete with the willingness to communicate, but will enable the learners to notice features of their discourse that they will be able to beneficially attend to.

Notes

27   In all examples from student interviews, the interviewer comments are in italics, the students' comments are in bold where they speak in English, and in roman print where the interpreter speaks for them.

28   This indicates Ilia spoke in Arabic with the interpreter but it was not interpolated.

29   We note that for many of these learners, there were languages other than their notional

'first' language that they had already learned. We make no claim that English was the only language other than their first language that they had learned.

30   This particular example has a further special feature in that it is likely to be a formulaic chunk – learned as a single unit and routinely used in contexts where the learner wants to signal a lack of knowledge.

31   The initial 100% figure for Zeinab reflects a small number of examples.

Appendix 2

Horn of Africa learners' use of extended clauses*

Horn of Africa	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Esther										
Complex	7		29	21						
Total	24		51	52						
% age	29.17		56.86	40.38						
Elsie										
Complex	18	168	45							
Total	41	251	55							
% age	43.90	66.93	81.82							
Zeinab										
Complex	6			20	30		44			
Total	28			52	67		96			
% age	21.43			38.46	44.78		45.83			
Abe										
Complex			57				127	21		
Total			87				223	39		
% age			65.52				56.95	53.85		
Nigel										
Complex	8	8	41	36	24	126	56	6		
Total	22	18	70	59	51	157	89	14		
% age	36.36	44.44	58.57	61.02	47.06	80.25	62.92	42.86		
Fern										
Complex	8	17		46	34	63	29	26		
Total	47	93		114	74	202	87	77		
% age	17.02	18.28		40.35	45.95	31.19	33.33	33.77		
Carrie										
Complex				16	83					
Total				46	124					
% age				34.78	66.94					

Appendix 2 Continued

Horn of Africa	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Alex										
Complex				1	5		96	82		
Total				2	30		117	96		
% age				50.00	85.71		82.05	85.42		
Harry										
Complex				30	51	87	12			
Total				48	64	110	16			
% age				62.50	79.69	79.09	75.00			

* Blank cells indicate data was not collected in that week. This was due to a variety of factors – a temporary absence, the learner having left the program, or the fact that the learner did not become a participant until some time after the beginning of the project.

Appendix 3

Multi-constituent clauses as a measure of refinement for Horn of Africa learners

Horn of Africa	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Esther										
Total multi-constituent clauses	1		8	6						
Subject and verb present	6		15	9						
% comp	16.67		53.33	66.67						
Elsie										
Total multi-constituent clauses	6	36	8							
Subject and verb present	12	80	16							
% comp	50.00	45.00	50.00							
Zeinab										
Total multi-constituent clauses	2			5	10		19			
Subject and verb present	2			10	19		28			
% comp	100.0			50.00	52.63		67.86			
Abe										
Total multi-constituent clauses			18				56	7		
Subject and verb present			34				94	13		
% comp			52.94				59.57	53.85		

Appendix 3 Continued

Horn of Africa	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Nigel Total multi-constituent clauses	4	3	2	14	10	52	42	4		
Subject and verb present	4	5	29	20	13	78	47	4		
% comp	100.0	60.0	6.9	70.0	76.92	66.67	89.36	100.0		
Fern Total multi-constituent clauses	2	5		11	5	9	5	2		
Subject and verb present	7	14		42	29	53	22	16		
% comp	28.57	5.71		26.19	17.24	16.98	22.73	12.5		
Carrie Total multi-constituent clauses				10	6					
Subject and verb present				15	62					
% comp				66.67	9.68					
Alex Total multi-constituent clauses				0	18		35	20		
Subject and verb present				1	12		43	33		
% comp				0.00	66.67		81.40	60.61		
Harry Total multi-constituent clauses				13	16	39	5			
Subject and verb present				19	36	55	8			
% comp				68.42	44.44	70.91	62.50			

Appendix 4

Iraqi learners' use of extended clauses

Iraq	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Kane Complex	28		55		51		7		114	449
Total	50		86		79		9		255	553
% age	56.00		63.95		64.56		77.78		56.47	81.19
Ray Complex	18		34		61		93	63		
Total	41		43		95		120	91		
% age	43.90		79.07		64.21		77.50	69.23		
Ilia Complex	1	15	12	14		102	8	3		
Total	8	66	29	41		267	30	15		
% age	12.50	22.70	41.38	34.10		38.20	26.7	20.00		
Andrea Complex	26	1	57	57	22	42	20	36		
Total	86	6	110	115	45	91	41	63		
% age	30.23	16.67	51.82	49.57	48.89	46.15	51.22	57.14		
Linda Complex				27	25		21			
Total				74	79		42			
% age				36.49	31.65		50.00			
Sue Complex				5	8	7	6	6	59	24
Total				38	30	61	16	23	140	37
% age				13.16	26.67	11.48	37.50	26.09	42.14	64.86

Appendix 5

Multi-constituent clauses as a measure of refinement for Iraqi learners

Iraq	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Kane Total multi-constituent clauses	15		18		22		2		47	139
Subject and verb present	22		35		33		6		86	237
% comp	68.18		1.43		66.67		33.33		54.65	58.65
Ray Total multi-constituent clauses	7		25		11		22	42		
Subject and verb present	14		30		19		3	53		
% comp	50.0		83.33		57.89		59.46	79.25		
Ilia Total multi-constituent clauses	1	6	5	1		35	4	0		
Subject and verb present	1	10	9	12		80	5	2		
% comp	100.0	60.0	55.56	8.33		43.75	80.00	0.00		
Andrea Total multi-constituent clauses	2	0	11	10	2	9	13	4		
Subject and verb present	22	1	48	33	12	25	18	10		
% comp	9.09	0.00	22.92	30.30	16.67	36.00	72.2	40.00		

Appendix 5 Continued

Iraq	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Linda Total multi-constituent clauses				10	18			2		
Subject and verb present				19	20			4		
% comp				52.63	90.00			50.00		
Sue Total multi-constituent clauses				0	0	4	4	2	28	12
Subject and verb present				5	6	6	6	2	43	22
% comp				0.00	0.00	66.67	66.67	100.0	65.12	54.55

Appendix 6

Chinese learners' use of extended clauses

Chinese	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Joe										
Complex	2	15	16	16	19	38	12	18	8	7
Total utterances	29	57	26	49	40	98	29	34	28	30
% age	6.90	26.32	61.54	32.65	47.50	38.78	41.38	52.94	28.57	23.33
George										
Complex	4	11	9	8	7	23	8	13	4	9
Total utterances	53	90	29	36	57	125	32	36	23	54
% age	7.55	12.22	31.03	22.22	12.28	18.4	25.00	36.11	17.39	26.47
Zena										
Complex	2	1	6	9	11	12	17	4	3	12
Total utterances	37	76	33	55	78	48	58	35	8	70
% age	5.41	1.32	18.18	16.36	14.10	25.00	29.31	11.43	37.5	17.14
Zara										
Complex	14	12	21	14	18	40	20			
Total utterances	45	93	43	53	52	123	76			
% age	31.11	12.90	48.84	26.42	34.62	32.52	26.32			

Appendix 7

Multi-constituent clauses as a measure of refinement for Chinese learners

Chinese	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 12	Week 16	Week 20	Week 23	Week 27	Week 32	Week 35
Joe										
Total multi-constituent clauses	0	6	7	3	5	10	5	5	2	1
Subject and verb present	2	13	11	11	12	33	9	8	3	5
% comp	0.00	46.15	63.64	27.27	41.67	30.30	55.56	62.5	66.67	20.00
George										
Total multi-constituent clauses	0	1	5	7	5	9	4	6	1	0
Subject and verb present	4	10	9	8	7	22	8	7	3	8
% comp	0.00	10.00	55.56	87.50	71.43	40.91	50.00	85.71	33.33	0.00
Zena										
Total multi-constituent clauses	0	0	3	3	4	3	4	1	0	2
Subject and verb present	2	1	4	9	10	11	17	3	2	11
% comp	0.00	0.00	75.00	33.33	40.00	27.27	23.53	33.33	0.00	18.18
Zara										
Total multi-constituent clauses	3	5	11	9	4	11	4			
Subject and verb present	14	12	18	12	18	31	12			
% comp	21.43	41.67	61.11	75.00	22.22	35.84	33.33			

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Turning the kaleidoscope: Perceptions of learning and teaching in the AMEP

Lynda Yates and Alan Williams

As outlined in Chapter 1, the intention of the project was to investigate the experiences in the AMEP of learners from particular client groups who were relatively new to the AMEP, that is learners from Horn of Africa, Iraq and older Chinese learners. Previous longitudinal studies of adult language learners have tended to concentrate on a single learner (for example, Huebner 1983; Schmidt 1983), or have focused on linguistic development in the second language rather than on learner perceptions of their language learning experience (for example, Perdue 1993). More recent studies, such as those conducted by Norton (2000) in Canada, and Miller (2003) in Australia, have paid more attention to the social contexts of learning. Norton followed a group of female immigrants to Canada over the period of one year. Her study focused largely on issues of identity and investment in the learning of the dominant language, and did not investigate teachers' perceptions. Miller (2003) followed a small group of adolescent learners from a range of countries as they left the English language centre in Brisbane where they had studied since their arrival in Australia, and tackled the more challenging world of mainstream schooling. Again, however, the design of this study did not tackle in depth teachers' perceptions of what was happening in the classroom, or allow for an in-depth analysis of the learners' perceptions of their language learning experiences.

This study, therefore, provides a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which adult ESL learners and their teachers perceive their participation and involvement in a language learning program. In this chapter, we present some of the perceptions of the learners and their teachers of a range of issues. During the course of the project, the learners commented on many different aspects of their experience. Some of these were unique to the individual who talked about them, others seemed to be shared more widely among the learners. Here we have space only to report on a small fraction of the impressions reported to us. We thought it useful to start with an account of the learners' aims, and perceptions of their progress in learning English, as these are central to understanding the ways in

which they describe their language learning experiences, and all of the participants were asked to comment on these. We then selected for analysis the themes which emerged in the interviews as particularly important to the learners, or to the teachers, or to both. We therefore report below on learner and teacher perceptions of the place and importance of speaking skills; their perceptions of organisational issues such as lateness and absenteeism; the importance of content on Australian life in the language program; and their perceptions of cultures of teaching. As far as possible we have tried to use the words of the learners and their teachers, and where appropriate we have added our comments or observations. We have selected comments first on the basis that the speaker is making a point that arises a number of times in the data, and second that the comment is particularly clear, concise or illuminating.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the perceptions of both the learners and their teachers were collected through interviews and written records. Data were collected from three perspectives. Firstly, the learners were asked to comment on various aspects of their language learning experiences in interviews conducted with an interpreter. Secondly, the teachers were asked to comment about the learners in class, and to complete written reports on what work was covered, and how the learners performed on these tasks. Thirdly, the research team made a small number of observations of the learners in their classes.

The 20 learners followed in this study were very diverse, not only in age, language background and life circumstance, but also in educational experiences, even among those from the same national or ethnic group (see Chapter 5 for further information about the learners). All of the learners had at least four years of primary education in their own country, and some from China and the Horn of Africa also had secondary schooling. One, from China, had experience of study at a tertiary level. Some of the learners were multilingual, many were bilingual. Some had learned the dominant language of their country (including literacy) in their formal schooling and for use in their daily lives, retaining their mother tongue (in which they were often not literate) for a range of purposes in their minority communities. Others had learned a regional language at school, and/or in religious schools, and perhaps used a historic form of the language for religious purposes. A number of learners in the study also had experience of less formal language learning, often developing some capacity in the language of the third country in which they spent some time in transit between their country of origin and Australia. Thus all of the learners had prior educational experiences, which included in some cases formal instruction in another language, although

it is clear from what they said that their previous experiences of schooling were rather different from their experiences in the AMEP (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of issues related to schooling).

The teachers in the project were experienced, fully qualified general and specialist ESL teachers supported by a range of professional development activities, membership of professional associations, and professional development courses and would therefore be familiar with what Scollon and Scollon (2001) call the 'professional discourse' of ESL teachers. In some cases English was their second language.

In the next section, a brief sketch of the structure of the AMEP program, the curriculum and what teachers reported covering during the period of the study is given in order to provide some context for the discussion of the learners' perceptions which follows.

Perceptions of what was taught

The curriculum

The AMEP is concerned with the teaching of functional English to recently arrived immigrants to Australia and familiarising them with aspects of life in Australia. The curriculum framework used in the AMEP – the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) – takes a genre-based view of language as text, focuses on the social aspects of language use and aims to prepare learners for life within a predominantly English-speaking culture (NSW AMES 1998). Both oracy and literacy are seen as important in order to prepare learners for the workplace, further education and training, and life in general in modern technological societies. The curriculum is structured around the attainment of certain competencies specified at four different levels of certificate, and students are grouped according to what stage of the certificate framework they are studying. The learners in this study were primarily beginners, working at Level 1 of the CSWE. Most of the competencies in each certificate relate to spoken and written genres that are typical of life in the community in Australia, or entry to and participation in the workforce. A small number of competencies at each level also relate to participation in formal ESL classes. There is no prescribed syllabus or content, but teaching is expected to prepare students to attain the specified competencies for their level of study. Teachers usually assess the students in the competencies during class time, generally in more formal tasks, so the students are aware that they are being assessed.

The teachers' reports of what was done in classes

Data on what was covered in class each day were collected from the teachers, using the task record sheets, which were completed by all of the project teachers, who also provided program plans showing the content covered week by week together with the work sheets used in class (see Chapter 1 for a full account of data collection procedures). While these documents provided a description of what the teachers saw as the main features and focus of classroom work and tasks, they were, of course, not able to convey the full complexity of every class the learners participated in, and did not reveal the proportion of class time devoted to different tasks and activities. Nonetheless, they provided an overview of the content of classes that was seen as significant by the teachers, and provided some evidence of some of the routines followed in the classes.

Analyses of these data show that, in general, the teachers related English language to the general circumstances of the learners. While the linguistic focus and the types of tasks used varied, some activities focused on a macroskill, or language pertinent to a 'topic', such as 'food' or 'clothing'. At times the focus was on either real life texts such as a utilities bill, or other stories or texts written specifically for language classes. In some cases the focus was on grammatical structures (much less frequently on phonological features) in the context of exercises on work sheets. However, while the teachers appeared to focus primarily on language which helped learners to talk about themselves, they did this by contextualising situations the learners might be expected to encounter in their life in Australia (bearing in mind that all of the learners were working towards their formal CSWE assessments). Linguistically, students often began working with present tense verbs, before moving on to work with past tense verbs. Later in the course, ways of talking about the future were introduced in the context of a notable forthcoming event (such as a class excursion). Then there was ongoing revision of these items in the context of either new themes, such as when the students learned to talk about illnesses and ailments, or in on-going routines established by teachers, such as discussing the plans of learners for the weekend in classes at the end of the week, and in discussing what learners and their families did over the weekend in the classes at the beginning of the week.

Perceptions of learning needs and progress

While some of the older learners were content to learn how to do basic, everyday things in English, the younger ones saw proficiency in English as an essential precondition for 'work, studying, everything' (Elsie, week 8. See Chapters 1 and 5 for further information about participants in the study). As Ray notes in week 8:

Example 69: Ray, week 8[32]

| Interviewer: | *… what is it that you want to use English for?* |
| Ray: | I learn English because I'm going to spend the rest of my life here, so English is very important. |

Early in the project, some of the learners spoke of their lack of English as a disability, or akin to imprisonment. In week 8, Kane likened his inability to communicate in English to being in prison, while George expressed similar feelings of frustration in terms of disability:

Example 70: George, week 8

| George: | Since we came here, we had the same feeling {as the interviewer who had described her experience living in China}, like can't read, can't talk and can't say. It's like blind and deaf. After we arrived here in [NAME OF CITY], for six months we did not go out, because we were afraid of getting lost. |

Gaining proficiency in English was seen as the key, not only to achieving the practical tasks in life, but also to alleviating the sense of isolation many felt, as Zena reported in week 8:

Example 71: Zena, week 8

Interviewer:	*So what things do you want English for?*
Zena:	As for our age what I want to learn is for shopping, go to the bank, and asking for direction. Yeh, those daily situations.
Interviewer:	*So have, um, when now do you use English? Do you use English now outside the classroom?*
Zena:	No. Because we live in suburbs and even though we have Australian neighbours, as neighbours, but because I can't speak English I don't talk to them. So just basically stay at home.

From their first few weeks of classes, the learners recognised they were making progress in English. In some cases this was experienced as a sense of greater confidence and willingness to have a go at communicating in English and then to allow others to help, as Andrea reported in week 8:

Example 72: Andrea, week 8

Interviewer: {To interpreter} *Does Andrea think that her English has got better now, after classes?*

Andrea: It's not like before. I'm just finding myself I can manage much better than before. If it is incorrect, someone will help me to just correct things that I said.

Others reported progress from knowing absolutely nothing about English to being able to read signs on shops and trains and to exchange simple greetings (Zena, week 27), or greater facility in understanding what people were saying to him (Ray, week 26). For some of the older Chinese learners, participation in classes was an enjoyable end in itself, and provided a chance to socialise with others, and to overcome their sense of isolation, as George told us in week 8. Others told us of the pleasure they felt when what they learned in their AMEP class met a real communicative need outside the classroom. Thus, in week 10, Kane reported being able to notify his bank of his change of address without assistance. The practice filling in forms that he had had in class helped him to do this. In week 8, Elsie reported how she was able to sort out a practical problem at home after they had covered the relevant language and information in class:

Example 73: Elsie, week 8

Interviewer: *Can you give me some examples of something that you learned in class that you've been able to use outside the classroom?*

Elsie: Yes, I can give you an example. The other day, we didn't have hot water at home, so we had to call the water system. I called and tried to explain to them what was the problem, we didn't have hot water at home. The teacher before she had given us some, some things about when you've got any problem at home, you can say such and such, so it was very benefit for me to, to explain that what was going on at home. And there are lots of examples that I've learned here that I can use outside.

Interviewer: *So did that solve the problem? Did someone come to fix the water?*

Elsie: Yes.

As the project progressed and their proficiency in English grew, some of the participants were quite positive about their progress, as Nigel in week 27 reports:

Example 74: Nigel, week 27

Interviewer: *Can you think about going back to what it was like when you started learning at* [THIS CENTRE]? *What you knew in English then, and what you could do in English then and what you can do now? What can you do now that you couldn't do when you started?*

Nigel : **Different.** When I first came, I didn't know anything, even I couldn't say [XXXX] will you please give me water, whatever. But now I can hear people talking, I can write, I can write a little bit and read and it is totally different from when I came.

As the learners made progress through the program, they became increasingly aware of the limitations in their language. This meant that there was a tendency for them to become increasingly frustrated, despite their language gain, as they realised how much more they had to learn, and how rapidly their 510 hours was being used up, as shown in Example 75. Other learners reported these frustrations in terms of the skills and content they still had to master, as in Example 76 below:

Example 75: Fern, week 27

Interviewer: *Now, next week you finish. Think back to when you started at* [THESE ENGLISH CLASSES] *and now. Can you tell what the difference is? What can you do now that you couldn't do before?*

Fern: I have difficulties with English still.

Example 76: George, week 32

Interviewer: *What makes it hard or easy for you to learn English?*

George: I'd like to learn more useful things. For example, go to bank, use the bankcard, how to use it. I can't go shopping or take the bus, transport, or go to see a doctor. This kind of thing I'd like to learn, more useful thing and easier to learn. For example, I'm going to apply for, I'm already apply for citizenship and for the words for swear, swear, the words, I'd like to learn, but still not teaching us. And other things like to pay the fees, like electric fees, water rates.

Interviewer: *How to do that?*

George: Yeh, how to do that. I just didn't learn anything about that. I'd like to learn that.

Two areas which learners reported as important for them were: learning to speak in English, and learning more about Australian life. These are discussed in the following sections.

Perceptions of speaking skills

In this section, we investigate perceptions of the teaching and learning of speaking. We first explore what kind of speaking skills the learners felt were important, and then go on to examine teacher perceptions of speaking, before discussing the kinds of activities that the learners reported enjoying in their classes.

The importance of speaking

All of the learners followed seem to have a similar short-term goal as their first priority: to improve their speaking on everyday topics in English. This was the case for learners from all three groups, those who were single and those with families, those who planned to study and those whose goals related to the more effective running of their domestic life, regardless of previous study experience, level, age or amount of education. When we asked learners what they most wanted to be able to do, there was scarcely any hesitation in most cases. This was true for the two married women with children, as well as for Fern, a young married woman planning to study:

Example 77: Fern, week 1

Interviewer: *Now, when you're in the English class, are there things that you like doing, really like doing?*

Fern: To be able to speak.

It also applied to older Chinese males who have come to live with their children in Australia, as in Example 78 below, and to younger males anxious to join the world of work (see also section on perceptions of learning about Australia, page 207):

Example 78: Joe, week 12

Joe: Probably it's unlikely for me to find employment in the future but at least I want to be able to communicate with people when I go shopping, or other things for my every-day life.

As these examples illustrate, the learners were also clear about the kind of speaking they wanted to cover, that is, they wanted to be able to take part in everyday interactions with neighbours, with other people who take children to school, at the bank, post office, and in shops. Those who were keen to enter the workforce wanted to know how to talk to people when they applied for a job. The findings were very consistent: whatever their life circumstances, improving their speaking skills so that they could tackle 'direct usage' in negotiating the tasks confronting them appeared to be of paramount concern:

Example 79: Alex, week 12

Alex: This is the same thing which I have explained to you before. It's more being interested in the direct usage of the language in different daily life or exact activities. For example again, if someone is travelling wants looking for a job how could he or she come within that manner?

