



JALT
THE JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING
全国語学教育学会

Between the Keys

A Publication of the JALT Materials Writers SIG

Spring 2013
Volume XXI, Number 1

Co-ordinator's Column

Nate French

2

MW's *Between the Keys*

Welcome to the Spring edition of *Between the Keys*, 2013! This edition is the maiden voyage for Eric Lerstrom (our new publication chair) as the head of *Between the Keys*! Before anything else, I'd like to congratulate him on a job well done! Being a publication chair is not the flashiest role in the SIG, and sometimes publication chairs can be under appreciated. However, that will not be the case in the MW SIG! The publication chair is a very crucial role, and without it we would be demoted to a lower ranked SIG or disbanded. So thank you Eric for keeping us afloat! A clapping of hands to you sir.

In addition to this issue being Eric's first, this issue is also especially important to me as it includes my MW SIG grant articles. I am especially proud of the work and research that has gone into writing them, so please take a look at the articles if you have the time to do so. In addition, I'd like to say that the MW SIG grant was one of the best things that happened to me in JALT. In honor of this, and in honor of all members who are looking to create new materials, I'd like to announce that the

MW SIG grant will be happening again in 2013! Ready your materials and look for an announcement soon!

In other news, the Pan-SIG 2013 is just around the corner on May 18th & 19th in Nanzan University, Nagoya. A big thank you to all of you who made submissions and congratulations to the presenters who were accepted! We will have 6 presentations this year, along with one tri-SIG forum conducted in coordination with Framework and Language Portfolio (FLP) and Task Based Learning (TBL). As a member on the organizing committee, I can say that I think this year's Pan-SIG conference will be even more eye opening than previous years with the addition of the tri-SIG forums (every SIG has a group forum), and that there will be good times held by all. I hope to see all of you down there! ■

MW-SIG Web Site

<http://www.materialswritersorg>

The site contains articles on topics ranging from copyright to desktop publishing techniques, an extensive list of publishers including contact information, tutorials and software recommendations, and information on submission requirements for *Between the Keys*.

MW-SIG Mailing List

mw-sig@materialswriters.org

From the Editor

Eric Lerstrom

Welcome to the first issue of *Between the Keys* for 2013 and my first issue as editor. I am very proud and excited to be taking over this post from Jim Smiley. He has done a fantastic job and I have enormous shoes to fill. Thank you Jim for all the help you have given me and for being there when I needed a hand. I truly appreciate it.

There have been a lot of changes in the Materials Writers SIG officers lately, with Nate French stepping up to become the the Co-ordinator and Membership Chair in the middle of October, as well as Azusa Sato becoming the Programme and Publicity Chairs and I becoming the Publications Chair later in the year. Azusa and I are relatively new to the SIG so we hope to have a chance to meet many more members at the upcoming Pan-SIG Conference on May 18th and 19th at Nanzan University in Nagoya. Fortunately Scott Peterson is remaining as Treasurer and Jim Smiley is still available as Member-at-large, so they can help keep us newcomers on track. Also Brian Cullen is retaining his job on BTK Layout and Proofing. Thank you Brian for the excellent job that you do making BTK look so good.

Our main article this month comes from our own Co-ordinator Nate French entitled "Reward Probability and Uncertainty." In this article Nate explains how the brain releases dopamine (a natural brain chemical which gives a feeling of euphoria) when someone attempts an action with an uncertain outcome such as gambling or taking a test. He then goes on to explain

how this can be applied to testing situations to help build the students' motivation through can-do testing and allowing the students to retake the test for full marks.

In "Creating Classroom Audio using Online Sources", Jim Smiley describes some of the advantages and disadvantages in generating classroom content using text-to-speech (TTS) audio synthesis. This article is interesting because he also goes on to explain in some detail the steps a novice could take to create great sounding TTS audio for the classroom at no cost to the teacher.

From Brian Cullen and Sarah Mulvey we get the "Writers Point" column, where they spoke to Tom Kenny, author of several textbooks including *Nice Talking with You*. In this article Tom talks about his two approaches to writing materials; "scope and sequence" and "supplement." He also discusses his newest project, *Global Voices*, and some of the difficulties that he had to overcome when working on it.