Interviewer: *OK.*

Alex: If someone is going to have a school or go to university how to approach such kind of things we wouldn't know, wouldn't have that one.

As discussed in the previous section, all of the learners reported that their ability to speak had improved over the time of the program, (see Example 74, page 189). And yet many of the learners continued to find speaking in English very challenging. Esther tried to express this feeling in English in week 8:

Example 80: Esther, week 8

Esther: Yep. Very sad, no good for me.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Esther: Yes, because, because I have been in Centrelink [employment agency] and the doctor, no speak good.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Esther: I need a, help.

               […]

Esther: Yeh, yeh because ah, no speak English good, no very, anything no.

In week 23, Zeinab reported that she still felt unable to express herself in speaking, and suggested that others felt a need for more time to be devoted to the development of speaking skills:

Example 81: Zeinab, week 23

Interviewer: *So you've got one month left. Is there anything that you really want to learn before you finish? Or do you think your English is fine now?*

Zeinab: I hope this month will be good benefit for me, I think. With the listening I'm quite well now, but the speaking that's the problem. I still can't express myself.

Interviewer: *Mm. So what's the problem with the speaking? You can't express yourself, you know what you want to say, but you can't say it? What, tell me a bit more about the speaking problem.*

Zeinab: I think there is not enough practice that I'm doing with the speaking and here we ask [?] because the teacher will ask, I have to answer what she is saying, er, what question she has to be answered. And er, at home we just speak Arabic with my husband, so there is not enough practice to do with the speaking. I think when someone gets a job probably that will be much better to practise the language more.

[…]

Interviewer: *Can you suggest anything that might have made things better? In the future, can you suggest, you know, teachers need to do this, this, this or this. […].*

Zeinab: I think if they add some more time for the dialogue and conversation, speaking.

Interviewer: *So you'd like more emphasis on speaking?*

Zeinab: Yes.

[…]

Interviewer: *Do you think other students would like more speaking too? Or is that just you, do you think?*

Zeinab: There are many of them.

Interviewer: *So have you talked about this with other students?*

Zeinab: We have.

In addressing this issue, it must be remembered that we were following learners who were at the very beginning of their stay in Australia. Most had had very little previous instruction, and few opportunities to speak in English. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the learners were keen to develop their speaking skills further, especially, as Burns and Joyce (1997: 58) point out, given that learners often equate learning a language with learning to speak it. Moreover, speakers feel frustrated when they cannot express themselves fully in a new language, and feel unable to operate as a full person. One of the learners, Ilia, would often use his L1 with the teacher, apparently from a need to save face and actually express himself, although he was aware that neither she, nor most of the class, could understand what he was saying (reported by Teacher 16 in week 8).

As Example 82 below, and Examples 69 and 70 (George and Ray, page 187) illustrate, the learners desperately wanted to be able to communicate with the people around them, and they felt their powerlessness most keenly when they were face-to-face with someone they could not understand, and to whom they could say very little. This compounded their feelings of social isolation and inadequacy:

Example 82: Andrea, week 20

Andrea: Language it's really difficult because when you go out and someone talks to you, it's like, sorry to say that just like I'm feel I'm idiot, because I can't, you know, can't say anything.

Learning to operate effectively in another language as an adult is an enormous undertaking, of course, and the learners may also have had unrealistic expectations about how rapidly their skills would develop over the period of their enrolment in the AMEP program.

Some of the learners who had studied English before arriving in Australia noted that, like many EFL learners worldwide, their previous English language instruction had emphasised reading and writing, often in traditional classrooms with less scope for interaction (see Chapter 4), and this contributed to their interest in developing speaking skills. Thus Fern from Horn of Africa reported (week 23) that, although she had learned English in school before she arrived in Australia, the focus of these studies had been on reading and writing, and not on listening and speaking.

It is also the case that many of the learners followed had not been successful in finding people outside the classroom with whom they could practise their speaking.

Two of the learners, Kane and Nigel, specifically mentioned how they would like a friend to talk English to, as this would help them improve their language.

For most of these learners, then, the classroom was the only place in which they could reliably expect to practise their speaking, and so they were particularly keen to take advantage of the opportunity to find out what to say and how to say it. Kane was consistently clear about this. For example, in response to a question in week 8 about the applicability of his lessons to his life outside the classroom, he replied that he did not use English:

Example 83: Kane, week 8

Interviewer: *OK. Great. Can you give me an example of something that you've learned in class that you've used outside of class?*

Kane: I never talk outside the class.

In week 23 he complained that he still did not have the opportunity to speak much outside the classroom since Australian people did not want to stop and talk to him as they have their own lives. He comments in week 31 that this lack of interaction in English with people outside the classroom was holding back his language development. This lack of opportunity to practise outside the classroom was also noted by several other learners (for example, Alex, week 12, and Sue, week 31). Similar restricted opportunities for communication in English outside the classroom have also been reported in Norton (2000) and Miller (2003). Moreover, even when they managed to find someone with whom to speak English, their experiences were not always successful. Joe, in week 12, reported regretfully how, after he had tried speaking in English with his young granddaughter, she had refused to continue, saying that his English was 'too bad' and that she did not like listening to it!

The learners' comments on the learning of speaking indicated that their lack of proficiency in speaking skills frustrated them, and they felt that they needed more opportunity to practise these skills in the class as they did not have many opportunities outside the classroom. Their teachers, however, were concerned to present them with a balanced program which also included a strong focus on literacy because they felt this to be an area of weakness for the learners, as we shall see in the following section.

Focus of teachers

There was evidence from several of our interviews with the teachers that they often perceived the learners' literacy skills to be less well developed, and there-fore more in need of attention, than their spoken skills. Writing and spelling were seen to be Ray and Kane's 'weakest points' (reported by Teacher 1 when interviewed in week 8), while reading and writing were seen as the major issue for Andrea (Teacher 13, week 16) and areas in which there had been generally less progress for Andrew, Abe and Nigel (Teacher 7, week 8).

All of the learners came from other script backgrounds and many had had little schooling in their own country. This meant that they were unfamiliar with Roman script and many of them were slow in developing their reading and writing skills in English. This seemed to have been constructed as a 'literacy problem' by the teachers. Since both written and spoken competencies must be passed to achieve a CSWE certificate, the teachers may, therefore, have focused particularly on literacy skills in English to enable the learners to successfully complete the written competencies and thus to progress to the next level. Some support for this view comes from the examination of the teachers' workplans and diaries, which suggest that what teachers identified as speaking activities were sometimes activities that involved talking about a written text or a work sheet, rather than working on the types of speaking the learners may be involved in outside the classroom.

Thus, while many of the teachers were aware that their learners particularly enjoyed the speaking activities in class (Teacher 4 in week 8, and both Teacher 7 and Teacher 15 during their individual interviews in week 16 commented on this), they may nevertheless have focused more on literacy skills to redress what they saw as an imbalance in the learners' skills. Teacher 9 articulated this mismatch in priorities, suggesting that while many learners would choose to focus on oracy, their teachers often felt that they really needed more help with their literacy:

Example 84: Teacher 9, week 27

Teacher 9: Yeh. And often the things that you think they should go to, like the literacy electives. They don't think that's what they need. They think they need …

(tape turned over)

Interviewer: *Can you just say that again? Their oracy's their strongest?*

Teacher 9: Yeh. Their oracy's their strongest skill, where the teacher's realised that their literacy is their weakest skill and tried to direct them to the literacy electives and they think they need more speaking.

The teachers were concerned to maintain progress both in students' oracy and their literacy skills to provide a sound basis on which to base their language development. Teacher 3 explicitly commented on the frustration she saw in Harry because his literacy skills were not keeping up with his spoken skills:

Example 85: Teacher 3 about Harry, week 23

Teacher 3:   As well. Harry can communicate quite a lot, but his accuracy's …

Interviewer: *Variable*.

Teacher 3:   Exactly. It's like Harry's approximating … he's picking up a lot of stuff from the TV, I think and from around him and he's producing a very sort of free flow kind of language. […]. I'm not sure if he's going to be able to be moved to the next level because of his writing. […]. But I have a feeling that as he moves along, he may find himself getting more frustrated. This is a common pattern. I've got a few other Africans in the class. Firstly, his attendance is much better than some of them. He's very consistent. I would think that he's going to start to feel frustrated as he moves along because his reading skills are not really that developed. They need more development. But whether that's a priority for him, I'm not sure.

Perhaps this longer term view underpinned a focus on literacy which was not shared by all of the learners, whose shorter term need to communicate felt, at times at least, more urgent.

The speaking activities that learners like

As we shall see below, the learners appreciated clear models, plenty of opportunity to listen to, understand, repeat and practise these, together with the opportunity for regular feedback on their efforts. Several (for example, Linda, week 12 and Andrea, week 23) commented on the importance of clear models and the usefulness of having the time to repeat and practise new items. The notion of repetition as a device for helping them to remember and learn language, attracted particular comment, as the following extracts from Elsie and Esther illustrate:

Example 86: Elsie, week 8

Elsie: Here are some suggestions. One of those is like the teacher when she teaches us to repeat the thing that she has said

before. This repetition is I think important for us, especially when we are new to the language and in the country. So repetition I think it is important, she says.

Example 87: Esther, week 8

Interviewer: *When you say 'repetition' do you mean doing the same things again and again or do you mean repeating the pronunciation?*

Esther: It's for everything, any repetition for everything is important, she says. I think when it is slow for us, just slowly, slowly, slowly, we find it much easier to say it after her, or after him. So it's for the pronunciation and for another thing, the exercises like we are doing, this exercise or this point, when she repeats it, and we say it after her, the pronunciation will improve I think. I believe the repetition thing is good for everyone because when someone repeats something for you, or for anyone, he will get benefit from that. He will say it again and again, he will benefit.

Some of the learners commented that they needed a lot of practice. Ray (week 27) elaborated on this, explaining that although he liked working in groups, he also felt the need to have input and guidance from someone who was more expert than the members of the group. He liked the way the teacher divided them into groups, but lamented that 'sometimes if I don't know a word the other one he know what it means and help me, we help each other, but still we are not in very good level of English. Which mean, we can do much better'.

Many learners also found that the practice they had speaking with people other than the teacher was very useful. Some found this opportunity on excursions, others appreciated conversations with discussion groups held outside class time or the teacher's aides who came into the classroom, as in Example 88 below, while others (for example, Esther and Alex, week 8) commented favourably on the benefit they gained from small group conversation meetings that were held outside of class time in some centres.

Example 88: Elsie, week 1

Elsie: one bus. I went to [NAME OF SUBURB]. I walked on the river and ladies talking with walk together to three teacher and two class, is good, and asking what's your name, how are you.

Both learners and teachers also commented on the opportunities for speaking offered by classroom interaction. As we shall see in the following sections, however, while the teachers seemed to set great store by the way learners spoke in class discussion, off-task social interactions, and other voluntary spoken contributions to classroom activities, these more spontaneous aspects of spoken performance seemed to be a little challenging for some of the learners.

Perceptions of classroom interaction

The importance of classroom interaction

The data suggest that the teachers may have particularly valued the ability to participate in spontaneous ways in the class as a sign of engagement, and they generally talked positively of learners who offered classroom contributions freely. One reason for this might be that classroom interaction displays aspects of a learner's development in speaking which are not captured in the CSWE competencies, such as learners' confidence and their willingness and ability to converse and engage. Thus, when asked specifically about the learners' speaking skills, several of the teachers remarked on the learner's confidence to contribute to class discussions, and ability to respond to social questions posed by the teacher, as an indication of progress. That is, it seemed that their ability to engage in these aspects of classroom interaction was being used as a measure of progress. For example, in week 23, Teacher 13 describes Andrea's progress in terms of 'contributing more without being asked', and took this as a sign of growing confidence. Similarly, Teacher 1 commented in week 8, that Ray's strong point in English was his 'ability to converse and engage', the fact that 'he likes to talk'.

Thus active participation in interaction with the teacher and others was seen as important for the development of communicative skills. Teacher 7 articulated what she saw as the ability to 'have a go' at speaking out in class as central to communicative language teaching. That is, she seemed to feel that learners must be able to volunteer contributions, and suggested that the ability to self-correct may mark a stage in their development as learners:

Example 89: Teacher 7, week 8

Teacher 7:   No. And I think it's this unwillingness to have a go, whereas Z's got that willingness to have a go. She doesn't mind if she's wrong and you correct her and she'll have another go. And she's started to self-correct.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Teacher 7:   Whereas the others don't self-correct yet. That's almost a stage in their learning

[…]

And I think in a communicative classroom, that's what you've got to be able to do and maybe our teaching style doesn't suit that, I don't know, whether that type of learning. But if you want to encourage them to be able to speak and communicate then, they can't sit back.

In Example 90, Teacher 1 described Sue's progress in speaking in terms of how she answered incidental questions in the course of the lesson, questions about her health and so on. Thus Teacher 1 seemed to assess Sue's speaking ability on the basis of her ability to respond to social talk outside the topic of the lesson:

Example 90: Teacher 1 about Sue, week 16

Interviewer: *And what about her speaking?*

Teacher 1:   No. She doesn't offer anything voluntarily. For example, she'll never say to me 'teacher tomorrow sick' or 'yesterday sick'.[33] She's been away a couple of days, she's been sick.

And the teacher continued to describe the development of Sue's spoken skills in terms of her ability to respond to or make spontaneous comments in class. Yet when the interviewer specifically asked about Sue's performance on more structured speaking activities, Teacher 1 replied that she can perform these quite well:

Example 91: Teacher 1 about Sue, week 16

Interviewer: *But if they do speaking activity, how will Sue's speaking be then?*

Teacher 1:   That's OK. Yes. If it's something structured, Sue'll participate and that's no problem.

This suggests that Sue was more reticent about certain kinds of more spontaneous speaking in the classroom, but could participate successfully on more scaffolded tasks. Similarly, asked to comment on Esther's progress, Teacher 7 referred primarily to the way Esther made voluntary contributions or answered questions in class, when describing her spoken skills in English, and concluded that her speaking was disappointing:

Example 92: Teacher 7 about Esther, week 8

Teacher 7:   But she's very quiet in class. She doesn't tend to offer information. She will answer if you ask her directly, she will try as best she can to answer but she doesn't tend to.

Interviewer: *Doesn't volunteer.*

Teacher 7:   No and considering she's 1^{34} in speaking and listening and most of the others are zero or zero plus, I would have hoped that she would have been able to contribute more, but she just tended not to. And even in a group, she'd sort of, contribute a little bit, but it was quietly and she'd have to be prodded by other people.

However, it was clear from the interviews that Esther was, in fact, very keen to be able to speak more effectively, but found it difficult to contribute to class spontaneously and in front of the class. That is, although Esther may not have contributed spontaneously to classroom interaction, this did not mean that she did not wish to practise her speaking. Fern, another of the learners considered to be 'quiet' in class, explained why she did not speak out much in class:

Example 93: Fern, week 16

Fern: Yeh, it's only when the teacher asks a question, asks me a question, and I'm about to answer, I really get scared […] And when I, if I have a question I can't because I'm scared of asking. […] I think it's in my nature. Even if she's next to me, I'll be scared to ask.

Yet, like Esther, she was clear that speaking was really important for her:

Example 94: Fern, week 16

Interviewer: *Now, when you're in the English class, are there things that you like doing, really like doing?*

Fern: To be able to speak.

Fern's enthusiasm for speaking was not clear to either of her teachers,^{35} however, Because of Fern's timidity in classes, they had formed the impression that she did not really like speaking work, but preferred to concentrate on written exercises:

Example 95: Teacher 14 about Fern, week 23

Interviewer: *What sort of things does she like doing, do you think? What does she prefer doing?*

Teacher 14:   I think Fern likes the writing.

Example 96: Teacher 7 about Fern, week 23

Teacher 7:   They'd [Fern and others] be quite happy to sit and open the book and do exercises. I think that probably is what they are used to, that's what they feel more comfortable doing. They don't particularly like oral type things. No they don't seem to. It's very hard to get Fern to say very much.

It is clear from the data, then, that teachers attached importance to the ability to contribute to classroom interaction, and yet some learners may have found this type of spontaneous contribution to class talk rather daunting, particularly in the early weeks of their study. This meant that they were perceived as 'quiet' and not interested in speaking. In the following section we explore some of the reasons behind this reluctance, and some of the comments by learners and teachers on how classroom talk can be managed explicitly in a bid to increase learner comfort and learning.

Managing classroom interaction

There are many reasons why a person may be reluctant to speak out freely in class, and some of these may become less important as learners become more experienced in the program and with life in Australia. Learners may be reluctant to speak out because they lack confidence generally, or respect cultural or educational norms which discourage this kind of self-expression or apparent self-promotion (see Chapter 4, and Burns and Joyce 1997: 134). For example, younger learners may feel uncomfortable speaking out in front of older learners who they think should have first right of reply, or women may be unused to speaking out in class in front of males. In this study, several of the female learners were described by their teachers as 'quiet' and seemed to be reluctant to speak out in class (see Chapter 5), but this was also true of some of the males, for example Abe, a younger male:

Example 97: Teacher 7, talking about Abe, week 8

Teacher 7:   … Whereas Abe's far more reticent. You virtually have to milk the information from him, lots and lots of verbal prompts and also hand gestures, things like that, in order to make him, to explain something to him.

This reluctance to participate spontaneously did not mean that the learners did not wish to actively engage in their learning. Even those who appeared to their

teachers as 'quiet' saw the importance of actively participating in the class, as Elsie underlines:

Example 98: Elsie, week 1

Elsie: […] You know if the students are not participating in the class it's like a dead class. There is nothing in there to learn. So we have to participate I think.

Of course, personality plays an important role in how comfortable a learner feels participating in classroom talk, and the teachers realised this. In the first week of the project, Teacher 11 noted Elsie's apparent reluctance to talk to others in her class and put this down to personality, and Teacher 9 in week 27 similarly ascribed Zeinab's reluctance to volunteer answers in class to the fact that she was 'not the sort', and offers the truism that 'some students will, some students won't'.

From the interviews with these learners it was clear that there were ways in which the teachers could manage classroom participation and seating arrangements, which might have encouraged them to speak out in front of the class, and have more speaking practice in English. These included closer regulation of the ways in which people made their contributions to classroom talk, and to the deliberate organisation of seating so that English could be used as a lingua franca in small group interactions.

Several of the teachers reported noticing that some students tended to dominate in the classroom. Teacher 6 noted the tendency for some groups to be more out-spoken and that the rest of the class appeared to collude in this:

Example 99: Teacher 10, week 35

Teacher 6:   A lot of the Iraqi students are to some extent, yes, some of the males there seem to be very outspoken. A little bit loud when they speak, like you hear them when they speak and they're louder than the women, usually. And they're not afraid, they will readily speak across the room, you know, like they're sitting in one, at one end of the room, and they want to say something to someone right at the other end, they're not going to hesitate a minute to do it. They just do it. And sometimes I feel that the women, sort of, look up to them and think they're wonderful. That's this little group that I've got.

Similarly, Teacher 13 also noted that more confident and 'louder' learners tended to dominate in her classroom, and noted that this was not helpful:

Example 100: Teacher 13 about Andrea, week 16

Interviewer: *OK, wh what about speaking?*

Teacher 13:   Look, often I have to ask Andrea to to vol … not to vol … I have to ask her to respond to something I've asked because probably as you saw this morning we've got a few, you know, who are a bit higher level, and who tend to dominate, mm, if I ask general questions, so, if I want specific people to an … this goes for the other sort of quieter students as well, mm, I have to ask her directly. And often she'll say 'I don't know', mm but yeh she doesn't really volunteer off her own bat, you know. Mm.

Interviewer: *But why do you think that is?*

Teacher 13:   I don't know. I, I think, it might just be er a confidence thing {for Andrea}, because there are other students in the class who are quite loud and who are mm whose English, spoken English, is a lot better, mm, but they're moving on, you know, to the next level, mm, yeh, it just might be that.

The learners had also noticed this. Sue, for example, reported to us in the interview in week 35 that she did not like it when other students called out the answers or always took the floor, as she, and many of the other students in the class, found this confusing and annoying.

One of the interpreters, Eva, reported on the basis of her experience interpreting with members of the community that, particularly those learners with lower levels of education were often initially lacking in confidence and therefore needed to be able to speak in a well-regulated classroom environment.

Example 101: Project Interpreter Eva, week 35

Eva: But even when they come, when they arrive to new country, they are not confident to like, practise their English because their accent because they think themselves maybe they not doing very well. They embarrassed, you know, to speak to talk to anyone in English. But when they come to the English classes, it's really different in

some way like, because the teaching in [home country] it's different than here. […] But the people with a little English no, honestly no, because I found that in the community they're not very confident to come and teach more, because what's happening at the classroom, like if the teacher start talking to them and then somebody laugh, I believe later they find 'Oh no. I'm not going to continue these classes'. […] But after five years if you come and meet this person, he changes a lot, you know. Even if somebody laugh, he don't care. But for newly arrived, it's really big drama. It's really big drama. That's what I understand from the community sometimes. They say 'There is lots of talking in the class', you know. 'That make me, I can't concentrate.'

Thus quiet, less confident members of the class can be disadvantaged in an environment where the confident can participate too enthusiastically. However, as illustrated in Example 102, there is some evidence in the comments made by teachers that they were loath to stem the flow of talk when learners talked enthusiastically in the class. Here, Teacher 6 reported being reluctant to control such ebullient contributions because she saw these as positive signs of commitment to learning:

Example 102: Teacher 6 about Sue, week 35

Teacher 6: It's not Sue alone, like I've got a whole group of Turkish women, you know, and they sometimes like today we had a talking class, and they seemed to be really exasperated, you know, with people being so lively and noisy and they indicated to me 'I can't think'. So I had to stop the class and I had to say it again. But it's extremely hard to, to keep them quiet, you know, like I don't want to take the energy out of that class. It's wonderful overall. They are really contributing and most of them are really involved but because they are so involved they are often very, very noisy. And talk to each other heaps in their own language and often don't realise what we are doing, it's practice and they are a very argumentative lot.

Our data suggest, however, that the quieter learners would have benefited from some overt teacher regulation of how class members participated in the classroom.

Another issue which arose in relation to the overt regulation of how learners participate in classroom activities was the benefit of sitting next to learners from other language backgrounds. Although several of the learners followed in this study noted the usefulness of being able to ask questions about vocabulary and other items when they sat with others from the same language background, they also commented very favourably on the opportunity that sitting with speakers of other languages offered for them to practise their English.

Example 103: Esther, week 8

Interviewer: *So you'd prefer that, to being in a group of people from your own country?*

Esther: It's better for sure because if that group was just from our country we'd speak Arabic. We won't use our English at all.

Example 104: Nigel, week 16

Nigel: Yeh. I want to sit where there is a vacancy or an empty chair. I like this because I want to exercise my English language with different people.

However, the teachers indicated that learners would not necessarily move themselves deliberately in order to make sure that they were sitting with learners from other backgrounds. This notwithstanding, the teachers themselves reported a reluctance to deliberately move learners from their places. As Teacher 10 explained, she did not want to force the issue 'because at the same time it's important for them to feel secure in that class' (Teacher 10, week 35). Our findings suggest, however, that the learners would generally respond well to the opportunity to use English more frequently.

Indeed, pairs and small groups seemed to provide a safe and supportive environment in which to work. One teacher, who did deliberately regulate speaking activities, reported that Fern, who was one of the learners who felt timid about speaking out in class, responded well to pair work and spoke more freely to the volunteer tutor in the class:

Example 105: Teacher 14 about Fern, week 23

Teacher 14: But she certainly joins in, in pair work.

Interviewer: *Does she volunteer answers?*

Teacher 14: Well, I don't actually use that system much because people, there's some very assertive people, so I usually go round

and ask everybody and insist that everybody has a turn, and that if it's Fern's turn, it's her turn. And she certainly does answer.

Interviewer: *Right.*

Teacher 14:   And when I put, one of the things I do with pair work is I usually mix everybody up each time by giving them a number and they have to go and find their partner and Fern certainly joins in then, and the same with, when we do group work, she joins in. And I particularly watched the other day when I had the volunteer tutors for her, and she does, she's quiet but she does speak. I mean if everybody else was speaking, she wouldn't, she wouldn't assert herself, but if she's asked, she has something to say.

[…]

Teacher 14:   Well she certainly does her group work and when I, I mix them all up, she certainly does that pair work properly. And she, I specially noted that she talks with the volunteer tutors when, say there's one tutor and three people, she has, she, I don't know whether they ask her or whether she initiates, but she certainly talks at length with them.

Fern herself reported that she liked this more private opportunity to practise:

Example 106: Fern, week 1

Interviewer: *Sometimes the teacher might tell you things that help you remember, or help you read better, or help you write better.*

Fern: In the classroom, the teacher asks us to ask one another, sitting close together, friends, she asks us to ask questions, to be able to speak to one another. I like that very much.

Thus both learners and teachers seemed to recognise that classroom arrangements can help learning to be more effective, but there also seemd to be some reluctance on both sides to interfere too much with the status quo. Learners may not have wanted to volunteer to leave their zones of comfort, and teachers may have been wary of challenging learners too much or appearing to treat them like children in school. The teachers' expectations of appropriate patterns of interaction in the classroom reflected their own ethos, nurtured in the culture of the Australian education system. As learners moved through the AMEP, their

understanding of these educational and cultural expectations increased, and this is in part due to the inclusion in the curriculum of overt teaching about life in Australia. We now turn to a consideration of the learners' perceptions about learning about life in Australia.

Perceptions of learning about life in Australia

In this section we will consider the learners' attitudes to learning about how things worked in Australia through a brief discussion of what they said about learning to negotiate regular tasks which involved Australian 'systems' (for example, banking, hospitals etc), issues to do with employment, the use of computers and excursions.

One clear finding which emerged from the interviews with the learners is that they were keen to find out more about how 'the system' worked in Australia. Thus, for example, Ilia told us how valuable he found learning about how to negotiate daily tasks such as shopping, and liaising with professionals in his children's school and in the hospital (week 35). However, some learners felt that they had not had enough of this kind of information, as we saw in the extract from the interview with George in week 32 (see Example 76, page 189), and as he reinforces again in week 35:

Example 107: George, week 35

George: Well for us, the main thing is daily encounters, for example, going to a bank, going to a post office and go to hospital. And we asked our teacher to teach us how do we handle those situations. Up til now, the teacher hasn't taught us anything. It might be difficult for the teacher to teach, but we really want to learn those things. For us, the main thing is dealing with daily life, for example, bills, gas, electricity, water bills. We not only come here and study here, we also go to north-east area, there's a teacher, a teacher her, who teaches us about policies, about bills, all those things. And for us, grammar is not a necessary thing to learn. Actually now I still don't understand about past tense, future tense. What we need is how to deal with daily matters.

This raises a dilemma for teachers whose role is primarily to teach language. With a limited number of hours available, it is important that they maintain this focus. For the learners, however, learning language is only one dimension of all

that they want, and need, to learn about. This means that learner perceptions may reflect their view that a more systematic approach to the introduction of practical information could be taken. One way in which the AMEP addresses these sorts of issues is through the use of computers in the classroom for a range of activities. This may include some specific teaching of computer skills. This received a mixed reaction from the learners. Many of the younger learners appreciated the opportunities to learn about, and with, computers. For example, in week 8, Nigel felt that computers helped him learn to spell and that the use of the Internet and email helped his reading and writing.

However, some of the older learners, such as Linda and Andrea, were less enthusiastic about computers than other aspects of their language program. Kane, for example, said that he could not understand what was happening in the two computer sessions a week he had as part of his program, and was not motivated to learn:

> **Example 108: Kane, week 16**
>
> Interviewer: *And what about computer classes. Are they useful for you?*
>
> Kane: They are teaching us, but. They are teaching us the computers, but I'm not getting the benefits out of it.
>
> Interviewer: *Mhmm.*
>
> Kane: I'm over 50. I'm old. I'm it's a bit hard for me to be a quick learner.

Another aspect of Australian life which was of great interest to those learners planning to enter the workforce was information about work and workplaces. The younger male learners, in particular, were very keen to move into vocationally oriented study. For some of the young men from Horn of Africa, however, this desire seemed so strong that they did not always see learning English as a priority, or see how it might be a prerequisite or preparation for further study.

Andrew for example, seemed not see the relevance of the AMEP classes for the development of his occupational skills. In week 8 his teacher expressed concern about his attendance at English classes and reported that he seemed preoccupied with how he could get back into his previous occupation of goldsmith in Australia. Indeed, he never returned for a second term in the AMEP, despite having only attended a few beginner level classes. Similarly, Abe, another young male from Eritrea, left the AMEP after his first term to study a course in motor

mechanics in TAFE. However, he returned to the AMEP after almost a term when he saw that he was not able to keep up with these studies, although he continued to report to us that what he really needed to be doing was studying mechanics. An arrangement was made to enable him to attend one day a week of a mechanics course at a TAFE[36] College, instead of his AMEP class. In contrast, Abe's younger brother, Nigel (week 8), was aware that he needed to learn English first in order to reach his goal of studying nursing, and recognised that this had to be his first priority, before going on to do further study.

Such cases illustrate the strength of the desire to reach vocational goals, and suggest that the connections between learners' study of English and their vocational studies may not always be clear or realistic. While the learners were keen and enthusiastic to move on to study that focuses explicitly on vocational content, rather than language, they were not always aware of how critical their linguistic knowledge would be for successful participation in such study. Of course, in reality, much more than just language skill was taught. One way in which there was an attempt to give students an awareness of the broader community was through excursions, and these seemed to be a popular way of introducing aspects of Australian life into AMEP programs.

During the period of the study, a number of learners were taken on excursions to see notable sites or parts of [NAME OF CITY]. For example, in week 4, Nigel and his class spent a day travelling by boat on the river from the city to a bayside suburb, and then travelling by ferry to another suburb on the other side of the bay. He was very animated in talking to us about this trip, and in week 12 he revealed that he had taken his family back to the same places during the holidays. Other learners also reported that such excursions helped them to remember the language they had encountered on the trip as well as offering them the chance to talk to other people. This seemed to be true even for those from teaching and learning cultures which differed considerably from that found in the AMEP, and it is to this issue of match and mismatch in learning cultures that we now turn.

Perceptions of the teaching and learning culture in the AMEP

Many learners in the AMEP have experienced schooling in education systems that are quite different from those in which AMEP teachers have trained and worked. As we saw in Chapter 4, adult learners come to their English language studies with expectations based on their previous educational experiences as to

what constitutes effective learning and teaching, and how classes should be run, and these may not always coincide with those of the teachers.

Although the learner-participants had come to Australia with different attitudes to education and experiences of study, it was clear that they liked much of what they found in their English classes. Ray, for example, said in week 16 that he liked the fact that talking was allowed in class so that other learners could help him out when he needed it, and Sue (week 16) told us how much she appreciated the more autonomous approaches to study that she was experiencing in the AMEP, such as the opportunity to study by herself in the library.

However, there was also evidence that in some cases the learners were a little bewildered by the unfamiliar culture of learning in the AMEP. One of the older Chinese learners, for example, who had probably experienced a more predictable lesson format in China (see Chapter 4), had difficulty in perceiving the structure in her classes and felt the need for a more obvious plan:

Example 109: Zena, week 8

Interviewer: *OK. What sort of things have you been doing in class? What sort of things have you been learning?*

Zena: In the class it seems there's no text, kind of education, with sequence or plan. It's like, if there's someone sick, they're not coming to the class, then the teacher starts talking about someone's sick, not coming to the class.

Interviewer: *So does that happen often?*

Zena: Yes, a few of us were talking about, it would be better if you have a plan and gradually increasing the vocabulary, or what, the teaching,

Interviewer: *So, am I right in saying that you would like to see, you would like to have, you would like to be able to see what you were going to learn, in advance?*

Zena: Yes, yes.

As noted in Chapter 4, in many traditional learning cultures, students are expected to prepare lessons in advance of the class, where they would be expected to demonstrate their preparation and note down the explanations of the teacher. Indeed, Ray expressed the desire to have the teacher give him exercises in advance so that he could prepare them before the lesson. He felt that this would be good for him. Teacher 4 reported that she had noticed a similar desire to be

able to prepare language in advance of the lesson in Zena, who discussed with her husband before the class how to convey news to her class, and liked to know the meaning of all vocabulary items before proceeding.

The keen desire for feedback from the teacher expressed by several learners may also derive, at least in part, from their experiences in a learning culture in which the teacher is 'expert' and needs to sanction what is counted as correct. For example, in week 1, Elsie complained that when she worked in the library there was no-one who could correct her work and complained 'I don't know what's right or not'. Similarly, Linda mentioned her need for feedback in week 12 and again in week 16.

As far as expectations of organisational issues are concerned, some useful insights were provided by the interpreter, Eva, who worked on the project with some of the participants. She was a member of the Assyrian Iraqi community and had been a teacher in Iraq. She felt that many of the learners might have expected the program to be what she calls 'tough' (or strict) in the way that their schooling had been in Iraq, and when they found that it was not like this, they were less inclined to take it seriously:

Example 110: Eva, week 35

Eva: Like for example, sometimes when I saw teachers they laugh at the students and make fun and talk. They think 'Oh, she's', you know, 'she don't care, even if we do something wrong in the class, or'. But to be honest, not to be very, very close with the student, some of them, because some of them they understand this way it is, it is very smooth. It's not good to learn, you know. In Iraq the system is different. In the high schools sometimes we discipline the kid, the adults you know, and they not learning very well.

Eva did not approve of the educational culture in her country, but she felt that its influences did affect the way in which newly arrived learners reacted to the rather different learning culture in the AMEP:

Example 111: Eva, week 35

Eva: I refuse the idea. I refuse the idea. It's wrong. It's wrong what they doing there. It's wrong. But imagine people they coming from tough system to a very smooth system,

how they learn. Just, you know, we're just wasting time, you know. Like for example, for the teacher not really to be very, very smooth with them. To be say 'Look', you know, 'there is a rule here in the classroom. If somebody laughs, I will ask him to leave the class'. That's my idea. I don't know because sometimes I hear, specially with the female, they really they shy, they embarrassed and like, a male start laugh if she make a mistake or they make fun at the classroom. She think they talking about her because she can't speak the language.

There was evidence in the data that many learners had been used to generally stricter regimes. In the first week of the project, Elsie explained that her teachers in Sudan gave them exercises to do, and if these were not completed properly, they would be beaten. In week 16, Ray told us that, in contrast to the teachers in the AMEP who 'are our friends', the teachers in Iraq were very 'firm'. He was not completely negative about this firmness, however, but felt that the teachers were strict for the benefit of the students:

Example 112: Ray, week 16

Interviewer: *OK. So, when you remember how you learned at school in Iraq, and you think about learning here, do you try and learn the same way here?*

Ray: Methods of learning is different from our countries. And if you compare to here, er in Iraq, if you fail the year, you have to repeat it. Here no. You go, you don't fail. And also the teachers very firm over there. Here they are our friends.

[…]

Ray: It's also I need to mention they are firm, they are firm for our benefit, so we can get more education. It's not like fun. And plus you can have limited days to be absent from all your school in our country. If you keep doing that, you will be I mean they will kick you out of the school. But here, it's different. You are to not to come, or something like, there's no punishment. And er I guess that's all.

In this interview extract, Ray almost seemed to be associating 'fun' with the idea that there may be less benefit from learning in such an environment. He also pinpointed two areas of apparent mismatch in expectations on an organisational

level between teachers and learners which emerged as important during the study: punctuality and absenteeism. The issue of student absences from, or lateness to, class was commented on by both learners and teachers. The teachers reported that several of the learners from Horn of Africa were frequently late, particularly the women, and that this was a problem:

Example 113: Teacher 11 about Carrie, week 1

Teacher 11:   Well, I've only had her, this is her second week with me. She was transferred from another class, for various reasons, I don't know why. But, um, the most important thing I've noticed is that she is always late. Today she was half an hour late, yesterday I think it was 45 minutes late which is really bad for her in a sense because she misses all the relaxing, communicative activities that I do to start off with, and revision and so forth like that.

[…]

Teacher 11:   She's (Carrie) always late, so she's never kind of switched on with what we're focusing at at that moment as she walks in, and I usually have to, it distracts me. In fact her sister, Hannan and Zainab, another one from somewhere in Africa I don't know, they are always late, and so it takes my time, it takes me away from the rest of the class. I have to explain and, they are always trying to catch up …

And this lateness meant that the learners missed out on important work, including the very types of activities that they reported they needed. Thus, as reported above, Esther was really keen to improve her speaking abilities, and yet tended to miss out on the very activities that would help her because she was frequently late to class:

Example 114: Teacher 7 about Esther, week 1

Teacher 7:   And because Esther comes in late, she misses out. A lot of interactive part is during those warm up type activities. Um.

Erratic attendance was also a problem for some of the learners, not only because their studies were disrupted, but also because the hours they did not attend were required to be deducted from their total 510[37] hours of entitlement to English classes so that they reduced their overall opportunity for instruction

in English. Of course, there are many legitimate reasons why learners may be absent or late. Newly arrived immigrants have many settlement issues to resolve, and are frequently also coping with family trauma and illness, as well as the many routine family issues which are more time-consuming in an unfamiliar culture. For example, Ray had considerable absences early in his 510 hours as he saw getting his driving licence as a high priority, and was absent from class a number of times in order to have driving lessons so that he could take his driving test. Nigel and Abe also missed an increasing number of classes as they coped with a difficulty with their housing situation which arose when they had to relocate at short notice from the relatives who had accommodated them when they first arrived in Australia. For a few weeks this became their priority, their absences increased, and their ability to concentrate in class declined, until the situation was resolved.

However, it appeared that learners were also sometimes late or absent for less pressing reasons, as Zeinab's account of her lateness suggests:

Example 115: Zeinab, week 12

Interviewer: *Um, I'm just trying to see if there's any difference in what you think about the class. When you were in Sudan, were you ever late to class?*

Zeinab: No, I wouldn't be late. I would get my sleep, so I slept the whole night. During the day time I would be relaxed so I can go early.

Interviewer: *So is there, sometimes when you come ten minutes, 15 minutes after the start, is there a problem or, why is that? Can you tell me a bit about that?*

Zeinab: There are some other responsibilities because my husband, like I will prepare things in the morning for him. Breakfast til he goes and it's my nature I'm a bit slow in doing things. I start like dressing very slowly, slowly, so I won't be rushing around. I take my time in doing things, dressing, eating, things like that. That's why I'm like late for the class.

When the learners were questioned as to whether arriving late to class or being absent had been tolerated in the educational institutions they had attended in other countries, they all explained that they had not been allowed to arrive late to class. On the contrary, the regimes that they had been socialised into as younger learners frequently appeared draconian. Fern described to us (week 27)

how in her school a few days' absence would result in dismissal, and no one ever arrived late because the school compound would be shut and the guard would not allow them to enter.

There was some evidence that learners had an incomplete understanding of the importance of punctuality and regular attendance in the AMEP. This may have been, in part, because of a general misperception that AMEP classes were more relaxed, and therefore less serious than those of their previous educational experiences. However, although the teachers we questioned disliked the disruption to the lesson and to learning that occurred as a result of lateness and absenteeism, they were reluctant to investigate this too closely or step in to regulate attendance, for fear of intruding too much into learners' personal lives.

Example 116: Teacher 1, week 8, about Kane and other students in his class

Teacher 1: … I don't know why they're absent. For example, [Kane] has not given me any reasons for his absence.

Interviewer: *OK.*

Teacher 1: So I don't know what the reasons are. He hasn't said 'I'm sick' or 'I'm doing this'. He just hasn't said why he's been absent.

However, the learners commented on this lack of regulation with some surprise:

Example 117: Fern, week 27

Interviewer: *… When you're in class and somebody comes late to class, what does the teacher say to those people when they come late?*

Fern: They don't say anything.

Interviewer: *Both teachers, …?*

Fern: Yes.

Interviewer: *Do they ask the people why they are late?*

Fern: Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't.

Interviewer: *What about when they've been away from class for a few days?*

Fern: They don't say anything.

Interviewer: *Do you think that's a good thing or not?*

Fern: **No.**

Interviewer:	*What do you, what do you think should happen?*
Fern:	Because there is not any control method.
Interviewer:	*Sorry, if there's no*
Fern:	If there is no any control method, of course if we missed out, we think 'Oh that's OK. They don't say anything. So we can get away with it.'
Interviewer:	*Right. So do you think that's what happens? Is that what happens with some of the students?*
Fern:	Yes.
Interviewer:	*Yes this is what we've been wondering because when we're here watching the classes, we see sometimes that people come in late and we wonder why they come late.*
Fern:	There is no control method so they do whatever they want.

Eva, the interpreter, felt that the apparently relaxed atmosphere of learning was misinterpreted by learners:

Example 118: Eva, week 35

Eva:	Here it's different culture, you know, different behaviours, or maybe as I said, the system is different because it's not really that tough. They didn't realise it's 'Oh, what for? I'm wasting my time. I'm going there. Later I will learn these hours', you know. But if they, if it's a bit more tough with them, and look, this is the language and you learn it and I believe they will attend more than now.

In week 27, the interviewer discussed with Alex how teachers should respond to students' lateness or absence. When it was explained to him that teachers may not want to intrude into students' private lives, and this was why they did not always follow up students who are absent or late, Alex laughed, clearly regarding such concerns as a misplaced and resulting from what he saw as typical 'English' (sic) reserve. He felt that the teacher has a right to regulate such things, and found the sensitivities of the teachers amusing:

Example 119: Alex, week 27

Interviewer:	*Some people, some teachers say, we don't want to ask questions because, for the students this is private.*

Alex:	**The English [laughs]. In my country, not like this. if you are … some … just if you came too late, just you know, he ask why you come too late. Just maybe, if you are, you know you if you [past] one days and then came to [college] this one [is not] say …** In my country is different way. If you are absent one day, they give you warning, next day penalty. But he could be missing one parent or two parents something like that.

The above discussion suggests that cultural differences in values and perceptions are complex, and that sensitive but explicit discussion of the expectations and sensitivities of learners and teachers may help to avoid clashes of expectation regarding organisational and other issues.

Conclusion

As we turn the kaleidoscope on the lives and perceptions of the learners in this study, a complex picture emerges of their language learning and the many influences on this process. We have been able to present here only a small fraction of the rich data collected in the project, and have concentrated on what the learners and the teachers had to say about five general areas of the AMEP experience: aims and perceptions of progress in English; the place and practice of speaking skills; perceptions of organisational issues; the importance of learning about life in Australia; and perceptions of cultures of learning.

We have been able to highlight some of the different perspectives on these issues held by the teachers and learners. Sometimes these differences result from differences in roles: teachers must take a long-term view of language learning as the basis of a future life in Australia for learners, while learners are concerned with the practicalities of life and how the language learning they do in class will help them in meeting the demands of adjustment to life in a new environment. This predisposes them to a rather shorter term view of language learning. Sometimes, the different perspectives arise out of differences in experiences and expectations. These differences present challenges for programs which focus on teaching language to adult immigrant learners.

Notes

32 In all examples from student interviews, the interviewer comments are in italics, the students' comments are in bold where they speak in English, and in roman print where the interpreter speaks for them.