Last year the Materials Writers SIG created a grant to help new writers create their own materials. The winner of the first annual MW Grant was Nate French (before he was an officer). In his article "Variable Sentence Response" Nate explains about the needs that he found his students having and the materials that he created to help his students overcome those issues. Above and beyond this article, Nate has placed a large sample of his materials on the MWSIG website (www.materialswriters.org).

3

SPRING 2013 Vol. XXI, No. 1

org) in his profile page. If you are interested in creating your own profile page and/or showing off some of the materials that you are creating, you can send your profile and materials to webmaster@materialswriters.org.

Finally we have two My Share submissions for this issue. The first

is from Noboru Sakai entitled "Word Calculation Game" where the students will have to guess vocabulary terms by adding and subtracting letters. In the second, "A Guest from Overseas", Gregory Wroblewski gives us a four-skill lesson plan designed for adult business English learners. ■

Submission Guidelines

NEXT DEADLINE: July 15

Between the Keys (BtK) welcomes submissions in English on all topics related to the development of pedagogic materials. Between the Keys is distributed online both in HTML and PDF formats. We gladly review articles for publication from anyone, however priority for publication will be given to current members of the JALT MW-SIG. We invite any interested person to submit articles of the following types:

- main research articles for vetting team inclusion (between 2000-4000 words)*
- research articles for inclusion at the editor's discretion (1500-3000 words). Longer articles may be divided into sections and published in subsequent issues.
- perspective/opinion pieces (up to 1000 words)
- book reviews (up to 1000 words)
- annotated bibliographies
- short summaries/reviews of journal articles
- responses to BtK articles
- descriptions/reviews of websites related to pedagogic materials development
- letters to the editor
- My Share-type articles showing

materials in use

- interviews with materials-related writers, publishers, academics
- reviews of materials-related technology for upcoming issues.

*BtK is not a refereed publication on the whole. However, one article per issue will be. This is to improve the quality of materials development research and to further promote individual author's careers. Main article submissions must follow our Submission Guidelines.

Publication Schedule & Deadlines

Between the Keys is published three times a year, in:

- March (volume one),
- August (volume two)
- and December (volume three).

Submissions for consideration for any issue should be received by the editor by the 15th of the month prior to publication at the latest, i.e. February 15, July 15 and November 15.

Most articles will be published at the discretion of the editor except for refereed main articles, which will be reviewed by the MW-SIG vetting committee. If you wish your article to

be our Main Article, please indicate so in your cover letter.

You can consult the BtK archive to compare your article for general style, length and appropriacy.

Articles are available to members only for the two years after publication and open access afterwards. The copyright statement is: "All articles contained in *Between the Keys* © 2012 by their respective authors. This newsletter © 2013 by Materials Writers SIG."

This means that individual authors are free to disseminate their own works on, for example, their websites and in open access repositories, but that must be limited to their own article only and not the whole publication.

Furthermore, copyright for the formatting and layout belong to the Materials Writers SIG, and so any content that is published outside must not be a copy of the BtK article but only the text.

Submissions Process

- Send an email to publications@materialswriters.org with your article attached
- Send an email to publications@materialswriters.org stating your intention to submit before the next deadline. This is very useful in planning the next issue.
- If the document includes graphics, drawings, etc., they should be save as separate files and sent as e-mail attachments.

If you are unsure of the format to use, please ask the Layout Editor: layout@materialswriters.org
Editor Contact Information: publications@materialswriters.org

Questions?

Anyone with questions can reach the editor at the email address above.

Between the Keys is published by the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group (MW-SIG). The editors welcome contributions in the following areas: publishing issues, classroom activities, page layout or desktop publishing, experiences in publishing or materials design, announcements of materials-related meetings or newly published materials, or any other articles focusing on aspects of materials writing or publishing. For information about reprinting articles, please contact the editor. All articles contained in *Between the Keys* ©2013 by their respective authors. This newsletter ©2013 by Materials Writers SIG.