33 This could be glossed as 'Sorry I was absent from class yesterday. I didn't feel well.'

34 This refers to her level in speaking as assessed by the International Second Language Proficiency Rating scale (ISLPR), which is used to assess entry levels to the AMEP.

35 Some classes were split across two teachers; in these cases both teachers were interviewed individually.

36 College of Technical and Further Education

37 Immigrants to Australia who qualify for assistance with English are entitled to 510 hours of free tuition as part of the settlement process. When this is completed, they need to find alternative sources of instruction. See Chapter 1.

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Chapter 9: Bilingual initiatives in the ESL classroom

Gillian Wigglesworth

The role of bilingual assistance may be an important consideration in classrooms, particularly in the early stages of learning a language. Some of the learners who participated in the individual case studies reported in this volume were enrolled in a bilingual classroom with a bilingual teacher. While others were not enrolled in bilingual classrooms, they made use of bilingual resources, and also used their first languages in the classroom. The case study classroom (reported in Chapter 9) had a monolingual teacher, but two bilingual aides. This chapter examines the views of both learners and teachers on the value and role that bilingual assistance may have in the classroom, beginning with a brief historical overview of earlier research.

Background

Historical context for the use of the first language in English language teaching

Since the adoption of increasingly communicative approaches to language teaching, there has been some reticence about considering the potential role of the first language in the adult language classroom in a serious and systematic way. Clearly, there are sound pedagogical reasons for this minimisation of first language (L1) presence, with language teaching focusing on the functional aspects of language, where communicative competence is a major goal. Practical considerations support this view, since in countries with substantial immigrant communities – for example, Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand and the United States – multilingual classes have been the norm, and incorporation of the learners' first languages has been viewed as complicated, and potentially detrimental because it diminishes the focus on attempting to communicate in the L2. While the adoption of communicative approaches has certainly encouraged this relative neglect of the potential role of the first language, it is possible, more cynically, to view such policies through other, less charitable reasons related to linguistic imperialism. Phillipson (1992), for example, points to the fact that avoidance of L1 usage provides a distinct advantage for the native speaker teachers who are

able to teach anywhere in the world without having to go to the trouble of learning another language. In a similar vein, Weschler (1997) has argued that low levels of competence in their students' first languages by English native speaker teachers have contributed to sustaining such a policy. These arguments suggest that there may be both legitimate motivations for discouraging the use of the first language in the classroom and those that are rather more politically oriented.

Not only has the role of the L1 been reduced from the perspective of teaching, it has also been largely excluded from formal research with adult learners. A factor which may have contributed to the paucity of research into the role of the L1 in the adult ESL classroom results from the large immigrant populations with widely varied linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds who make up the adult English language classes in English-speaking countries – where much of the research into ESL learning and TESOL takes place. Traditionally, in these contexts, providers of English language classes have assigned learners to classes based on level of proficiency, and classrooms have often consisted of very heterogeneous groups of learners from widely differing linguistic and educational backgrounds. The logistical problems faced by English language providers in setting up classes which can take advantage of the first language are considerable, and this reduces the opportunities for research of this topic. The focus on research into the place of L1 in learning has also been weakened since it is but one of the many factors that are seen to characterise adult ESL learners. Indeed, from the perspective of many providers, L1 background is subordinate to factors such as culture (seen as shaping the overall approach to the classroom and the teacher) and experiences of prior learning (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of this issue). Class participants with their widely varied language backgrounds range in educational experience from those with no school experience, through to those with a few years of primary education, to those with postgraduate qualifications. In addition, they come from diverse sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Previous research into L1 use in the classroom

Despite the above comments, over the last two decades there have been a few studies which have systematically examined the role of the first language in various adult ESL and EFL situations.[38] However, recently, there has been a surge of interest in the range of possible roles that the first language might play in the classroom among researchers working within a socio-cultural framework. Studies conducted in this paradigm examine the role of the first language as a psychological tool and argue that second language processes can be enhanced under certain circumstances through the use of the L1. While these studies have

been largely conducted in foreign language classrooms, they do suggest that the first language has an important contribution to make in the language classroom, and may fulfil a number of important roles particularly with certain types of tasks. For example, learners may use the first language to scaffold assistance (Anton and DiCamilla 1998), to develop a shared understanding of the task, to develop strategies to make the task more manageable (Brooks and Donato 1994), and to develop and maintain interest in the task (Swain and Lapkin 2000).

A number of studies have included explicit discussion of the potential roles and uses of the first language in the adult language or literacy classroom. Auerbach argues that rather than asking yes-no questions about the use of the first language in the classroom, for example, 'should the first language be used in an ESL class?' (Auerbach 1992: 94), we should be investigating what functions it might best serve, and asking the learners themselves about their views on the topic. Cumming and Gill (1991) report an action research study which focused on teaching literacy to Punjabi women in Canada, where the substantially English-based instruction was supplemented by Punjabi for the purposes of explanations of terms or concepts, or for peer-group identification. Auerbach (1993) points out that there is considerable evidence that using the L1 in the classroom has a variety of positive benefits. These include both reducing affective barriers, and attracting students into language programs who might otherwise avoid joining because of their lack of English language proficiency (see also Gunn, Chapter 10, this volume). She also suggests that 'contrary to the claim that use of the L1 will slow the transition to and impede the development of thinking in English, numerous accounts suggest that it may actually facilitate this process' (Auerbach 1993: 19).

In the context of the Australian AMEP a small number of studies have examined the benefits of using the first language of the learners in the classroom. For example, Chau (1991) found that learners used their first language in the classroom to support their second language learning, while O'Grady (1987) found social gains, with students reporting increased confidence, and reduced anxiety, when there is a bilingual aide present in the classroom. The focus of these classes has tended to be on minimal proficiency learners, often those who come from low literacy or interrupted educational backgrounds as a result of their refugee status, and/or learners for whom language learning is perceived to be particularly difficult, such as more mature learners. Bilingual support is now offered in various modes throughout the AMEP, despite the problems inherent in setting up linguistically homogeneous language classes. A recent comprehensive report

(Taylor 2000) has made a significant contribution by examining the role of the first language as a resource in the Victorian AMEP. It provides a comprehensive overview of the range of different types of programs used in this context, and discusses these in some detail.

While the archetypal bilingual classroom is probably that of a bilingual teacher teaching a homogeneous group of students with a shared first language, this is by no means the only model that can be used. In other classrooms, one or more bilingual aides may work with a monolingual teacher assisting groups of learners from various different language backgrounds, depending upon how many aides are involved in the classroom.

The data

The data reported in this paper were elicited from teachers and learners involved in two separate, but related projects. One set of data comes from the learners and teachers in the longitudinal study, who were followed over a year. In the context of this project, some of the learners were participating in a bilingual classroom (that is, all of the learners spoke the same first language) with a bilingual teacher (who also spoke the learners' first language). The other learners were in classrooms where the teacher only interacted in English, but issues in relation to their first languages use came up, nonetheless, in the interviews. The design and data analysis procedures of this project are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

The second data set comes from the single case study of a classroom conducted over a period of three ten-week terms, for six hours a week. The classroom case study was conceptualised as an action research project,[39] designed to focus on low or preliterate learners from Horn of Africa. The study investigated two issues: first, appropriate innovations in curriculum design for this particular group of learners with non-existent or minimal prior schooling and literacy skills, which is reported in Gunn (Chapter 10, this volume), and, second, the value of bilingual aides in the classroom. The learners in this study came from various language backgrounds in Horn of Africa. There were 17 learners in the group who spoke between them ten languages, with most learners regularly using at least two languages. All of the learners were women. This was by design rather than chance, since we felt that the participants would feel more relaxed in an all-female class.

Two bilingual aides participated in the classroom, attending for one and a half hours per week (of the total of six hours). They were able to communicate

effectively with all but one of the classroom participants, a Nuer[40] speaker who nonetheless managed to communicate with other class participants quite successfully. With only one exception, the learners had either no formal education or had been to school for less than six years. One had more than six years. This is relatively typical of this area with 26.8% of learners from Horn of Africa having less than seven years of schooling. Enrolment and retention rates for girls are particularly low (Global IDP: 1). Data collected consisted of interviews with the learners, the teacher/researcher's reflective journal and classroom observations.

In the following discussion of learner perceptions, we will need to differentiate between the three different types of language learning situations of the various learners in this study, and to acknowledge what their contact was with the use of bilingual resources. For ease of identification, we have classified the learners into three groups as follows:

i   The bilingual learners:

Those learners where teacher and learners spoke the same L1 and who participated in a bilingual classroom

ii   The monolingual learners:

Those learners upon whom monolingualism in the classroom was imposed, who participated in mainstream monolingual classrooms

iii   The partially bilingual learners:

Those learners who participated in a partially bilingual classroom with a monolingual English-speaking teacher and part-time bilingual aides

Taylor (2000) argues that there is a variety of learners in the context of the AMEP who are likely to benefit from the inclusion of some bilingual support in the classroom. These include learners who are beginners and those with low levels of L1 literacy and/or interrupted education in their country of origin, and those who lack basic learning strategies for the classroom, and who lack confidence and feel 'lost in the context of a mainstream ESL class' (Taylor 2000: 12). Older learners also fall into this category.

The learners who participated in this project, and particularly in both the bilingual and partially bilingual classroom met many of these criteria. All were beginners and had arrived within a few months of the beginning of the study; all had low oral proficiency and low English literacy skills. The learners in the partially bilingual classroom had minimal levels of L1 literacy as well, which

reflected their lack of education generally. Although the bilingual and mono-lingual learners generally had higher levels of education than the learners in the partially bilingual group, they met many of the other criteria, and the bi-lingual learners were also categorised as older learners. The bilingual context therefore, whether fully or partially bilingual, provided a safe environment for their learning.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the bilingual and monolingual learners were inter-viewed at regular intervals through a year of their attendance at English classes. Their views about their involvement (in the case of the bilingual learners) in the bilingual class, and about their attitudes towards use of the first language, and first language resources emerged in the interviews conducted throughout the study. Their teachers, who to some extent changed during the course of the study, were also interviewed twice per term. The learners in the partially bilingual class were interviewed once during the course of the project, and although the inter-view did not focus on the value of the bilingual aides (see Gunn, Chapter 10, this volume, for a detailed discussion of this project), most of the learners commented on various aspects of the roles of the bilingual aides.

The data elicited from the interviews with learners and teachers were analysed qualitatively, using NUD*IST (see page 12). All comments about bilingual provi-sion and first language use made by the teachers and learners interviewed during the project we coded, and then extracted. The examples in the following discus-sion have been selected as much as possible to fairly represent the views and perceptions of both the learners and the teachers who were interviewed.

Factors impacting on bilingual classrooms

Learner background
Where a class has a bilingual teacher, the language background of the learners needs to be generally restricted to that of the teacher in order to ensure equity of access for all learners. While a situation in which there is only one bilingual aide is likely to be similar, it is sometimes the case that bilingual aides from certain parts of the world (for example, Horn of Africa) speak several languages and can be involved in the classroom assisting several different linguistic groups. Where more than one aide is present in the classroom, smaller groups of different language background learners can be involved. The learners involved in the bi-lingual class with the bilingual teacher in this project were not concerned about being in a class with participants from only the one background as Zena points out (see Chapters 1 and 5 for additional information about the participants):

Example 120: Zena, week 8[41]

Interviewer:	*What about the mixture of people in the class? Is that OK for you?*
Zena:	Yes.
Interviewer:	*Would you prefer to be in a more mixed class, not just* [language] *people?*
Zena:	I prefer to be in this class, not mixed because otherwise it's too difficult for me.

Establishment of rapport
Where the teacher speaks the same languages as the students, teacher and learners establish a rapport within the classroom context very similar to that which occurs in the monolingual classroom with a monolingual teacher. In other words, there is one teacher, and many learners. This contrasts with the situation where an aide, or aides, are present, where the development of rapport must be negotiated across teacher, aide(s) and students. Often, the bilingual aide will be in a good position to establish rapport with the learners even if this may only be with a subset of the group. However, Taylor (2000) has noted that tensions do develop from time to time between teacher and aide, and that these need to be carefully managed, since they will impact negatively on the running of the class, especially if students are able to observe and understand the nature of the tensions, and if they go on over a long period of time. Thus, the idea of working in close liaison with another staff member (as is the case with bilingual aides) can have both positive and negative aspects, depending upon the degree of rapport that can be established. The bilingual aides in the classroom case study comment on this, saying that initially they felt as if they were under the teacher's feet, but by the middle of the first term their views had changed and they felt part of the class, with a mutually understood role to play.

Both aides also saw their own role as facilitating the exchange of information and explanation in the class so that everyone could get to the core of learning the language; for them, their job included giving the concepts behind the words, explaining the teacher's rationale for what she was doing, and therefore clarifying misunderstandings. They also saw themselves as helping students express their goals (and these were quite varied, such as learning to sew and being indepen-dent in filling out forms), encouraging students to converse with their teacher, and helping them to gain confidence in asking if they misunderstood the meaning

of words. The presence of the aides certainly contributed to the highly supportive atmosphere that developed over the course of the study.

Both bilingual aides also felt that it was critical for the teacher to have an understanding of the culture of the student – in this case study of African cultures – although these were, of course, varied due to the ethnic mix in the class. They saw themselves as being instrumental in fostering cultural understanding, demonstrating to the students that cultural information could be shared, and being the tool through which the cultural information flowed from learners to teacher and vice versa. They also saw the class as being highly supportive, especially in comparison with other classes where bilingual support was not available, and where students felt out of their depth. They reported that the students were finding the class very supportive and a good preparation for formal learning, enabling them to become familiar with how to learn, how to deal with the teacher, and how to behave appropriately in the classroom

Availability of bilingual support

In the case study classroom, learner perceptions of the availability of bilingual support were very similar and highly supportive. Almost all of these learners commented on the importance of the presence of the interpreters for being able to understand what was happening in the classroom and what was being said.

One of the African learners, Mona, said she found interpreters particularly important because of her low level of English, even though they were not there all the time. Another learner, Robyn, liked having another person who could be asked questions (rather than the teacher) and found that having interpreters in the classroom improved her long-term understanding. Thus, it did not appear to matter that the bilingual aides were not present all the time, and learners found they could 'save up' questions for times when they were there.

Generally learners were also very positive about the bilingual classroom:

Example 121: Zara, week 1

Interviewer: *Right. So is it a good idea to have a* [bilingual][42] *teacher?*

Zara: It's very helpful. We can understand.

The ability of the teacher to speak their language meant that they felt they could understand what was going on, and the process was made easier:

Example 122: Zena, week 8

Interviewer: *So you like having a* [language] *speaking teacher?*

Zena: Yes, it's easy.

Interviewer: *So is the balance of* [language] *and English OK? Or would you like more* [language] *or more English?*

Zena: For example, now the teacher teaches in English once then uses the [language] pronunciation equivalent to the English pronunciation and then explains in [language] about the meaning of that word, so that's easy for me to understand. If I'm going to the mixed class the teacher won't be able to explain in [language]. So it's hard.

All of the learners in the mutually bilingual class fell into the category of more mature language learners and while they felt that a bilingual class was the most appropriate for them, they did not necessarily see this type of class as being equally appropriate for their younger compatriots:

Example 123: Joe, week 8

Joe: If I am a bit younger, I would choose the mixed class, but for my age I don't want too much pressure.

Interviewer: *So is the bilingual class a good thing?*

Joe: It's been easy for us to understand.

Interviewer: *Right. So what, do you think you need a bit more pushing along to learn?*

Joe: As far as I know if you give a little bit of pressure to the aged students, then the student number might reduce gradually.

This same learner returned to the topic some months later, with precisely the same view:

Example 124: Joe, week 27

Joe: They will concentrate themselves normally and if the student is young and can learn quickly so I will, I will suggest the student to go to the all English class instead of the bilingual.

Interviewer: *Why would you suggest that?*

Joe: Because in the bilingual class it is a little bit slow and also we normally depend on our own language and sometimes use [language]. For my age it is quite all right in the

bilingual class but for the young student they learn quickly it would be much better if they can study in the all English.

Although most of the learners in this study were in imposed monolingual classes (with a non-bilingual teacher and learners from a range of different backgrounds), in those cases where the teacher spoke a smattering of their language, they perceived this as highly beneficial:

Example 125: Kane, week 23

Kane: Today, [teacher's name].

Interviewer: [teacher's name], *right. Ah OK.*

Kane: Can speak a little [language].

Interviewer: *That must be fantastic.*

Kane: Yeh.

Interviewer: *Is that helpful? So she understands you?*

Kane: Sometime no understand. Speak [language].

This learner clearly felt that this was a resource which could be put to good use as he indicated later in the interview:

Example 126: Kane, week 23

Kane: Maybe if she tried to explain this news to us, or give us few words in [language] through what she's explaining, I believe we understand what's happening …

Interviewer: *Can, can* [teacher's name] *help you to do something that helps you learn about the content in* [language] *and so she can work on the English in the class …?*

Kane: Yeh.

Interviewer: *We said before that what it's about, let's say East Timor, and then the English that we use to talk about East Timor. You could, or is it possible to learn about East Timor in* [language], *so that* [teacher's name] *can work on the English, to discuss East Timor in English.*

Kane: Yeh, that's the best way. At least we know first in [language] and then tell in English, yeh.

Interviewer: *What would be a good way for her, or another teacher,*

to do that? How can you be helped to understand what it's about first?

Kane: [teacher's name] she can, she can talk some [language].

Interviewer: *Mm.*

Kane: A few things if she tried just to tell us in [language] and later to, you know, translate into English, it's really easy for us.

Occasionally a learner in an imposed monolingual group had an experience which demonstrated how valuable they might find bilingual support in the classroom were it available:

Example 127: Linda, week 27

Interviewer: *So, what are other things in the class which you find particularly useful?*

Linda: … we need sometimes somebody like interpreter in the class, sometime. Because, we don't know what she (the teacher) is talking about. Just to give us like a guide.

Interviewer: *Mmmm.*

Linda: … for example, four five days ago, there is another lady, she's coming with a teacher, another teacher to the classroom … she is help us in case of the teacher give us any issues or any things to do. We don't know what's happening. She try to explain to us in [language], quietly, what we need, what to do. I feel much, much better.

Interviewer: *So, that helped?*

Linda: Yeh, yeh.

[…]

Interviewer: *But the interpreter wouldn't help you actually speak yourself. Would it?*

Linda: The role for the interpreter, at least she can explain the work, the meaning in [language] and later she can tell me in English, at least I understand what you are talking about.

The importance of this kind of bilingual support was summed up by one of the teachers who suggested that without it, the learners simply would not be prepared to come to class:

Example 128: Teacher 4, week 35

Interviewer: *How, what do you think it is about the bilingual class that happens in* [language], *that can't happen in English? In other words, what's the real value of a bilingual class?*

Teacher 4:   Um … I think I've mentioned this before too, in an interview with you that some of the students have said to me that they were in a straight ESL class before … and they just couldn't, couldn't follow the class and they left … and they just stayed home without studying English until they heard that we've got a bilingual class here and they started coming back … Yeh, so, um, that's one value there, that it, having the bilingual class learners actually come.

Dependence and independence

While a bilingual classroom may be seen as advantageous from the point of view of having bilingual support available at all times to the learners, an alternative viewpoint is that learners may become too dependent on this type of support. It was clear that some of the learners were aware of the potential of this problem and one learner did feel that one of the disadvantages was the potential dependency on the first language which appeared to be entrenched by the end of the project:

Example 129: Zena, week 35

Interviewer: *Now, are there any disadvantages that you see in a bilingual program?*

Zena: The disadvantage is, when I started learning English, I didn't have any language skills. I didn't know alphabetical order. So I used [language] to make myself understand and remember. But now, the problem is I can't get rid of [language]. So it is a problem.

Interviewer: *Mm. So you feel it would be better for your learning if you could get rid of* [language] *a bit?*

Zena: Well, because I use [language] to recognise letters or words. Now, if I get rid of [language] I just can't understand English. So, if you move around the letters, I just can't understand it. So, I rely on [language] too much.

Interviewer: *Mm. So, today you had a teacher who does not speak* [language].

Zena :   The teacher is good. I can understand a little bit because I learned before and sometimes it's just like, even though I can hear and it sounds familiar, but I can't recognise the word.

However, this learner also had a strategy for dealing with this problem:

Example 130: Zena, week 35

Zena: Yeh, I'm trying to understand English speaking conversation. For example, on the train I try to listen to other people's conversations, but I can only get one or two sentences.

With some models of bilingual support, aides may be present for only part of the time – and the advantages of this are that it reduces learner dependency, while at the same time providing the learners with the benefit of knowing that if they really are unable to understand particular concepts, they will be able to have them explained in the next session the bilingual aide attends. This was reflected upon by the bilingual aides in the classroom case study, who found that one of the most important aspects for their learners, and one of their major motivations, was their desire to be independent. For this reason, the bilingual aides in their interview said they were happy not to be present at all times because they also felt that being present too frequently increased the opportunities for dependency by the students. Instead of being present extensively the aides were encouraging the students to save up their questions for the next session at which they would be present. The balancing of presence and absence of bilingual support is, thus, an important factor which needs to be taken into account by program planners and curriculum developers.

Balance of language input

With any group of learners there will be different perceptions of almost any aspect of classroom practice since different methods and approaches suit different people. This was no less the case with the bilingual learner group. Initially they found the balance of use between English and their first language appropriate:

Example 131: Zara, week 8

Interviewer: *Or would you like more English?*

Zara: I still need bilingual, because if there's too much English, I won't be able to understand everything. [language] is better.

Interviewer: *Do you understand everything now?*

Zara: Yeh.

However, as the year progressed, some of the learners, when encouraged, were able to identify the fact that a mix of teaching input might be beneficial, even though it was very clear that the presence of their first language was of great importance to them:

Example 132: Zara, week 23

Interviewer: *Mm. Would you like to have, sometimes, a teacher who speaks only English?*

Zara: Yes, sometimes yes. But not all the time because sometimes you just can't understand.

Interviewer: *What would happen if you had a teacher who speaks only English? What would the effect be on you?*

Zara: That really, that might really create problems if we don't understand the teacher.

Joe was of a very similar view:

Example 133: Joe, week 35

Joe: Well, let me explain. After the students have some basic language skills then it's better for them to have a monolingual teacher but, on the other hand, in my class there are still some old students that even can't recognise letters. So it would be better for them to have a bilingual teacher.

Interviewer: *OK. So perhaps at the start, you are suggesting a bilingual teacher and then, when you get a bit further … have a monolingual teacher.*

Joe: Yes. That would be better.

Interviewer: *So, if someone you knew was coming from [country of origin] to Australia, would you, what sort of class would you suggest that they went into, a bilingual class, or a monolingual class?*

Joe: It depends on his language skills.

Interviewer: *Can you tell me a bit more about that?*

Joe: For example, people from [country of origin], if they are middle-aged or younger generation, and they came here

and they are going to live here and work here. So in most cases, they start studying in my class but after a month or two they feel it is too slow for them, so they will go to other classes with monolingual teachers. But for older aged students, they just live their, not live, study day by day whatever they learn, it's a bonus. So they don't want to have too much pressure. In that case, a bilingual teacher is better for them.

This was not a universal view, however, and some learners, even by the end of the study (week 35), still focused on the benefits of having a bilingual teacher:

Example 134: George and Zena, week 35

Interviewer: *Can you tell me some of the things that have been good about being in a bilingual program?*

George: Bilingual teacher, if we can't understand, we ask, then we'll get explanation. For a monolingual teacher, if we can't understand, we can't understand.

Interviewer: *… what have been the good things about that program for you?*

Zena: As a bilingual teacher, if a student comes in, we can ask the teacher and the teacher will explain in [language]. But for a teacher who only speaks English, then there is no way we can do that.

Interviewer: *OK. So that's the main thing, that you can understand.*

Zena :   Yeh.

Thus at the same time the advantages and disadvantages of a particular situation can be experienced differently by different members of the group.

Cognitive and conceptual advantages

A major advantage of having a teacher or aide who is bilingual in the classroom, and this applies particularly with low level learners, is that it ensures that all of the learners will be able to fully participate in classroom activities because all of the learners can be certain to understand in full the instructions for the tasks. In addition, a bilingual presence allows learners to have input into their own learning processes through discussion with the teacher – in other words, and this is especially important with adults, it allows learners to interact with teachers on

an equal footing in terms of language and cognitive ability. In the classroom case study, this was clearly identified by the learners. Mona found that, even if the bilingual aides were not present at the time, they were able to explain concepts the next time they came. She felt interpreters were essential for helping her to understand what was going on. Ava felt that having interpreters present assisted with the pace at which the class could progress by not having to spend large amounts of time explaining concepts. Norma commented that interpreters were very helpful with respect to explaining spelling rules, and being able to understand the explanations. Sama liked the fact that the interpreters could express the learners' views and needs to the teacher. Because substantial amounts of time can be spent in class explaining new words and grammar to learners, there is little question that bilingual support saves time. Indeed, Cole (1998) has argued that the struggle to avoid L1 at all costs can lead to bizarre behaviours on the part of the teacher in trying to explain a meaning when a simple translation would be sufficient.

The use of bilingual resources

Dictionaries were used widely by most of the learners both in the bilingual and monolingual classrooms:

Example 135: Fern, week 1; Zara and Abe, week 8

Fern: When that happens, I have a dictionary, that has [language] and English translation. So usually when I am sitting in the classroom to study, I read that.

Zara: On the train, so when I'm home I use the dictionary at home to check the words.

Abe: I will try to speak with my colleagues in class, I try to speak with the teacher and ask her sometimes, some words and if I don't understand I look up the dictionary. It's helped me that way.

Learners did feel disadvantaged where they either did not have a dictionary available in the library at their centre, or where other learners had access to electronic dictionaries which made the looking up of words much quicker:

Example 136: Fern and Carrie, week 8

Fern: Yes, I would like to see a dictionary [language], from [language] to English, from English to [language] dictionary in the library.

Interviewer: *That would be helpful for you?*

Fern: Yeh.

Carrie: People would ask they are mainly from [country of origin] and they use dictionaries, spoken dictionaries I think. We do have other dictionaries, the normal one. When the teacher is giving us some words or something that we can't understand what is it, we have to search for that in the dictionary. At the time when we are searching for the word, the teacher will be gone to another thing, but with those people I think they just use their dictionaries and the word will come up. So, I think it's quick for them and not for us.

Teachers also commented on the use of dictionaries in the classroom:

Example 137: Teacher 1, week 8; Teacher 3, week 23

Teacher 1:   … So, Ray has study skills in that he can use a dictionary and he did that a lot in class, the bilingual dictionary mind you. At this stage they're usually using a bilingual dictionary … He looks up a word, a new word comes up and I explain it and he sort of gets it and then he thinks 'I'll look it up'. So he looks it up and then he says 'Oh, teacher, that has many different meanings' and he says that, and he often says that. And I said 'Yes it does' and then he'll give a few and then he'll say 'Oh it's got many different meanings, oh dear' you know. But he'll, he uses the dictionary a lot. And sometimes, he'll, I'll be going on about something and he'll just tune out and look up, because he wants to do that

Interviewer: *Is he overly dependent on the dictionary?*

Teacher 1:   Is he overly dependent? No, not really. I would just say a personality thing. You know? Like he wants to know exactly. And you know you get those students that want to know, what exactly. And he must get a lot of satisfaction.

Teacher 3:   … I've given all of the students a dictionary where they have to write in new words and they're supposed to write it in English and their language. I don't think he often he does sometimes, then write it in [language].

As Teacher 2 indicates, learners use the L1 in the classroom to help out other learners, and this is something that learners both commented on, and clearly enjoyed, in the classroom. Bilingual resources such as dictionaries also permit the learners to continue their learning outside the classroom with a greater feeling of control and independence.

Role of L1 in classroom interaction

One of the roles for the first language which tends to have been examined very little in the literature is the role of the first language in classroom interaction, to achieve such functions as assisting other learners etc. In the next example, Kane is using the language he speaks in common with other class members (in fact this was not his first language although it plays the same role):

Example 138: Kane, week 31

Interviewer:	*So it's better to have a class with different people, with different ages, and different nationalities?*
Kane:	Yeh. I can? speak [language] and there are [language] people in the class, so we can talk.
Interviewer:	*So that helps.*
Kane:	Yeh.
Interviewer:	*OK. So you've got people in the class that you can use* [language] *with?*
Kane:	[language], four [language], two man, two woman.
Interviewer:	*OK. so you can use* [language] *with them.*
Kane:	Yeh. Sometime [language]. One word I not understand what, I speak for [language] what is speak, [language] I …
Interviewer:	*Mm. when those same people, when you see them, do you say hello to them in* [language], *or in English?*
Kane:	When I see? In the class.
Interviewer:	*Mm. But when you see them, when you see them for the first time*
Kane:	English. We start English and we go to (unintelligible)
Interviewer:	*So you use* [language] *when won't English won't work? Is that right?*

Kane:	When they talk to me in [language], I respond in [language], but when I don't understand something in English, I ask them in [language].
Interviewer:	*OK. And do you talk about everything in* [language], *or?*
Kane:	No, no, sometime. Not everything.
Interviewer:	*Mm.*
Kane:	One word I not understand what I speak what it …
Interviewer:	*OK.*
Kane:	Speak OK.

Although for some learners it was clearly a mixed blessing:

Example 139: Ray, week 8

Ray:	Sometimes she gave us exercises that we should do before she do them and this is good for us. I have some oral problem. We've got a small class and all the people in my class are [language], so we are using [language] actually. But they are of different backgrounds, we would be …
Interviewer:	*You would be forced to use English more.*
Ray:	Maybe next year.
Interviewer:	*So having to use English in class helps you because you have to talk about things in, yeh, whereas if people use their first language that's too easy to use the first language*
Ray:	Yeh.

Clearly the teachers also saw the first language as a valuable resource in the classroom, particularly where some of the more able learners can help out those that are having more trouble, and where the translation of particular concepts from one language to another may cause problems:

Example 140: Teacher 5 and Teacher 1, week 8; Teacher 2, week 20

Teacher 5:	… She's more out going, she'll volunteer all the time to help translate and to organise the spelling of it. My understanding of it, is because I often get the [language] and [different language] students to write on the board or you know, translate, or whatever, it's phonetic and so

the [language] speakers will often conference with each other to work out exactly, because some of them are illiterate in [language], so it's a real challenge for them to phonetically spell out a word in their first language. But they do that really well together. They sort of talk about it and discuss it. So yeh, she, she volunteers all that sort of information. She loves small group work I think. She likes the speaking part of it. She's still reluctant and panics a bit when it comes to independent writing tasks, especially creative writing. …

Teacher 1:   Yes. He will explain things to others.

Interviewer: *Often in L1*

Teacher 1:   Yes. Sometimes somebody will say 'What's that?' and he will explain things, yes. Yes, I'll have to agree with that.

Teacher 2:   …, there's a few [language], other [language] students in there and they translate for each other, which is good, and they rely on that, but you know, he's also very, he also offers a lot of information.

Teachers noted that learners sat together in order to be able to make use of this valuable resource:

Example 141: Teacher 2 and Teacher 8, week 16

Teacher 2:   … I've noticed the [language] students tend to sort of sit all together in the middle and they do converse a lot and help each other a lot throughout the class.

Teacher 8:   Oh Carrie definitely preferred to be with someone from her own country and the other student, she's quite good really. She picks up language quite quickly and she understands, like we did matching signs and symbols today and she could do them, you know, in no time. She'd definitely sit with her, yeh. Because I think, with [country] students they communicate in their own language and like if she has a problem understanding terminology or a particular word, the other [country] student would sort of translate it to her in the [country] language. So she prefers sitting with this particular student and today she did sit with her. She

came in late and she was sitting with the other students too. She appears very comfortable sitting with her.

Or if they sit together, then they call out to each other from time to time:

Example 142: Teacher 7, week 8

Interviewer: *So he will sometimes just say it in L1.*

Teacher 7:   Well, he'll say in a word in L1, like the bread discussion today. He knows what he wants to say, he doesn't quite know how to express it, so he'll say, when the girls are in the room as well, they will help him out.

Interviewer: *I noticed he and Abe used, when you talked about the fruit, they were calling out to each other in L1.*

Teacher 7:   Yes, it doesn't very often happen, but occasionally.

In some cases, the L1 was used so extensively by particular learners that the teachers felt that they were almost expected to learn the learners' L1!

Example 143: Teacher 6, week 8

Teacher 6:   … the way he sees it is, he wants to teach me his language and therefore immediately translates all the words, you know, and also, like when he says something in his language, it's better than not knowing at all in terms for his self-esteem. So that's a little bit, I'm wondering whether that's going on for him, you know.

Interviewer: *Yeh, that's interesting, yeh, yeh. 'Cos he certainly does it a lot, doesn't he, he uses the L1 to …*

Teacher 6:   Oh, heaps and sometimes whole sentences he directs at me in L1 knowing full well I can't understand.

However, it was also clear that the incorporation of the first language into the classroom context needed to be carefully handled so that learners did not simply rely on their friends, and use this as a way to avoid speaking English:

Example 144: Teacher 10, week 35

Teacher 10:   The problem there that's because Sue sits with her little [country] group of friends, it's not, she doesn't have to try and speak in English. And I don't think she has it in her to sort of, say 'OK, I'm going to move away from this.

I'm going to try and sit next to someone who's [language] today and practise my English'. Like some others will do that but I don't see that she's at the stage where she has the courage to go and do that. And I don't want to force them, because at the same time it's important for them to feel secure in that class, and she feels very happy, very secure when she's there.

Discussion

The bilingual classroom provides a way of validating the first languages of the students in the sense that the language is used, not prohibited, in the context of the classroom. In the case study classroom discussed in this paper, this meant that it was possible to have a multilingual aide who was in a position to help other students with the written and literacy work because she spoke three languages other than English.

There is considerable evidence to support the view that the first language has an important role to play in the classroom for the expression of difficult concepts, for translation of particular words and vocabulary, and for discussion of more cognitively demanding types of activities. This concurs with Taylor's (2000) report on the actual and potential contribution of bilingual assistants in the classroom. Gunn (2002 and Chapter 10, this volume) is sceptical about the value of institutionalising bilingual support. Indeed, the institutionalisation of this kind of support would require extremely careful planning and would need a very clear rationale for its use, and of course, an understanding of the considerable financial implications involved.

As the discussion above shows, students clearly have their own ideas about bilingual support. They enjoy and appreciate bilingual support, but are aware also that it should not be too readily available. Bilingual support is not universally viewed by the students as being beneficial; one of the students in the case study group indicated in an exit interview that the use of English alone was better for her than having bilingual help. This reflected her determination to become an independent learner, a view which was important to other students both in the bilingual classroom, and outside it.

The role of first language in the classroom is valuable; it included understanding processes, understanding explanations and ensuring clarity of classroom instructions. Clearly, then, the presence of a bilingual aide (or bilingual teacher) reduces the frustration of both teacher and students who may otherwise encounter communication difficulties, consequently a lot of time is saved, and it allows students and teacher to get on with the important matters of the class rather than to focus on the organisation and procedural details.

Gunn (2002 and Chapter 10, this volume), the teacher of the case study class, reports that the bilingual support did not stop at the end of the class, or during the break. As members of the same language community, such provision also provided assistance outside the classroom by explaining issues and problems that had come up during the class, thus giving new meaning to the experience of revising previously taught material.

She also found the presence of the bilingual assistance allowed her to do many things that she would otherwise have been unable to attempt. For example, knowing the bilingual aides were to be available allowed her to investigate what it meant to the students to have minimal formal education, and also therefore to discuss a range of topics with the students which could not otherwise have been tackled. She argues that the presence of the bilingual aides can enable a teacher to do much more than just to teach, but also to find out about what is important to the student – their background, their likes and dislikes, basic stories of their culture, basic geography of the lands they come from. She rules out the intention of using them as interpreters for every classroom interaction:

> … *but they could communicate many other things – including my respect for them as learners, my appreciation of the task they were beginning, and a sense of: OK! Yes, there's lots to do, but let's begin – together.*   (Gunn 2002: 82)

The roles of the bilingual aides varied. Gunn (2002: 82–3) reports that some of these roles were ones that she had not previously predicted – for example, they increased the sense of safety in the classroom because neither teacher nor students felt isolated from each other because of the language barrier; she found the aides who she worked with approached issues in a diplomatic fashion such that they were able to diffuse many moments of anxiety or confusion. Their strength supported many moments of distress. She admired the leadership that these particular people provided. In addition to these, Gunn notes that the aides were constantly in demand both inside and outside the classroom – the demand outside the classroom is another 'side' benefit of the value of using bilingual aides and of their ability to help and relate to the community, and to provide a link between home (community) and classroom (school). Clearly, this has implications for the understanding of the role of the aides and may have quite strong implications for their employment conditions.

Conclusion

As I have argued elsewhere (Wigglesworth 2002), the inherent danger in encouraging, or even allowing, the use of the first language in the classroom is that it will take over the classroom. This danger can be increased in mutually bilingual classes where the teacher has to continually choose which language to use and to perform a very delicate balancing act between support (through the L1) and challenge (via the L2). A potential result of increased use of the L1 is that the advantage of using English communicatively in the classroom context will be lost. Conversely, the danger of not using the first language in the classroom is that it wastes a valuable and useful resource, one which both learners and teachers involved in this study indicate they value highly. The learner perceptions discussed above concerning the use of the first language in the classroom reflect the importance with which they view it as a resource. But it is not only a resource. For these learners, their first language is the tool through which they can communicate their innermost desires, their needs, and their thoughts and their hopes for the future. It is the tool through which they can express the pains and joys of their past experiences. These things they may never be able to do to the same degree in their second language. We would not want to advocate the unthinking use of the first language in the classroom, but it clearly plays an important role, on several levels – functional, conceptual and social. At higher levels of proficiency, learners are less likely to use their first language, but report that even when they are fairly proficient in their second language, they can identify the importance of the cognitive benefits of first language use in specific contexts (Storch and Wigglesworth, in press). This has been shown to be the case in a variety of contexts with learners being allowed to use their first language to complete complex tasks and activities (see, for example, Vilamil and de Guerrero 1996; Swain 2000; Swain and Lapkin 2002).

Clearly, it is critical that where the first language is used in the classroom it is constrained within clearly delimited guidelines. Both teachers and learners need to know that its use is carefully controlled, in a structured and organised manner, and with full awareness of the learning functions it is playing in the classroom.

Notes

38 There is a considerable body of research on the use of the L1 in school-based bilingual classrooms particularly at the primary level, but the discussion of this falls outside the parameters of this paper.

39 Action research refers to the type of project which is often undertaken by classroom teachers to investigate their own practice, or specific issues within their classroom. See, for example, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988); Burns (1999).

40 Nuer is a language spoken in Horn of Africa

41 In all examples, the interviewer comments are in italics, the students' comments are in bold where they speak in English, and in plain text where the interpreter speaks for them. See Chapter 1 for more detail.

42 All references to the language used in the bilingual classroom have been removed in the interests of anonymity.

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Section 3:   Classroom case studies

Chapter 10: Problem or opportunity? Providing for preliterate learners in the AMEP*

Margaret Gunn

During 2001–02, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre funded an action research project with a class of preliterate women from Ethiopia, Eritrea and southern Sudan. All had entered Australia under its immigration program (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs).

The project class operated in a large metropolitan language centre in South Australia, alongside other classes of women and men from many other language and cultural backgrounds, most of whom were literate in their first languages. The majority of students in the project class were young women who had minimal experience of formal schooling and whose exposure to written text, if any, had been largely confined to religious texts in Arabic, the first language of only one student.

The class met for six hours per week over three ten-week terms, with the teacher-researcher (myself) devising the curriculum, implementing the courses, teaching the classes and reflecting on the processes that evolved. This was done in consultation with teaching colleagues, bilingual support staff and consultants from the AMEP Research Centre.

The need for the class arose because of an increase in the number of preliterate young adult learners amongst the newly arrived immigrant population. I was persuaded, from my past experience with Hmong learners in Tasmania in the 1980s and 1990s, that a systematic approach was warranted, different to that normally used for L1 literate beginners, one which addressed the specific needs for literacy that these learners demonstrated. They needed a safe, uncritical environment with time to encounter the basics of reading and writing, and bilingual support to provide clarification and an immediate means of feedback.

I was excited by the learners' adaptability, their apparent rapid acquisition of oral English skills, their motivation and their hunger for learning. To regard these learners as 'a challenge' or 'a problem' obscured the fact that, above all, they required an opportunity to 'have a go' at literacy – something they had not previously been able to do. If such an opportunity could be created, there was every

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reason that these learners could become participants in a literate society. But I was also aware of the urgency of the opportunity. '*If we (in the AMEP) don't attend to this need, who will?*' (Author's journal entry, September 2001)

The recommendations for the project envisaged an English language class at beginner level which was to focus on reading and writing more than speaking and listening. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, in my experience, the extent of access to formal English tuition in the AMEP (510 hours) is insufficient for most beginner, literate students to acquire 'minimal social proficiency', or Level 2 on the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR). Those entering the program with minimal literacy are even less likely to achieve this outcome. As a result, I proposed a class where, while oral and aural skills were not excluded, handwriting and preliminary reading skills would be the main focus.

Secondly, students without literacy in their first language are at a disadvantage when placed in a class with L1 literate students. Usually, the teacher with a mixed class of this nature can merely hope that someone else is teaching the basics of reading and writing to those without literacy. Sometimes a volunteer Home Tutor is faced with the task. All too often though, the need remains unaddressed. When I began recruiting for the class, a number of women who had almost completed their 510 hours asked to be admitted, indicating that they believed they had learned 'very little' in mixed classes with L1 literate students. They were to comment later and frequently, that they wished they had had a class 'like this one' when they began learning English in the AMEP.

The third reason for my choice to promote reading and writing ahead of speaking and listening emerged from discussions with members of the learners' communities. I was privileged to develop links with several key women who played pivotal leadership roles in the settlement of newly arrived families within the south Sudanese, Ethiopian (Oromo and Amharic), Somali and Eritrean communities. These women referred to the burden they carried because of the dependence exhibited by people with minimal literacy in the settlement process. From their point of view, it was imperative that literacy levels within their communities, and the associated independence of individuals, should increase. Of these women, most had post-secondary training, but one had arrived in Australia without L1 literacy herself and was committed to these people having a 'better start' than she had experienced. These leaders responded with enthusiasm to the proposal for the class and immediately identified a large number of potential participants. AMEP eligibility criteria determined the final size of the project class.

As I organised for the commencement of the class, I began a journal, compiling quotations from discussions, anticipating barriers, enumerating tasks and recording contact details. I reflected on my past experiences with preliterate learners and began anticipating differences and similarities with this learner group. For example, I expected the Horn of Africa students, like the Hmong, to lack mapping or 'bird's-eye view' skills (Achren 1991), but I was to be proved quite wrong when I presented them with such tasks. On the other hand, I recalled that the Hmong did not appear to acquire oral English as readily as the Dinka, many of whom, it seemed, were acquiring spoken English proficiency quite rapidly. This, I assumed, was because Dinka is one of a large number of languages spoken by interacting tribal communities in southern Sudan, whereas the Hmong were a more isolated community in northern Laos.