Programme Chair Column

Azusa Sato

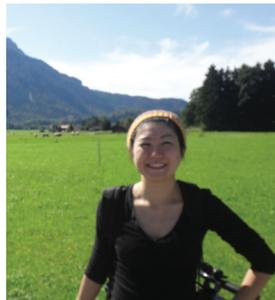
Hello and hajime-mashite! My name is Azusa and I'm the new Program Chair. I am excited to join and work for this group. I'm hoping to see you all sometime in the near future and share your ideas and experience.

I imagine that many of you are teachers who have already published textbooks or are writing or thinking of writing one. Perhaps you are an MW member because you are looking for some useful information to find a publisher or some tips to be successful in publishing? Or maybe, you are looking for a better way to help and reach other teachers with the materials you have made? Each of you has a different reason for joining MW, and I am sure that it makes our group more interesting and active.

For many years, I have worked as an ELT consultant for both local and international publishers before becoming a teacher. I introduced textbooks to teachers at conferences or university offices. It was an interesting and challenging job, and

I was proud of this work because of the role that consultants have in connecting teachers, publishers, and students. It is a big circle, and every element is important and linked with the others. Based on my experience, what I am hoping to do in this group is to find way of making these bonds stronger through an exchange of ideas and discussion.

I am hoping to learn a lot from everyone and I am looking forward to working in the MW SIG as the Programme Chair. I will inform everyone about events and conferences by email or on our website. I really hope everyone can be more involved and get even more value from the MW SIG. If anyone has any ideas about how to make our SIG better, please let me know. As I am a non-native English speaker, I will probably make some mistakes in writing and speaking so I thank everyone for their tolerance in advance. I hope that the coming school year will be a good one for all. Yoroshiku!☺



Azusa Sato

Reward Probability and Uncertainty

Nate French

I first heard about reward probability and uncertainty when I attended the keynote lecture by Tim Murphey (2010) at JALT national in Nagoya, although it was not called by this name at the time. This phenomenon was referred to as ‘dopamine surges’, which in essence is what it is, but the picture we received at this lecture was not complete (and to be fair the information given on the TED lecture that Tim Murphey sourced (Sapolsky, 2009) was also incomplete).

As I was very interested in these ‘dopamine surges’, I dug up the original research from *Science* (Fiorillo, Tobler, & Schultz, 2003). And although it was a bit cryptic in language, the information in this research article was far more in depth, and as such more useful. Therefore, this article seeks to outline their data and to apply it to language teaching.

The General Concepts

Dopamine is a natural chemical in our bodies which elicits euphoria, therefore motivating us to do things which give us this feeling. ‘Reward probability and uncertainty’ is the name given to the changes in dopamine that humans (and primates) experience when they encounter a challenge and/or a game where the outcome of their efforts is uncertain. A good example of the type of situation that this phenomenon applies to might be gambling or taking a test. Although taking a test does not seem like it would elicit any type of euphoria, I can assure everyone that it also fits the pattern.

There are three stages of this phenomenon; with each stage having its own nuances. Regardless of the outcome, there are guaranteed dopamine level changes in each stage.

The first stage is **capability**. This stage occurs very quickly, and is the ‘I think I can!’ stage. The second stage is **anticipation**. This stage occurs over a prolonged period of time. It is the ‘I wonder what will happen...’ stage. The final stage is **reward**. This stage also occurs very quickly, and is the ‘VICTORY!’ or ‘awww...’ stage.

To give an example of these stages in action: let’s imagine a student taking a test. The teacher walks in the room and hands the student the test. The student turns over the paper and looks at the test and thinks (Stage 1) “I can ace this test!” The student then finishes the test and hands it to the teacher, but won’t know the answer until the next class. (Stage 2) During this time the student is a little worried about how he/she did on the test. (Stage 2) The next class comes and the teacher is about to hand back the test grades. (Stage 2) The intensity of not knowing his/her score is building up. Finally, the teacher gives back the test, the student looks at his/her grade and thinks (Stage 3) “I got an A! YES!”

This story is a glimpse of how dopamine affects our system during a challenge and/or a game. One very interesting thing to note is that the level of dopamine experienced in all three stages is dependent on one subjective variable: the degree to which the person



(primate) believes they will be successful. Let's break down each stage and see how the degree of chance affects the amount of dopamine received.