As well as beginning a journal, I addressed the issue of learning materials. There is a dearth of materials commercially available for preliterate adult learners of English as a Second Language. People teaching in this area typically devise their own in direct response to the immediate settlement needs of their current students, usually using pre- or primary school methodologies. I decided to put to one side a lot of the materials I would commonly have used in beginner ESL classes. Instead, I found myself devising new materials and tasks for the skill-development I anticipated would be required, for example, kinaesthetic skills such as macro- and micro- hand-eye coordination (practising letter formation and placement, cutting and ruling lines, copying and colouring, folding and sticking) and cognitive skills (grid work and categorisation). I also decided to review my usual practice of supplying photocopied work sheets because, too often, these replace a valid opportunity for students to write.

I did, however, prepare three workbooks before the start of the class, which enabled me to introduce several of the components of initial literacy:

- writing practice, an introduction to phonics and to alphabetical order
- a basic vocabulary list demonstrating the functions of capital letters
- an approach which would foster word attack skills.

The first book, *Writing alphabet letters*, provided a lined page modelling the formation of each letter, opposite a page featuring four pictures and words of common items beginning with that letter, and chosen because they could largely be sounded phonically. The second book, *Writing capital letters* and the third, *Joining letters together*, followed similar principles. In addition to fulfilling the objectives set for them, I was to discover that this resource also served to promote

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learner autonomy, enabling students to practise their writing, reading and oral skills while I, as teacher, focused on the slower writers.

As the class took shape, I began to see the learners in the context of their communities, not as isolated individuals. I maintained the contact I had established with the community leaders by regularly reporting to them on the class's progress, seeking clarification, confirmation or correction about my assumptions and plans for the class. For example, I was advised to ensure I taught '*basic English*, *ABC*, *like in primary school*' but was then warned: '*but we don't have apples*'. This comment came to symbolise the need to challenge every assumption I had about the learners, to be open to perspectives different from my own, to deconstruct every activity into its component parts and to identify the processes underlying the most familiar of 'literacy' tasks.

An example of this 'deconstruction' emerged as I reported to a workplace seminar about the project. I gave my colleagues the simplest of forms asking for personal identification: family name, given name, address and signature, then asked: '*What skills and knowledge did you use in order to complete this task?*'

The resulting list can be extensive. For example, the writing of your name assumes:

- that you recognise that a single word or phrase on a form (for example, 'Family Name') implies a question
- that you understand the purpose of such a text
- that you understand that the way in which you complete this task in public will betray your level of literacy and the control you have over your immediate environment.

It also assumes:

- the universal differentiation of everyone's name into 'Family' and 'Given' components
- that the transliteration that an Immigration officer may have made of a person's name is sufficiently accurate and satisfactory to that person

and so on.

Assumptions of similar complexity abound when you consider address, numbers, signature (Mace 1995) and so on, yet the contexts and functions of such writing became fruitful sources of exploration in the project class, especially where practice in completing such a form was incessant.

The establishment of this class evoked considerable interest amongst colleagues, many of whom had extensive experience in teaching beginner literacy classes. It also set a precedent in the language centre for employing bilingual assistants from the learners' communities. Two of the women leaders referred to previously, were employed for 1.5 of the six hours of class per week. Between them, they spoke all but one of the languages spoken by the students (see Table 24, page 261). This time was designated for students to clarify issues or ideas, for me to raise organisational matters with the class, and to enable us all to explore topics beyond English-language learning. The students themselves indicated clearly that they did not want the constant presence of the bilingual assistants '*because we'll become lazy learners. We'll listen to them, not to you*'. (Author's journal entry: August 2001).

Considerations of a wide range of issues such as these culminated in the formulation of the project's research question:

> What conditions are necessary to optimise access by preliterate learners to literacy in ESL classes in the AMEP?

Issues in learning and literacy

My previous experience with teaching English as a Second Language to preliterate learners (Gunn 1994) had introduced me to a body of mostly Australian literature including unpublished research reports, which were to inform much of my practice at that time (for example, Khoe and Kightley 1986; Eldridge 1989; Huntington 1992; Ramm 1992). As I began the project class, I looked again for publications which addressed the teaching of English as a Second Language to preliterate learners in an Australian context, with particular reference to students from oral traditions. Little new was forthcoming. I changed focus therefore, and decided to survey the research relating to 'literacy' published in the AMEP publication *Prospect: A Journal of Australian TESOL* during the first 15 years of its production (1985–2000). This would provide an overview of adult ESL literacy teaching in Australia, against which background I could view my present research project.

While preliterate learners were not unfamiliar to practitioners in Australia's Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), there were few direct references in *Prospect* to the nature of the learning and teaching practices their presence had generated. Substantial groups with low levels of literacy from Indo-China, Central and South America, the Middle East and parts of Europe had been present in the Program for over 20 years.

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Kalantzis (1987) was the first contributor to make direct reference to the presence of 'illiterate' people in AMEP classes. Her paper identified a number of themes which, in fact, echo the general discussion about literacy throughout the period under review (1985–2002). These themes are:

- finding an adequate definition for 'literacy'
- acknowledging that literacy is a social process and highly variable depending on learners' experiences
- acknowledging that there is an incongruity between learners' expectations and practices and the assumptions and practices of teachers in formal AMEP classrooms
- that it is imperative to enquire into the linguistic and cultural experience of learners, and
- that these learners are likely to be marginalised in the AMEP, even though they are the learners most in need.

A summary of how *Prospect* addressed each of these themes follows.

Defining literacy

Kalantzis (1987: 34–5) differentiated between the functionalist definition of *literacy: literacy means reading and writing*, and the process definition: *learning to be literate is an ongoing process*. Two groups of learners came under consideration: first language speakers without functional written language, and second language learners. This dichotomy was highlighted during the 1989 International Year of Literacy. *Prospect* reported on the public debate between those who argued for literacy to be 'a process for learners to gain access to powerful forms of language' (Burns 1990: 62–3), and the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991; Davison 1996: 49–50) which adopted an internationally acceptable definition of functional literacy as the ability: 'to read, write, speak and listen well enough to accomplish everyday literacy tasks in our society in different contexts, such as the workplace and the classroom' (Davison 1996: 48).

However, ESL teachers were uncomfortable with the ALLP's reference to 'Standard Australian English' and its effective exclusion of proficiency in a language other than English as part of its vision of 'effective literacy' (Davison 1996: 48). Black and Thorp (1997: 64) clearly stated that 'the need for English language was not the same as a need for literacy'. They were attempting to counter

an all-too-familiar sentiment in Australian society, which is reluctant to regard proficiency in a language other than English as an asset.

By the mid-1990s, the preoccupation with defining 'literacy' had subsided and other uses of the term were receiving careful scrutiny: for example, 'critical literacy' (Murray 1998) and 'multiple literacies' (Black and Thorp 1997). Such terms demonstrate the effectiveness of the 'process' view in ESL research. However, the notion of 'preliteracy' was not addressed. I adopted the term extensively throughout the project, possibly from Huntington (1990), unaware it had not been defined.

Defining 'preliteracy'

I used the term 'preliterate' as opposed to 'illiterate' or 'non-literate' in reference to the project class learners. 'Preliteracy' denotes a period of initial encounter with the behavioural practices of literate people that engages the individual on a personal and community level.

'Preliterate teaching' involves a deliberate fostering of specific kinaesthetic and cognitive skills, given that the capacity to write requires manipulative skills, and awareness of spatial and sequential processes. Likewise, preliterate students acquire the capacity to read through an encounter with symbols that are used to denote phonemes, phonemes to formulate words, words to denote concepts, and concepts to comprise discourse that can be captured from speech and made tangible in a variety of written modes that can then be read. Other skills or 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner 1993) are engaged widely such as intra- and interpersonal intelligences that initiate the learners into social interactions where written texts have a place, alongside interactive oral ones.

The dividing line between 'preliterate' and 'literate' is indefinable, but involves the learner's perception of self, as well as their evaluation of their own capacity to participate in a literate society. Consequently, the state of preliteracy is temporary; its duration is variable, but participation in a range of definable activities should result in most learners developing a qualitative change in their capacity to write and read.

Literacy as a social process

This second general theme in *Prospect* saw ESL researchers and practitioners establishing a clear link between literacy and social context (Black and Thorp (1997: 64), sometimes describing vividly what can happen when the relevance

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of context and social process is ignored in literacy teaching. Freebody (1995: 8) and Murray (1998: 42–3) reported that UNESCO's Experimental World Program, aimed at 'developing functional everyday literacy', was seen as a failure because the learners came to see that they were being manipulated merely to become 'better workers'. In contrast, the work of Brazilian Paolo Freire was noted (Murray 1990: 61). His work with dispossessed people was underpinned by his conviction that:

> *literacy is a social practice that only finds expression by empowering people to determine their own needs.*　　　　(Freire 1970, 1994)

Several of the class participants had an oral, not a written tradition in their first language (see chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of these issues). Others had not learned to write their language (for example, Amharic) because they lacked formal schooling. They had now entered an environment where the acquisition of English, a literacy-based language, was the core focus. They faced the need not only to learn a new language but to learn to be literate as well. This 'need' was unquestioned. Here they were faced with the opportunity to explore the value of being literate for themselves.

Learners' versus teachers' expectations and assumptions

The impact of teachers' and learners' expectations and assumptions was a third, and significant theme. Kalantzis (1987) described the low self-esteem that characterised the learners in her initial study. This is not an uncommon feature in Australian research reports (Ramm 1992; Sangster 1996): a sense of low self-esteem amongst students that is reflected in the expectations of teachers. Hood (1990: 60) vigorously addressed the resulting stalemate, urging that 'more appropriate approaches to teaching English' should be found. In support, Davison (1996) demonstrated that teachers' assumptions and attitudes towards their learners strongly influenced their methodologies and approaches.

Davison observed that the practitioner who emphasises literacy as part of language knowledge, skills and functions will adopt much broader goals than one who sees reading and writing as the only forms of literacy. A practitioner who sees language and literacy as a purely cognitive process rather than embedded in social or cultural practices will have a much narrower curriculum; a practitioner who does not understand the processes of first and second language acquisition will evaluate learner achievement on a far more restricted range of criteria (Davison 1996: 55).

Burns (1990: 63) also challenged teacher attitudes, highlighting in particular the tendency to relegate reading and writing to second place after speaking and listening in beginner ESL classes. She insisted that:

> *in a technologically-oriented and highly literate society, adult learners (should be) given instruction in written language as early as possible and in a principled way.*　　　　(Burns 1990: 70)

Burns' argument confirmed my conviction that the project class deserved an opportunity for literacy, and that this included introducing a range of written genres and texts as well as speaking and listening ones. Such a stance, it might be argued, does not reflect the initial preferences of some preliterate learners who clearly indicate a preference for speaking and listening. However, such students may harbour a fear of literacy-related activities and may not readily nominate reading and writing as a priority, because they do not see themselves as full participants in a literate society.

The learners' linguistic and cultural experiences

Kalantzis (1987: 37) predicted the value of learning about the diverse backgrounds of the learners and the inappropriateness of making generalisations about them. Black and Thorp (1997) canvassed this fourth theme in their study of multilingual students in TAFE adult literacy classes.

Though not reported in *Prospect*, the AMEP's recent research agenda has addressed the profile of people widely presumed to be 'literacy' students in an AMEP context: those whose achievements in the competency-based curriculum, the Certificates in Spoken and Written English[43] (CSWE) (Hagan et al 1993) have been below the national average. Ross (1999) profiled this group by demonstrating a correlation between (older) age and (minimal) years of schooling. However, the learners in the project class, by comparison, were relatively young, though with minimal formal schooling. In this respect, they presented a very different profile to that described by Ross (1999), although they may well have contributed to the outcomes he reported, were they included in his sample.

The marginalisation of these learners in the AMEP

The fifth theme that arose out of Kalantzis's 1987 article is as unwelcome as it is prophetic. Freebody, in defence of learners with minimal literacy, described the extent of the marginalisation to which they have too often been assigned. These learners, he reported, were often seen as being:

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incapable of logic, scientific thought, literary appreciation, democratic processes, informed judgment and, in many cases, incapable of being employed or of contributing to the maintenance and development of social well-being. (Freebody 1995: 6)

He went on to argue (1995: 9) that the issue is not how the 'commodity of literacy' is delivered, but how well the capabilities that are taught fit into the 'everyday beliefs and activities of the target group'. In this, he echoes Freire (Murray 1990: 61). The implication is that teachers of literacy need to view their learners not as isolated individuals, but as members of communities whose everyday beliefs and activities they need to understand better.

This review of *Prospect* occurred after the project class had disbanded, but the experience of the class confirmed many of the principles outlined and assisted in the evaluation of the project.

Data collection

Several methods of data collection were used. I made journal commentaries that evaluated class activities and recorded key discussions with bilingual assistants, colleagues, community leaders and the students themselves. In addition, the ten core students who remained in class for the length of the project (30 weeks) participated in two interviews at the beginning of both the second and third terms. The interviews were conducted by two colleagues, using bilingual support.

While 17 students entered the class at the beginning of the project, (a much larger than ideal number, given the nature of the class), a total of 25 women participated in the class across the three terms. Most were under 35 years of age. The fluctuation in numbers was due to factors such as the policy of continuous intake, the imminent birth of children, relocation interstate, extended return visits to the country of origin and the expiry of AMEP eligibility. None left because of dissatisfaction with the class. This fluctuating population was not entirely detrimental. It was possible to establish a spirit of cooperation between learners, with the more confident invited to assist the newcomers.

The interviews provided documentation of the students' language backgrounds and their experience of school. Their evaluation of the class and other outcomes are discussed in the final section.

Language background

At least ten languages were spoken by the interviewees, including Arabic, Swahili, Azandi, Tigrinya, Amharic, Dinka, Nuer and Tigre. While nine of the project participants had had some access to Arabic, this was the first language of only one student. Every student regularly spoke at least two languages in addition to English (Table 24). Some Arabic and Tigre speakers could read a little of their first language, but those from southern Sudan were from oral traditions where the languages were not officially transcribed. While it is possible to find a Roman script transcription of the New Testament in Dinka, such transcriptions were neither available nor present in the school curriculum.

Table 24   Number of languages spoken/written by project participants (excludes English)

Student	Number of languages spoken	Are you able to read and write in these languages?
Nina	3	Not Arabic
Sama	4	A little Arabic and Tigre
Ada	2	No
Ava	3	No
Hailey	2	No
Norma	3	No
Marie	2	Arabic
Sally	2	No
Robyn	2	Arabic
Mona	4	No

School background

Table 25 (page 262) collates data from the World Bank indicating a gender discrepancy in access to literacy in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, and estimating the percentage of the school-age population able to access primary schooling in 1995. The figures are the average for each country as a whole. They do not differentiate, for example, between the northern and southern regions of Sudan. A 1999–2000 Global IDP report (Global IDP: 1) indicated that less than 30% of school-age children in southern Sudan were attending school, with that percentage dropping to as low as 5% for areas afflicted by war.

Against this backdrop, the years of formal schooling of the interviewees (Table 26, page 262) can be compared. Amongst AMEP enrolments nationally (Yates 2002),

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Table 25   Extent of previous literacy and primary schooling: Horn of Africa (World Bank 1995)

Country	Literacy		Primary education
	male %	female %	%
Eritrea	66	39	31
Ethiopia	47	31	28
Sudan	68	44	51

Yates (2002)

Table 26   Age at which project participants attended school

Student	Ages at which school was attended											
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Nina										▓	▓	▓
Sama					▓	▓	▓	▓	▓			
Ada										▓	▓	▓
Ava			▓	▓								
Hailey								▓	▓			
Norma	Did not attend											
Marie			▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓				
Sally	Did not attend											
Robyn	▓	▓	▓	▓								
Mona	▓	▓										

n = 10 students (Shaded areas depict time at school)

26.8% of students from Horn of Africa are reported to have less than seven years of schooling. Of this percentage, 7.4% report no schooling. Amongst the ten students available for interview from the project class, only one had received more than five years of formal schooling. Two (20%) had not attended school at all.

Table 24 represents the impact on the students' formal education of many variables, notably war, economics, distance and gender. For example, Marie had her schooling interrupted by war and had been forced to move to another country,

while such a move provided Nina and Ada with the only access to schooling that they had experienced, in a refugee camp, and that at age 16. Ava had been forced to leave school after only two years because her family could not afford to continue her schooling after her father's death, while Hailey, who also had only two years of schooling, had had to live away from home with an uncle in a far-off village. The issue of gender influenced access to schooling for some. Marie and Robyn had left school at puberty and were married soon after. Very few parents (Ada's mother and the fathers of Sama and Hailey) had attended school, while the siblings, both male and female of those interviewed who had had some schooling, were also reported to have shared the experience. Ava, in fact, had an older sister who had escaped the war and completed postgraduate study overseas. On the other hand, Norma and Sally had had no access to school. Both had lived in rural Ethiopia.

I asked the interviewees: 'Did you enjoy school?' I was to realise the folly of the question. It was like asking a hungry man if he enjoyed his food after only one mouthful (Author's journal entry).

The structure of the syllabus

Six key strands provided the backbone of the syllabus which emerged as the project class got underway. The first of these was to foster skills in graphology, manual dexterity, fine motor coordination, and eye–hand coordination essential for preliteracy learning. We practised copying in a variety of mediums: in the writing books, using tracing paper, transferring from the white board to the page or vice-versa. We used large sheets of paper to practise clockwise and anti-clockwise spirals, to use a pair of compasses or practise ruling parallel lines. We solved mazes and dot-to-dot puzzles. We identified the flags of our respective countries and attempted to reproduce the motifs and colour them. Because the use of scissors was unfamiliar to most, I devised a range of tasks, including cutting fabric (given many of them were also keen to learn sewing). Simultaneously, students relished the opportunity to use CD-ROM programs such as *The alphabet* and *The interactive picture dictionary* (Protea Textware nd) which introduced key hand–eye coordination skills. Several students returned regularly to the computer suite in their own time, so positive was their initial experience of this technology.

The second strand fostered aural–visual association with English text. This was where the basics of reading or 'code-breaking' (Freebody and Luke 1990: 8) were introduced. I was committed to introducing phonic interpretation of the

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letter symbols, despite the confusion this can create, given that most learners arrive in class having rote-learned the alphabet. But phonics, as with whole-word recognition, had to become tools for word attack skills. We examined many genres, from labels and street signs to stories and maps. When the students 'read' something that related to their personal experience, for example, finding their place of birth on a map and incorporating it into a story about their journey to Australia, a new energy became evident.

Strand 3 aimed to promote meaning, encouraging the readers to become 'text participants' (Freebody and Luke 1990: 9). This required building an 'oral language pool … an essential prerequisite in the move to literacy in L2' (Kalantzis 1987: 41). By the end of the project and the production of a book of ten stories that were used throughout the third term (Gunn 2002), that pool had grown to over 300, by now familiar, words in stories that provoked considerable interest and lively interaction.

Strand 4 focused on making links with the 'real' world, using every possible opportunity to contextualise, interpret and encourage curiosity in whatever we encountered in class or beyond. When Burns (1990: 62–3) had recommended giving learners access to a wide range of genres from the start of their learning, she was predicting that teachers would feel overwhelmed by the possibilities of what could be introduced into the class. I was privileged to have access to bilingual support, which meant we could address many varied, often unpredictable, ideas and topics.

Inevitably, some of my personal biases showed. For example, I was attracted to the idea of helping students locate 'their place in space', so maps, grids, pictures, items of personal and national interest and of the local environment were immediate choices for class realia. Natural phenomena, human biology, mechanical processes (from staplers to car engines, overhead projectors to old-fashioned apple corers), historical references, personal stories – nothing was barred from investigation. Indeed, every topic was an opportunity for learning – if not the English language, then about the immediate environment and how literate people behave within it.

Strand 5 incorporated numeracy. While initially unforeseen as a component of the syllabus, an optional two-hour numeracy module was offered from the second term. 'Minimal formal schooling', it emerged, provided little in the way of formal numeracy concepts. This was most evident in a series of lessons about time. Even the most proficient English speaker in the class responded to a systematic demonstration of how analogue clocks depict time as 'something I now understand'. However, I had yet to learn how disorienting Australian society's construct of 'time' is to people whose world has been interpreted by seasons or festivals, not dates and hours.

Finally, Strand 6 involved the development of learning strategies designed to model and encourage independent learning. Preliterate students are often assumed to be highly teacher-dependent, but I looked for ways for them to express a form of independence. For example, I timetabled occasional sessions where students quietly thumbed through a selection of travel and garden magazines, coffee-table books and the like, then nominated a picture that interested them. At the very least, this provided quite simply, an enjoyable experience of books, even, for some, an opportunity to become familiar with holding and opening them. Because the bilingual assistants were in class on those occasions, I encouraged the students to ask questions and express opinions.

At other times, students chose to revise classwork as a form of independent activity. Occasionally, those who had completed work were invited to assist others and we discussed appropriate and inappropriate models of supporting each other. Evidence of homework began to appear, sometimes clearly done as a family activity. I observed other expressions of independence in their use of the library and computer suite in their own time.

These strands were woven throughout the regular routines of the class. There was a daily expectation of handwriting practice in the form of letter formation or copying of words or phrases, the sounding out of words and exploration of their meaning. There was always an element of unpredictability, as 'real world' activities were often spontaneous or incidental. Because of the availability of bilingual support, the class became a place where settlement concerns could be addressed safely, just as it was a sufficiently private place for basic literacy skills to be encountered and practised away from prying, judgmental eyes.

Outcomes of the project

The research question focused on identifying the conditions that would best assist preliterate, non-English speakers to develop basic literacy skills in an AMEP program. Such a question ensured that the ultimate outcomes of the research experience would relate not only to the performance and responses of the students, but also attitudinal and organisational changes within the AMEP teaching environment.