Capability

Not surprisingly, the more capable a person thinks they are at doing a task, the more dopamine they receive. That said, this amount of dopamine received plateaus around 50%. Figure 1 scales this into relative terms based on percentages:

Chance (capability)	Dopamine received
0%	None
25%	Medium
50%	Max
75%	Max
100%	Max

Figure 1. Capability dopamine received with respect to chance

Anticipation

Anticipation dopamine levels are lower than *capability* and *reward*, but this is offset by the length in which the levels remain elevated. Unlike *capability* and *reward* which are nearly instantaneous, in some instances *anticipation* can last years (Sapolsky, 2009). Anticipation starts low, and gradually builds over time. Imagine a ramp. It is lowest at the beginning, and builds (although not necessarily uniformly) until its highest point just before the unveiling of success or failure.

Levels of dopamine for *anticipation* are highest when the chance is the most unsure: 50%. This is the point where anything could happen. Dopamine levels fall off once the chance starts to favor success or failure, and are non-existent

when chance is 0% or 100%.

Chance (anticipation)	Dopamine received
0%	None
25%	Medium
50%	Max
75%	Medium
100%	None

Figure 2. Anticipation dopamine received with respect to chance

Reward

Dopamine levels for reward are inversely proportional to the chance. That is, the lower the chance, the higher the received dopamine levels. Unlike *capability*, there is no cap on dopamine as there is with *reward*. However, if no reward is received, then dopamine levels actually decrease for all probabilities other than 0% (there is always a small active level of dopamine).

Chance (anticipation)	Dopamine received (success)	Dopamine received (failure)
0%	Max	None
25%	High	Negative
50%	Medium	Negative
75%	Low	Negative
100%	None	Negative

Figure 3. Reward dopamine received with respect to chance

Discussion

Overall, a 50% chance gives the most dopamine over the course of a challenge/ game if the student is successful. In light of this information, it might be advisable for teachers to put students in situations where students have a 50% chance at succeeding. However, teachers must be careful of two pitfalls with regards to traditional types of tests and evaluations. First of all, traditional evaluation tests (those which give a percentage) have subjective success values. One student may think an 80% on a test is a success, while another might think that a 90% is a failure. In order to circumvent this problem, it is possible for teachers to give 100% for successes and 0%

for failures. An example where this is applicable in language teaching is a 'Can do' test. If students can do the task well, they get a 100%, if not they receive a

zero.

The second pitfall is that failure leads to a decrease in dopamine. If dopamine elicits euphoria, then decreased levels lead to depression and a lack of motivation. This is something that is best to avoid. In order to solve this problem, we can take a lesson from gambling. Gamblers lose all the time, but they keep gambling. Why? I personally believe it's because gamblers can try again. They can try again for *the exact same reward*.

If applied to teaching, this means that students should get to retest as many times as they need to pass, and even if it takes five times to pass, they still get a 100%.

“Dopamine is a natural chemical in our bodies which elicits euphoria, therefore motivating us to do things which give us this feeling.”

Unfortunately, not all teaching situations allow for can-do tests with an unlimited amount of retakes. However, maximizing the situations in which

these are used would result in increased euphoria while learning for the students. This, in turn, may lead to highly sought after attributes in class: higher student enjoyment in learning, higher motivation to learn, higher perceived improvement, and a faster rate of actual improvement. As well, there is even the possibility that the application of these extrinsic motivational tools may lead to students becoming more intrinsically motivated to learn. Of course, this is all speculation, but I do not believe that this speculation is groundless; especially since the research I have done on my VSR materials (described in this issue) seems to show that these speculations are indeed true, and that utilizing reward probability and uncertainty should be a top priority for all teachers.

Sources

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Sapolsky, R. (2009). "The uniqueness of humans" Stanford's Class Day Lecture, Stanford, California, June 13, 2009. Retrieved from: http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_sapolsky_the_uniqueness_of_humans.html

"... the application of these extrinsic motivational tools may lead to students becoming more intrinsically motivated to learn."

Approaches to Material Writing

Brian Cullen & Sarah Mulvey

Recently we had the opportunity to speak to an old friend, wonderful materials writer, and long-term resident of Nagoya—Tom Kenny. Tom is probably best known for his book, *Nice Talking*



Writer's Point

with You which continues to be a popular choice to get students engaged in oral communication many years after it was originally published. When we asked Tom about his roots in material development, he told us; “I didn’t study it... never took a course in it. It’s just something that happened for me. It comes out of the desire to create. When we’re new to teaching, we always teach with some book that’s chosen *for* us, not *by* us. We learn pretty fast what works for us as teachers and what’s not our cup of tea.”

Tom appears to have a very organic approach to materials development and this has proven successful for him, although he has had to become flexible in his approach when he works with larger publishing companies. When he began teaching, he used several famous four-skill textbooks, cut out the sections that he couldn’t use in class, and then supplemented the textbooks with activities that appealed to him. This is an approach that many material writers in Japan will probably relate to. Certainly in our experience, the motivation for many teachers writing

textbooks in Japan tends to spring from a desire to improve a local learning situation with perceived problems rather than a desire to create a textbook that will reach a wide market, and many teachers will also have had Tom’s experience that; “After a while, you start to make supplements yourself, with your own voice.”

In more formal terms, Tom divides material writing into two approaches; the “scope and sequence” modular approach which is top-down, and the “supplement” approach, which is bottom up.

“In the former, you lay out a grand plan with topics, grammar points, or whatever, in a table form and then fill the modules with activities. That’s how Cengage Learning worked up the *Listening Advantage* series I did with them.” This approach tends to be common among large commercial publishers since it suits the needs of the editorial staff and helps the book to have systematic coverage of language points for a larger market.

In the other writing approach, Tom suggests that “you start with one element, like topic questions, test them out with students and refine them, work them up into supplements. From the supplements, you expand on the topics with scripts that turn into listening activities, with words you know students will need, which you turn into vocab sections, and so on. That’s how I developed *Nice Talking with You*.”

Global Voices

Tom used to be a DJ on a local radio station in Nagoya and is still well known for his great sense of humour. When we asked him to tell us about a recent project, he replied, "I just finished recording an album at EMI studios. It's called *Revolver*. I hope the fans will like it." Seriously, however, the latest project that Tom has been working on is called *Global Voices*. When he was working with Cambridge on the new editions of *Nice Talking with You 1 & 2*, he really wanted to include some language from non-native English speakers. He explains this by saying; "I'm a big believer in the idea that no one "owns" English, which probably surprises people, being that I'm American! So I worked with a small group of international students at my university. I asked them a question and let them answer it however they wanted. They didn't know the questions ahead of time, so all of it was improvised." You can hear these international students speaking at the page Tom has created at: <http://www.nicetalkingwithyou.com/global-voices-text1/>"

Global Voices was interesting in several ways. First, Tom points out that the audio from the students sounds so colorful—an array of different accents from Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia float over a nice music bed for students to enjoy while they're listening. The combination of unscripted, international English with a bit of music added in is pretty unusual from a traditional publishing perspective. Another interesting aspect of the project was the way that Tom packaged the material for use. For teachers and students everywhere, this material is totally free and includes twenty-four audio clips with

a downloadable listening activity for each. For teachers, he also created a video slideshow they can play in class to see and hear rather than just listening to the audio. Always willing to go the extra mile to really support teachers, Tom also made additional videos with a scrolling transcript of what they're saying: "Everything else these days is freemium-premium; why not ESL materials?"

Difficulties

In Global Voices, Tom found that the actual activities (the task students are supposed to do) were very hard to construct. "When you write scripted dialogues, you have to write with the task in mind, and then there's a lot of fine-tuning as you bounce back and forth between task and script. But when you're dealing with unscripted language, the tasks are much harder to create."

Write from the Heart

In closing, we would like to share a great tip that Tom offered for other materials writers. He had a terrific teacher in graduate school who had published several textbooks in linguistics. "They weren't easy reads, but they were incredibly lucid: beautifully organized, with no wasted language." Tom asked him once, over a beer at a party, how he learned to write like that and the teacher replied; "I explain it only how I can understand it." Tom never forgot that and recommends to other material writers to lay things out how you understand them, and how you would use them in class. "Write for you, not for a teacher in a McDonaldized English program. If you're writing from the heart, teachers will spot it."