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Assessment of performance

It was clear from the outset that there were no adequate tools for measuring the achievement of preliterate learners within the existing curriculum framework, the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) (Hagan et al 1993, 1998). This was because Certificate I assumes literacy in L1. This created a dilemma, because as in any formal learning situation, the students required feedback, correction, affirmation and a sense of progress. I needed it as a teacher, to remain focused and to record cumulative skill development. The AMEP needed it too, because substantial achievements were being unreported and unrewarded.

Since the conclusion of this project, new modules for the assessment of preliterate learners have been added to the 2003 edition of the CSWE. In trialling these instruments towards the end of the project, I found the students well able to satisfy the requirements, yet they remained unprepared for the reading and writing demands of an L1-literate Certificate I class.

This suggests that the impact of minimal exposure to literacy and minimal formal schooling has a prolonged impact on students' performance and cannot be overcome in one particular class, no matter how 'tailored' it may be. In acknowledging this, my workplace has since instituted a learner pathway with a range of options: a sequence of classes to enable students to continue a steady trajectory, others for students with identifiable impediments to learning, and a further category, catering for students with high oracy and minimal literacy. The future success of this model depends on there being enough AMEP-eligible students to form viable classes.

Learners' responses

The learners' responses were of major interest. In their interview at the beginning of the third term, the students evaluated their current learning situation, their use of English out of class and their sense of progress as a result of this class. They were also asked to evaluate the contribution of the bilingual assistants.

Throughout the project, students had expressed commitment to their current learning situation by high levels of attendance and active participation in activities. They appreciated the teaching approach, the pace of learning, the amount of repetition and the focus on their need for literacy skills in the context of a new culture that threatened to marginalise them.

Most were content with a low-intensity class (six hours per week) but reasons varied. Some saw low intensity as a way of conserving their AMEP allocation of 510 hours. Others were keen to have more hours, but these were out of reach for those with preschool children because childcare places (funded by the AMEP) were not locally available. Most students took up the option of two extra hours per week in a numeracy class from the second term.

Students were also asked at interview about their participation in a range of transactions outside class. Seven of them indicated that homework was now a higher priority than at the beginning of the class, when the general consensus had been it was 'impossible' because everyone was 'too busy' with household responsibilities. I had interpreted this as meaning the homework they'd been given before was too difficult, requiring new learning rather than repetition. By the beginning of the third term, I was seeing evidence of dog-eared well-filled writing books and other attempts to copy and revise written work done in class.

The students reported a success rate in other areas that I had not expected. Most were able to use bank automatic teller machines and buy a bus ticket, understand letters where money was involved and write their name in a public situation (for example, in a retail transaction). Where the limits were identified, most could indicate sources of assistance; for example, three remained hesitant about writing their address without recourse to copying, others spoke of family support.

The need for autonomy was always in the foreground. This was particularly evident in questions about their personal goals. They were acutely aware that they needed extensive educational opportunities and were afraid these would cease all too quickly. All wanted to be well-educated. Their children's education was important to them but they wanted to be independent of them. All wanted to work, some in an office, one as a doctor. They all valued learning English and were open to new information, because they wanted to participate in Australian society.

All valued the contribution of the bilingual assistants, as conduits for feedback and clarification between students and teacher, as well as an independent source of advice and encouragement. In particular, they made it possible for students to voice their opinions and describe experiences that established their individuality and reduced their isolation. The bilingual assistants were also seen as enabling this class to operate efficiently, because issues could be dealt with promptly and students could 'get on and learn' (see Chapter 9 for further discussion of this). These responses reinforced the view that acquiring literacy is a social process: that is, literacy needs to be pursued in the context of the requirements of a real community. The students shared the belief of their communities that the

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independence of individuals, as demonstrated by basic English proficiency, was highly valued and greatly desired. These were not passive learners; nor was optimism readily surrendered.

Overall however, the students reflected conservatively about their progress. Several of them had entered the class hoping that they might be able to re-visit learning opportunities that had been wasted in previous classes. Others became aware, perhaps for the first time, of how much there was to learn.

Attitudinal change

The starting point for this project was my decision to speak about the class as an 'opportunity for literacy' rather than a 'problem' or a 'challenge'. This was counter to both teacher and student expectations and set the scene for useful discussion and considerable attitudinal change amongst my colleagues. It also made the classroom a place of optimism and discovery. The decision to explicitly favour reading and writing activities above speaking and listening provoked surprise and interest in a number of quarters, but had been enthusiastically embraced by the students and their community representatives. Despite this, there was no disputing the urgency and size of the task, given the limited amount of time available to these students under their AMEP entitlement.

Of perhaps greater change was the impact on my methodology and the need to create a new syllabus based largely on a process of 'deconstruction of the familiar'. The comment: '*We don't have apples*' encapsulated the issue: I needed to think critically about the assumptions and expectations I held. By minimising class handouts and introducing new materials, I forced myself to re-think issues of presentation and to observe more closely how students were responding. This had to be a place where time was provided for tasks to be completed, repeated, and presented again in a different way; where accomplishing each step, however small, was essential for building a sound foundation. It was the foundation, not the super-structure, which was the priority. Part of that process included creating an adult, yet a 'hands-on', environment where people could experiment doing things they had never had the chance to do before.

At the same time, I wanted to affirm the skills and knowledge that the students possessed, in order to make links between our two worlds. The task was overwhelming at times: to make literacy in English and the Australian society accessible to them. However, here were intelligent, competent people with much to bring to the process. In thinking about the formation of an appropriate curriculum, I wrote in my journal:

It is not as if these students have to begin with the primary school curriculum and work through it from beginning to end. They don't need a concrete roadway to bridge the gap. Rather, they're like spiders throwing out anchor lines, then spinning a web that is strong enough to cross and efficient enough to catch food for the journey.

(Author's journal, April 2002)

Organisational change

Several observations are useful for the establishment of future classes. From the outset, the project class was organised quite differently from others in the language centre. The students were identified using the networks of the bilingual assistants. Its focus – reading and writing for people with minimal schooling – was advertised widely, bringing some students from their former classes into this one as well as attracting others who may have hesitated about coming at all. The presence of bilingual assistants in the class was an innovation, as was the grouping of students of one gender from similar educational, linguistic and geographical backgrounds. The class was low-intensity, six hours per week instead of the usual 12 or 15. Further provision was made: extending the class for three terms (30 weeks) and arranging for some students to continue post-510 hours with external funding. It was also significant that the class was operating alongside others and that the students had access to all the services of the school and the full company of students. While I was concerned to create a private, uncritical environment within the classroom, I was frequently asked by other students: 'How are they going?' This I understood to be a practical indication of the ongoing support of the students' communities.

Conclusion

The realities of the learners' circumstances impinged on the creation of 'optimal' conditions for acquiring literacy. Ideally, students would not be pressured by considerations of their relative lack of formal education, decreasing AMEP entitlement, insufficient childcare or anxiety about their future learning opportunities. However, momentum for the class was generated because both teacher and students were pursuing an opportunity, rather than making up for a deficit. This attitudinal change was made explicit by identifying a shared purpose: namely, a class for people beginning to read and write English, by drawing bilingual support from peers, bilingual assistants and the learners' communities and by devising a curriculum that built upon the learners' experience and capacity. What we as teachers have to do is 'walk in our learners' shoes' and be willing to

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make substantial adjustments in our assumptions and methodologies – perhaps for a prolonged period.

⁎ An earlier version of this paper appeared in *Prospect: An Australian Journal of TESOL*.

Notes

43 The Certificates in Spoken and Written English is the nationally accredited curriculum framework of the AMEP. It is assessed through certificates which correspond to four levels of English language proficiency. At each level, statements of learning outcomes in the form of language competencies in oral interaction, reading and writing are provided (NSW AMES 1998).

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Chapter 11: Special focus writing class for Horn of Africa and other AMEP students with similar writing needs

Karen Slikas Barber

This study builds on an earlier study (Barber 2002) which investigated the writing characteristics of students from Horn of Africa (students from high oracy backgrounds) and described a range of strategies that proved useful in enhancing the teaching of writing to those students. From the results of that study, it was hypothesised that these strategies might also enhance the teaching and learning of other students in the AMEP who have similar writing characteristics to those learners from high oracy backgrounds who participated in the 2002 study. These characteristics were:

- Problems with words and word formation:
  - Non-standard spelling
  - Non-standard capitalisation.

- Problems with sentence formation:
  - Very long sentences; inadequate use of full stops
  - Indirectness in expression.

- Problems with rhetorical organisation:
  - Repetition of ideas
  - Lack of organisation of ideas
  - Attempts to express complex ideas which make the writing seem convoluted
  - Similarity to speaking (stream of consciousness).

A special-focus writing class was created to give students with writing characteristics similar to those of the earlier group an opportunity to focus on their developing writing skills and to further trial some of the strategies identified in Barber (2002). This class was designed as a pilot study. Subsequently, another special focus writing class was formed in which the findings of the pilot study were implemented. This chapter reports on the pilot study and the results of the subsequent special-focus writing class.

The pilot study

The aim of the pilot study was to explore teacher and student perspectives as input to the design and implementation of the special focus writing classes. The class was designed to meet the needs of students with writing characteristics similar to those detailed above. These learners can be identified as those most likely to have difficulty passing writing assessment tasks such as 'writing an information report' or 'writing an opinion text'.

The impetus for creating a special focus writing class was to address the writing characteristics and needs of students from high oracy backgrounds. However, due to a reluctance to restrict the class to specific groups, the class was made available to all students studying for the Certificates in Spoken and Written English[44] at a pre-intermediate and intermediate level (CSWE II and III).

The initial plan for the special focus writing class was to present the two writing competencies that the CSWE II and III have in common, that is 'writing an information report' and 'writing an opinion text' and to teach the same writing competencies that were also being taught and assessed in the students' full-time English course in that term. The rationale for this was threefold. First, it was thought that separate classes for students at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels would not be viable as it was anticipated that the classes would be too small. Secondly, it was thought that much of the content related to teaching how to write a report, and how to write an opinion text, at both levels, was quite similar in terms of what needed to be taught about the structure, organisation and linking of ideas. Thirdly, it was thought the students would benefit from practising writing the same kind of texts that they would be learning how to write in their full-time English class. The content of the class would thus cover the structure and language features of report and opinion texts with students analysing, deconstructing and constructing texts of these two genres.

The teachers used some of the strategies identified by Barber (2002) in the special focus writing class. The strategies that were selected were:

- Use of the 'teaching-learning cycle' of building knowledge of field, modelling of text, joint construction of text and independent construction of text (Joyce and Burns 1999: 125–8) including:
  - Extensive oral interaction related to text
  - Modelling at text and sentence level
  - Genre approach

- Teaching grammar in the context of a specific genre
- Hands-on approach for sequencing activities including using cut-up sentences or paragraphs that can be moved to determine logical sequences
- Repetition of task types that work and tasks that students are familiar with
- Explicit explanation of, and instruction in, all classroom activities and in the requirements of assessment tasks, including the cultural requirements such as valuing quality above quantity
- Practising planning writing
- Mini-conferences to talk with students about their writing.

The pilot study was conducted following an action research spiral (Burns and Hood 1995: 6–8) with the two classroom teachers having an initial plan for the weekly, two hours per week, nine-week special focus writing classes (a morning and an afternoon class) and then acting on, observing, reflecting on, and revising the class program. Lesson materials, lesson content and students' written work were reviewed and discussed weekly by the two teachers, and four student surveys about the class were completed by the students in weeks two to nine and then analysed by those classroom teachers. In the last week of the class, all of the students were interviewed by their classroom teachers. As the students had high oracy, they were well able to describe their learning experiences in English without the aid of an interpreter.

The teachers' reflections on their classes, as recorded in their teaching diaries, were similar in many respects. Both teachers found a lot of class time was spent on teacher talk and whole class teacher-led activities such as building knowledge of the field, deconstructing texts, modelling, planning and joint construction of texts. Both teachers found it difficult to find real model texts of the two genres at an appropriate level of language and complexity for the learners, so adapted texts were developed for instructional purposes. The teachers considered that the use of adapted and simplified model texts was beneficial to the students' learning, as the texts were comprehensible and resembled texts that the students would be expected to write (see Appendix 7, page 179).

The teachers also agreed that the presentation of one genre was more than enough for the nine-week, two-hour class. This became evident early on in the morning class with students having difficulty organising information, paragraphing their

information texts and linking their ideas. Therefore, only report writing was covered in the morning class. Information reports were written in and outside class on a range of topics including: Australian animals, hometowns, Australian capital cities and other Australian cities. In week eight of the morning class, students were still having some difficulty deciding what information to put in each paragraph. The students needed time to explore and interact with texts of the same genre and needed teacher support to write their own texts. In the afternoon class, although the students were better writers, the teacher also considered that these students could benefit from further exploration of just one genre.

From the student surveys and interviews, it was evident that all 19 students in the pilot study thought their writing had improved by the end of the class and all thought the class was beneficial. Many students thought that they had benefited from being in a small class because they could ask the teacher questions and talk to the teacher one-on-one in the mini-conferences. They liked the discussions about the texts and the grammar analysis of the context-specific grammar items. Representative statements include one student who stated, 'Teachers pay more attention to explanation of writing so easy to catch main points than in a general English class'. Another student said, 'I feel more comfortable about writing now'. And another student said, 'I improved my organisation and tenses'.

Teachers also supported the students' views that students had benefited from the classes. Teachers reported improvement in all of the students, particularly in terms of their text organisation and coherence. In the morning class, teachers reported an improvement in students' use of full stops and in their understanding of sentence boundaries.

From the whole-group discussions about the class and the interviews with the students, it was evident that the use of cut up texts at sentence and paragraph level was an effective way of exploring the given genre as it allowed students to experiment with and understand text organisation.

The student surveys yielded little insight as to whether or not the strategies used in the classroom were effective because the students marked all the strategies as beneficial. More useful information was obtained in the student interviews and in the whole-group discussions on the teaching methods and content used in the class. It was determined that the teachers needed to be more explicit about the strategies they were using in the classroom and needed to help students critique their own learning.

Bearing in mind the results of the pilot study, the second special focus writing class was planned. Planning included a brief literature review to further underpin the teaching of the special focus writing class for students with good spoken English but with the particular writing characteristics previously detailed.

Literature review

Since the aim of the special focus writing class was to offer additional support to students in developing their writing skills, the notion of 'scaffolding' was reviewed. As Hammond (2001: 7) quotes Maybin, Mercer and Steirer:

> [Scaffolding] *is not just any assistance which helps a learner accomplish a task. It is help which will enable a learner to accomplish a task which they would not have been quite able to manage on their own, and it is help which is intended to bring the learner closer to a state of competence which will enable them eventually to complete such a task on their own.*

Hammond (2001: 6) suggests that scaffolding should be offered at both a macro and a micro level, with macro-level scaffolding related to the class goals and the selection and sequencing of tasks, and micro-level scaffolding relating to the interactions between teacher and students. In the context of writing, students need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully write a text of a certain genre. To this end, the teaching and learning is concerned with constructing shared understandings and shared knowledge, firstly through spoken interactions (Hammond 2001: 21). Students need opportunities to talk through their ideas and points of view with the teacher and their classmates to develop 'new ways of thinking and understanding' and as a source for shared understandings between teacher and student (Hammond 2001: 13).

Gibbons (2002: 47) argues that the role of the teacher in student and teacher interactions is to be a leader from behind; this is achieved by the teacher guiding, reporting, recasting and reformulating to push students to go beyond the unproblematic. In addition, activities within a genre-based curriculum cycle 'which explicitly focus[es] attention on both content and language' are advocated to give students the strong support they need 'to engage successfully with educational knowledge' (Hammond 2001: 29). Delpit (cited in Hammond 2001: 59) advocates explicit teaching of writing conventions in the context of teaching African American students (Hammond 2001: 59).

As part of the special focus writing class program, students were given opportunities to 'practise language and to practise different aspects of the target task, in

less complex, less demanding situations' (Hammond 2001: 50). In this scaffolding approach to writing, at each stage, students were given 'systematic guidance and support' until they were able to carry out the writing task on their own (Gibbons 2002: 67). These practices are consistent with approaches that, in the context of teaching English as a second language in Aboriginal education, Murray has described as 'exploring and exploiting texts' as a means of increasing students' interaction with and understanding of texts and students creating texts of their own (Murray 1995: 42).

The identification of these practices was important in that it allowed them to be incorporated into the design of the writing class in a systematic fashion. These practices, together with the findings from the pilot study discussed above, were used to guide the design and implementation of the writing class, the focus of this study.

The study

The aims of the study were:

- To describe teachers' and students' perspectives on teaching strategies used to teach writing
- To describe teachers' and students' perspectives on a special focus writing class.

The priority for this writing class was to encourage 'target group' writers (students who demonstrated writing characteristics, detailed previously) to join the class. To do this, it was necessary to specifically select participants. Accordingly, 40 students were invited to join a special-focus writing class, in the morning or in the afternoon. Students were selected on the basis of the previous term's writing assessment task which all of the students had completed. All of the students selected demonstrated a number of the writing characteristics outlined previously, and were students who the teachers believed would have difficulty with writing assessment tasks.

The selected students were given letters of invitation, and teachers explained the content of the letter to the students individually and encouraged them to consider taking the class. Twenty-five of the invited 40 students enrolled in the class, with the remaining 15 being unable to attend for various reasons. Six other students, recommended by their teachers, also joined the class as they had similar writing characteristics and needs to the invited students.

Based on the findings of the pilot study, it was decided that only one genre, the argument text, would be covered in the special focus writing class, since it was important to limit the content of the writing class to ensure that the learners had a clear understanding of the genre, and were able to write a text successfully. This would serve as part of the macro-level scaffolding of the class (Hammond 2001: 6), with the goal of the class being explicit as learning how to write an argument text, an achievable goal.

Three classes were run, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. One of the morning classes consisted of nine students, with four students from Sudan, two from Sierre Leone, one from Vietnam, one from Somalia and one from Iran. The other morning class, with students at a higher level, consisted of 11 students, nine from Sudan, one from Burma and one from Thailand. There were 11 students in the afternoon class, five from Sudan, and one from each of Somalia, Liberia, Sierre Leone, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The educational backgrounds of the learners were quite diverse, ranging from very limited or sporadic formal education with low levels of literacy, to university level qualifications. All of the students had very good oracy but their writing lacked structure and clarity.

The study again followed an action research spiral. Data included teachers' weekly diary reflections on the class material; students' weekly writing plans and written work; students' comments during mini-conferences and their 'thinking-aloud' planning; students' comments during class discussions on the strategies and content of the class; and an end of term survey.

In the teaching of the class, the two teachers taught using shared principles and materials, and used and made explicit to the students, the strategies that were being used in the writing class each week. The principles (or teachers' mantra) for each lesson are summarised below:

- Use a genre-based curriculum cycle
- Provide macro and micro-level scaffolding
- Use accessible texts
- Be explicit about how, what and why every activity is being done
- Encourage questions and interaction, and listening to each other
- Lead from behind
- Build on existing understandings to link old with new language and language uses (Gibbons 2002: 50)

- Get to know as much about the learners as possible, teasing out their prior learning experiences and knowledge
- Explore and exploit texts.

Worksheets were created for the class, with the teaching strategy being used for the activity identified at the top of the sheet. These strategies included:

- Building knowledge of genre*
- Comparing a spoken and written text
- Analysing a model text*
- Sequencing a cut-up text to learn about the organisation of a text* (paragraphs, sentences)
- Noticing language use in a text*
- Learning a metalanguage to talk about texts
- Noticing grammatical features in a model text
- Using model sentences to write your own sentences
- Practising planning your writing*
- Using a model text to write your own text*
- Participating in a mini-conference and thinking aloud about your writing
- Revising your text
- Noticing spelling patterns and spelling mistakes, to improve spelling.

Strategies identified with an asterisk (*) were used in every class. A sample work sheet is presented in Figure 2.

Findings

The teachers' decision to present only one genre was validated, with the students needing a great deal of class time and class 'talk' to understand the genre and then to write texts. From the ongoing reflections on the class, the teachers found that there were some strategies that were very effective in the teaching of the special focus writing class. These strategies are outlined below.

Model texts were explored and exploited in each lesson. Exploring and exploiting a text involved the following sorts of activities: describing the purpose of a text; noticing organisation, language use and grammatical features of a text; labelling a text; sequencing a text using cut up sentences of a model text; writing the plan of a model text; and using a model text to write an original text.

> **Strategy: Planning your writing**
>
> **Activity:** Fill in the writing plan below.
>
> **Opinion:** 'I think watching TV is a great way to improve your English.'

Introduction paragraph

Watching TV – great for learning English _____

First body paragraph (first reason) (**TELL**)

_____

supporting ideas (**SHOW/explain**)

_____

_____

_____

Second body paragraph (second reason) (**TELL**)

_____

supporting ideas (**SHOW/explain**)

_____

_____

_____

Third body paragraph (final reason) (**TELL**)

_____

supporting ideas (**SHOW/explain**)

_____

_____

_____

Summary/conclusion paragraph

_____

Figure 2   Sample work sheet

The students were very interested in all aspects of texts, in text analysis and in the topics of the texts. Students also responded particularly well to whole-class development of a text, or the teaching of a specific grammar point when it involved 'chalk' and talk. Sequencing of the text at paragraph and sentence level using cut-up texts was a challenging activity which the students enjoyed doing individually and in pairs. This activity clearly helped them to understand text organisation and was an activity which they noted in their end of term survey that they did not do in their full-time English class.

Students were assisted to develop explicit plans for their writing. All of the texts were planned using a one-page planning work sheet (see Figure 2) before writing. This was found to be very helpful and ensured that the argument the students wrote would be well supported. As one student commented (referring to planning): 'This is great. I've never done this before.' In response to the question in the end-of-term survey asking what they had learned, one student wrote, 'I learned more in writing class especially to plan before writing.' Another student wrote, 'It help especially in plan and putting words together.' Again, this was an activity that students noted they did not do in their full-time English class.

Students were also encouraged to actively reflect on what they were writing while they were writing. While students were writing up the plan for their argument texts, the teachers assisted them to think out loud about how they were going to build their argument. This activity revealed that many students had difficulty supporting their main arguments. The teachers' mantra soon became, 'You've told me, now show me.' Or 'I don't believe you. Show me!' (Write a supporting sentence).

The students were also shown and encouraged to think about models of the kinds of texts that they were going to write. Finding authentic model texts at an appropriate language level proved impossible, with the consequence that model texts were created by the teachers. These texts were created and adapted to be accessible to students and to provide a model of the kind of writing they might be expected to produce. For the most part, the texts covered topics that were thought to be familiar to the students, and of relevance and interest to them. In addition, the texts provided topics that the students could readily discuss and write about or could write about taking more than one point of view. The topics included:

- My hometown is a great place to live
- Black is the best colour to wear
- It is good for elderly parents to live with their children

- TAFE is a good place to study
- Flies (the insects) are not all bad
- Watching videos at home is better than going to the cinema
- It is good for children to have a pet
- Using a credit card can be beneficial
- Watching TV is a great way to improve your English.

On the whole, the students responded well to these topics. There were lively class discussions about the topics, and the students were generally able to write about them. However, the topic of credit card use was not familiar to many of the African students, and therefore difficult for those students to write about, though these students found it interesting to listen to other students explain credit card usage. This raised the issue of the danger of making assumptions about shared knowledge of cultural practices. This issue was again clearly brought home in a discussion on the benefits of studying at TAFE.[45] In this activity, students were given a plan with three main reasons why TAFE was a good place to study, and then the class discussed how the reasons could be supported. One reason given in the plan was that TAFE teachers were kind. The assumption underlying this was that students would find it quite easy to write a few supporting statements showing the teachers were indeed kind. However, some students said that the teachers were too kind because they did not get angry when the students came to class late or did not complete the set homework, and therefore they were unable to write many points. These students thought the 'kindness' was actually evidence of a lack of care for the students and that teachers needed to be stricter (see also Chapter 8 for further discussion of these issues).

A vital part of the overall strategy was providing opportunities to work one-on-one with the teacher on the meanings that originated with the student. Through in-class mini-conferences, the teachers could also tease out gaps in shared cultural understandings. For example, one student wrote, to support her argument about going to the cinema, that watching movies was a good way to find a nice boyfriend. She supported this argument by writing that 'you can sit behind a boy and see how he is (behaves) with his girlfriend'. The teacher was rather confused by this argument because finding a new boyfriend at the cinema was not in her realm of experience. In the mini-conference, the student explained to the teacher how young singles in her country often made new friends and looked for prospective boyfriends/girlfriends at the cinema. With this information in mind the teacher and student then worked on strengthening her argument for the uninformed reader.

Mini-conference time was also used to work on a student's particular writing weaknesses. For example, for one student, some of the mini-conference was used to work on his difficulty with 'never-ending' sentences. The use of mini-conferences was popular with students. For example, one student said, 'I like to talk to the teacher about my writing. It helps me understand better.'

In the nine-week class the teachers saw evidence of improved text organisation and coherence, and also in all of the students' ability to write an argument. By the end of the class, the students were able to plan, develop and write a logical opinion text and provide supporting evidence for their opinions, although their sentences of support were not always accurately expressed.

One significant area of the students' writing which the teachers considered they were unable to address adequately in the writing class relates to accuracy of expression and to the students' writing characteristics. The students wrote long sentences with many ideas seemingly mixed together in one sentence. Several strategies were tried to help students to overcome this problem. One strategy was to have the student read the 'long' sentence to the teacher, and to notice where they paused. The teacher would write that part of the text as one sentence. After completing this activity, the teacher and student went back over the student's sentence, teasing out meaning and then comparing the student's expression with a similar sentence the teacher modelled. This seemed to work well but was time consuming because of its sentence-by-sentence approach. Another strategy included whole class deconstruction of 'problem' sentences, followed by rewriting of the sentence into shorter sentences. A further strategy was for the teacher to rewrite the sentence into a more coherent sentence or sentences and then use the re-written sentence(s) as the basis of a whole class activity with students and teacher discussing and then experimenting with rewording and sentence boundaries.

Of the 21 students who completed the end of term survey, 19 stated that they thought their writing had improved because of the special focus writing class, and two students stated that they did not know if their writing had improved. All stated they had learned how to write an argument and many commented that they had learned how to plan and organise their writing. All of the students agreed that the special focus writing class had helped them with writing in their full-time English class. One student wrote, 'Before the class I was writing just mess and not ordered but now I know how to order information and write it.' All 21 students indicated that they thought the strategies of planning before writing, whole class planning of texts, and sequencing activities were useful

strategies. The strategy of writing out a plan for their own texts, and learning about text organisation through cut-up sentences were strategies they had not previously used in their English studies.

Discussion

The special focus writing class gave the high oracy learners with particular writing characteristics an opportunity to focus on developing writing skills in the context of exploring one text type. With an emphasis on exploring model texts and then planning texts with teacher support, the class provided a means by which the students could be encouraged to separate the 'spontaneity' of their oral communication from the greater formality of writing. The students were thus able to address their need to plan their writing so that they could write a well-organised text. Teacher observation confirmed that the greatest improvement in the students' written work was in their rhetorical organisation.

The class also provided a means by which the students could gain an awareness of sentence boundaries through whole-class and mini-conference analysis of problematic sentences. However, strategies need to be further reviewed and developed to better address problems with sentence formation.

The small class size and the limited content of the special focus writing class meant that the students were able to explore and exploit a writing genre as a means of enhancing understanding of these texts, interacting with these texts and improving the skills needed to write such text. Much of each lesson was spent on whole-class–teacher-led discussion of model opinion texts and this was seen to be valuable from the perspective of both teachers and students. These discussions were opportunities for collaborative learning. As Mercer (cited in Hammond 2001: 13) states, 'Not only do teachers impact on students' learning; students in turn impact on teachers' understandings'. Teachers and students were active participants in the learning process in these discussions, 'thus moving away for the well-worn debate around teacher-directed versus student-centred learning' (Hammond 2001: 13).

Class time spent on planning texts (both as a whole class activity and as an individual activity with an opportunity for teacher feedback) gave the students the opportunity to talk about, and talk through, texts, to increase their understanding of text structure and organisation. The students could then use the same planning processes when writing their own texts, and they could talk through their plans with the teacher in a mini-conference.

The one-genre approach allowed students to repeat and revisit tasks, such as using cut-up texts to experiment with and determine text organisation with different model texts of the same genre. This study has demonstrated that repetition and revisiting helped to enrich the students' knowledge and understanding of the genre. The use of specifically written model texts aided the learning process because, with some of the complexities of texts removed, students were able to comprehend the texts and then use the text to write their own texts.

A special focus writing class which focuses on the knowledge, language and skills of a particular genre, and allows time for student-teacher interaction, offers the strong support (that is, the scaffolding) that students who have difficulty with writing seem to need to understand and write texts (Hammond 2001: 29). Certainly, this study has demonstrated that the students in the special focus writing classes benefited from having the time, the space and the strategies to interact with, and write, texts of one genre.

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Notes

44   The CSWE (Certificates in Spoken and Written English) is a nationally accredited curriculum framework assessed through certificates corresponding to four levels of English language proficiency which provide statements of learning outcomes in the form of language competencies in oral interaction, reading and writing (NSW AMES 1998).

45   TAFE = Technical and Further Education; many of the English classes in the Adult Migrant English program are conducted as part of the TAFE system offerings.

Appendix 8

Examples of model texts

> **The Echidna**
>
> The echidna is one of only two Australian monotremes, or egg-laying mammals. It is one of the world's most primitive mammals and it is found throughout Australia.
>
> The echidna is a small mammal with a long snout, long claws and short legs. It is covered in long spines.
>
> The echidna is a highly specialised feeder. It exposes termites by breaking open nests with its strong forepaws or snout and then extracs the termites with its long sticky tongue.
>
> Female echidnas lay a soft-shelled egg and feed their young on milk. The egg is laid into the pouch on the belly of the female. It hatches after ten days and the young remains in the pouch for three months.

Adapted from 'Family walks in Perth outdoors', Department of Conservation and Land Management, 1996

> **Perth**
>
> Perth, which is located on the southwest coast of Western Australia, is the capital of WA. It has a population of 1.2 million people. Perth is a quiet and clean city.
>
> Perth has a fairly temperate climate with a few very hot weeks in summer and some cold nights in winter. The weather throughout the year is usually sunny with most rainfall occurring in winter.
>
> There are many interesting places to visit and activities to do in Perth. Kings Park is a very large park with many native bushes and flowers. It is a nice place for a picnic or a walk. The city centre is also a good place to visit because there are many shops and interesting-looking buildings. Perth has an art museum and a history museum too. Because Perth is on the Swan River, people can enjoy sailing, boating and walks along the river bank.
>
> The people of Perth are friendly and relaxed. They are very helpful to visitors to the city. Perth is multicultural, so there are many different nationalities of people living there, such as Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, and British. With people from many different countries, Perth has a wide variety of foods and customs to experience.
>
> Perth is a lovely city. In Perth people can enjoy a comfortable lifestyle.

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Section 4:   Final reflections

Chapter 12: Reflections on the patterns from the kaleidoscope

Gillian Wigglesworth and Howard Nicholas

Throughout the project, we have been influenced by the metaphor of the kaleidoscope. With each small movement, the patterns change. In a similar way, throughout this project we have explored the patterns of the relationships between the learners and their learning environment, and between the teachers and their learners. During the year that we were collecting the data in multiple settings, and focusing on the different facets of this study, we were trying to understand the motivations and concerns of all of the participants in the study. We worked with a broad range of learners each of whom had their own views of the context in which they were learning, of their own learning, and the learning of those they worked alongside. Into this mix, we also introduced the voices of the teachers. Inevitably, our own perspectives, elicited from both our interactions with all of the participants in this study, and in our analyses of the data, have influenced our approach. However, our major aim throughout has been to remain true to the data and to the views of our participants, and we have endeavoured to present as reliable as possible a picture of the learners' experiences. Consistent with the idea that in a kaleidoscope the picture does not remain constant, we found not only new things when moving to new perspectives, but also that the perspectives that emerged were not always consistent with the views that we had previously gained.

In Chapter 1, we discussed the fact that our major objectives revolved around the four key variables proposed by Breen (2001: 1). The first of these asked what the learners themselves contribute to the process, and addressed the question: 'what are the specific contributions of the persons doing the learning?'. The second concerned the kind of language data that was made available to the learners in the context in which they were learning, asking: 'under what conditions or circumstances does learning take place?'. The third question related to the interaction between the learners and their environment in terms of the actual learning process, thus essentially asking: 'how is the learning done?'. Finally, the actual outcomes of the learning process were investigated, by asking: 'What is actually

learned? What is it that people learn and what constitutes significant learning in these groups?'. Below, we briefly revisit each of these issues and consider what we have learned about the learners and their learning in the context of the Adult Migrant English Program in Australia.

The data set that has resulted from this investigation is a unique one. Central to it are the evolving longitudinal perspectives with a very specific focus on learner perceptions, and the relationship of those perceptions to teacher perceptions. However, the contexts in which we obtained the data, both inside and outside classrooms, in different states throughout Australia, in a variety of program types, and with learners from diverse backgrounds, meant that the learner perceptions were quite varied. The data set is also unique in that in collecting the data we elicited two very different types of content – firstly, we used a range of language tasks to elicit learners' performances in their second language with a view to identifying the changing patterns in their linguistic ability as they moved through their English language program. Secondly, the learners' own perceptions of their learning and of their lives, and the learning environment in which they found themselves, were discussed in some depth with each learner individually, and over a long period of time, with the help of an interpreter in the learners' first languages. This allowed learners, teachers and researchers to establish a long-term relationship, and allowed contrasting perceptions to be compared. In contrast, other long-term studies of adult learners have tended to gather multiple data types, but have focused more or less exclusively on the language data obtained either from a very specific elicitation task (the 'Modern Times' film retelling of the ESF project) (Perdue 1993a; 1993b) or the unstructured interviews of the ZISA project (Clahsen 1984). In what follows, we return to our initial questions as a way of framing our reflections.

What do learners bring to the learning environment?

As we have discussed at various points throughout this volume, every individual is a complex mix, which is the result of both individual traits and previous cultural, social and educational experiences. Thus, when people move to a new country they bring with them not only their personalities and individual foibles, but also a wealth of previous experience. All of these factors help to shape the person who arrives in the language classroom. The learners who were involved in this project came from a wide range of backgrounds – some were already literate while others were not; some were highly educated and some were not; some came with families, and others did not.

We have pointed to the complex and varied language learning outcomes and the different ways in which the learners participated in their classes. We have not undertaken a detailed analysis to track how the backgrounds and experiences of each particular individual shaped what she or he did and learned, preferring rather to outline the nature of the diversity and to point to the need to work with individuals to understand their particular circumstances and how those circumstances influence their attitudes and behaviours.

Nevertheless, it is possible to make certain observations about the trends that we observed. Despite their diverse backgrounds, all of the learners brought with them a desire to find support and shelter within the AMEP classes. Whether this was in contrast with previous (sometimes very negative) experiences of education or as part of a perception of the AMEP classroom as a context for early engagement with Australian society, the learners consistently reported finding a sense of comfort and support with their teachers and in the program as a whole. All of the learners also brought with them a sense of the significance of English for their lives in Australia and a desire to gain as much control over the language as possible. They varied in the extent to which they reported success in achieving this. Some had, at least initially, possibly unrealistic expectations of how rapidly they could make progress. Others had personal inhibitions which may have resulted in them being less active and involved in the classroom than they could have been. Some feared being embarrassed by asking too many questions. But all of the learners were able to articulate and understand the complexity of what they were learning. While some expressed a preference for focusing on particular skills at a particular time, all recognised the importance of learning across the range of the four macroskills, and the centrality of speaking as a way of engaging with the wider community and its institutions.

What are the conditions and circumstances under which learning takes place?

We observed a range of classroom types, including those where the language of instruction was English, and those where English was but one of the official languages of instruction. We observed classes that focused on English learning and classes that focused on the use of information technology. Overall, we observed programs in which the teaching and learning of English was intertwined with a sense of induction into life in Australia, which at the same time acknowledged (in ways both implicit and explicit) previous life experiences and cultural systems other than the dominant Australian one. We observed teachers

trying to balance the need to support learners after previous traumatic experiences, with a need to challenge these learners to undertake new ways of learning and communicating. We observed many teachers trying to make sense of learners who offered approaches and responses to their classes that appeared different from those they had previously experienced.

Whereas we had anticipated that we would find many learners with limited literacy in their first languages, in fact, we found relatively few of these learners (although the study reported here by Gunn is a clear exception to this). Most of the learners with whom we worked were quite literate in at least one language. Their previous experience of schooling meant that they brought with them expectations of teacher roles that were shaped by their previous experiences. This led to some areas of cultural confusion and uncertainty for both teachers and learners when, almost inevitably, teacher and learner perceptions of various aspects of the program were not always in agreement. The teachers' perceptions of the learners and their lives focused on the difficulties many of the learners had endured in the months and years before they came to Australia. For this reason there was a strong emphasis among the teachers on empathy and understanding when learners came late to class, for example. This meant that teachers did not necessarily challenge learners on why they were late to class (although at the same time, such behaviour meant learners missed important aspects of the class). While teachers did this to support their learners, in some cases, the learners interpreted such behaviour ambiguously. So for some, this 'understanding' with its consequent lack of questioning about why the student might be late, was interpreted as a lack of interest. For others, the teachers' failure to censure such behaviour was viewed as 'slack' compared with the types of school regimes which they had generally previously encountered. Thus, in the absence of any other measuring stick, learners were uncertain how to interpret the supportive and non-intrusive behaviour of many of their teachers. For some of these learners, it was difficult to distinguish between an 'Australian' respect for privacy, and a lack of concern. For teachers, there was a similar sense of uncertainty in knowing when to push for explanations and when to acknowledge an adult's right to make choices about life priorities.

For both learners and teachers there was some ambiguity around the notions of support and challenge. As we indicated above, one of the features of the AMEP programs that the learners valued was the fact that the classes were organised to reflect different educational principles, and that the classes were safe and supportive environments in which the learners learn and discover the challenges

of the language. But, as mentioned, many learners had been through previous educational experiences in which teachers and schools had been perceived as harsh and demanding. There was some confusion, therefore, in knowing how to interpret the much less structured, and less demanding, classroom environment in which they found themselves. The challenge for the teachers is to provide a supportive and caring learning environment which at the same time challenges a variety of learners who may approach the learning activity in many different ways.

How do the learners learn?

The learners frequently reported the use of strategies that reflected more traditional approaches to education, as well as extensive use of their peers in a variety of ways. They were frustrated if these approaches were not as effective as they had hoped and, in a substantial number of cases, reported needing the assistance of the teacher to develop alternative strategies. Where teachers were either not conscious of this need, or not able to sufficiently address it, learners were liable to remain 'stuck'. Nevertheless, the strategies that the learners used were broadly consistent with what is known about learner strategies in the literature, and provided reinforcement of the idea that the ability to deploy a range of strategies best supports learner progress. Equally important is the ability of the teacher to introduce language concepts and activities in a range of different modes to ensure that each learner's opportunity to learn is maximised.

Clearly teachers were crucial to the learning process. The learners needed their teachers to model uses of English for them and to provide them with multiple opportunities to engage with the new language. This was often expressed as a desire for repetition, but appeared in reality to mean a desire for repeated opportunities to hear the new language and explore its uses. Inevitably, the personalities of the learners have an important role to play here. It seemed, particularly with speaking, that opportunities to speak, repeat, and question in the classroom were closely tied to each individual learner's confidence in speaking out in front of the class. It would appear that one of the areas that teachers and learners will need to explore together is how this desire for recycling can be effectively related to and differentiated from traditional models of teachers talking and learners repeating.

The bilingual models of classroom interactions explored in this project suggest that such models provide particular learners (for example, older, less confident learners, or learners with low educational backgrounds) with the crucial support they need in their learning programs. The bilingual classroom provides an

especially safe and supportive environment in which learners are able to discover the intricacies of language without fear of ridicule by other more able learners, with a teacher with whom they interact on an equal basis, and most importantly, in an adult and mature manner, exploring issues and concepts which would otherwise be seriously compromised by teachers' and learners' lack of mutual linguistic understanding. Equally, however, learners were fully aware that support must be tempered by challenge as their linguistic resources increase.

What do the learners learn?

Clearly the learners gained a great deal from their experiences in the AMEP classes. In most cases they gained greatly in confidence, and in the confidence to produce more extended English. Although this extended talk was not always accompanied by comparable levels of refinement in the approximation to what a 'native speaker' of English might do, as they continue to progress and learn and interact in English, their language is likely to become increasingly refined. It was clear that learners learned at different rates, and had quite different motivations, and it is likely that these variables affected the manner in which they approached the learning activities. While language was clearly the central focus of what they wanted to learn, many learners also gained extremely valuable 'non-linguistic' knowledge about sources of information, the ability to question, and how they could negotiate a wide range of necessary functions for their life in Australia. Not all of the learners were always satisfied in the short term, and most notable here was the case of the learner who expressed such dissatisfaction that he left the AMEP to pursue studies elsewhere, only to return because the AMEP offerings were, indeed, better suited to his needs than those he had sought with a different institution. There is, therefore, an important distinction to be made between short and long-term perspectives.

The importance of exploring this balance between linguistic learning and socio-cultural learning so that the learners will feel more empowered to engage with Australian institutions in English is absolutely crucial. For the learners, this is reflected in every aspect of their lives once they walk out of their English classes. As adults in an adult world, these learners long for independence, integration into their new communities, and to understand the cultural institutions they now live with. This, perhaps not surprisingly given their circumstances, remained their greatest expressed need even after extended periods in their English classes.

Conclusion

Two major themes emerge from our analyses and interactions with the data. These themes are support, and challenge. For learners, teachers and researchers alike there are some senses in which these themes are conflicting as we look at what people are doing, and of what they are trying to do. We have a sense of the learners and what they say about what they experience as challenging and what they find supportive. We have a sense from our own observations of what appears to be challenging in English and what the learners do to support themselves in their attempts to communicate. We have a sense from the teachers' comments both of the teachers' perceptions of what the students have found challenging, and of the ways in which they have worked through these challenges. From the teachers we know what they have found challenging in their own practice, and what they have endeavoured to do in order to simultaneously support and challenge the students.

Perhaps this notion of whose interpretation counts under what circumstances might be taken as a metaphor for the project as a whole. Apart from the learning of English, the negotiation of a place in a new society and working out how to interpret that society's actions and attitudes is at the core of the experience of recently arrived migrants in any context. In the best possible outcome, this exploration feeds into the learning of English so that the learners feel empowered to use their English in ways that give them a measure of control over their own lives and an ability to contribute to positive change in their new society. The learners' new experiences and challenges will interact with earlier experiences and challenges, and be more or less understandable because of previous experiences. Individuals will interact in different ways with these new experiences, and at the same time each new experience is likely to contribute to changing perspectives, changing attitudes and different views. As each of our participants continues through life and learning, the kaleidoscope will revolve, reflecting the evolving patterns of their lives with the integration of new experiences and knowledge, with the old.

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