Variable Sentence Response

Nathan French

Introduction

Before I get to the heart of this article, I'd like to say that I am very thankful to the Materials Writers SIG. I originally started off as a member who passively read the mailing list messages, attended materials presentations, and made some small scale materials presentations of my own. I did not really know what to do with my desire to make materials at the time. I made materials for my students, and I made acquaintances along the way, but it still largely felt like I was doing things on my own, and that can be a hard path to walk sometimes.

It wasn't until the MW SIG issued the competition for the 1st annual MW Grant that everything really fell into place for me. After I won the grant, I made my way down to the JALT national conference in Hamamatsu and met the officers of the MW SIG for the first time. The next 48 hours were a flurry of new experiences. I became the SIG Co-coordinator, I became an official author (and series editor!) for ABAX, and most importantly I started to truly find my place within the materials writers' community.

Looking back, I wished I had reached out to the MW SIG sooner. There are many people on the mailing list who are eager to help, and there are also many testimonials of authors on how they got started in *Between the Keys*. And if anyone is looking to get their foot in the door, I am always looking to recruit new

talent for ABAX. Send me an email and you can be a part of the team too. It's that easy.

Anyway, I digress. Here are the materials I wrote for the 1st annual MW SIG Grant. If anyone would like to know more about the materials after reading about them, please email me at: natefrench12@gmail.com, or look at my profile on the MW SIG website: www.materialswriters.org. And once again, thank you to everyone in the MW SIG. You have given me so much.

Research

From my perspective as a language teacher in Japan, two of the biggest problems when teaching a speaking and listening (or conversation) course are getting students to participate in conversation activities, and getting students to the point where they don't freeze when they hear fast English. These materials aim to solve both of these problems.

To validate this claim, I'd like to present research data that I have collected from some of my students who have used my materials (this research is available to download in full in PDF from my profile on the MW website). To summarize, 91 students in 4 classes used only my materials during a one period class for a semester at a university in Tokyo. All but five of the Students had a TOIEC score between 200-450. At the end of the semester, students were

13

SPRING 2013 Vol. XXI, No. 1

given an anonymous survey asking them to rate my class versus their other English classes with respect to three categories: likeability, motivation, and perceived improvement. 81 students responded. My class scored higher than the students' other English classes in every category. The difference was significant in all areas at a value greater than 0.001. Students were also asked to judge whether the teacher, one of the activities in my class, the story, or the theme was the students' favorite(s) in each category. Students were allowed to make more than one choice. The main activity, called VSR (to be explained soon), scored first in motivation and perceived improvement, and was second in likeability only to 'teacher'. VSR also received the most votes over all three categories.

VSR

VSR stands for Variable Sentence Response. Put simply, it is a list of 15 sentences in a given situation that will or won't be said in variable order to students. Students need to be able to understand what is said to them, and then make their own coherent response in their own words. The next sentence from the list is then chosen in response to the student's response, and in this constant flow of responding to responses, natural, or very close to natural, conversation is created.

As this is somewhat hard to conceptualize, here is an example of the materials. In this situation, the student is studying abroad and the student's initial desire is to study for the night; however the student's roommate is trying to get the student to go to a party. This chapter is called 'Peer Pressure'.

Lead-in sentence: *I've got to do homework tonight. I can't go.*

Roommate's sentences:

1. Since when are you so boring?
2. You can study later.
3. But the party is amazing!
4. But you have to see this!
5. Guess what everyone is doing!?
6. Just look for 5 minutes and then you can come back.
7. It's happening now! You're missing it!
8. Ok! Let's go!
9. I knew you'd come!
10. Everyone is dancing in the park. It's so cool!
11. Come on! I want you to come with me!
12. A food company is sponsoring the party! Free food!
13. You're going to regret this for the rest of your life.
14. A movie star is at the party! They're signing autographs!
15. I wouldn't lie to you!

The goal of this activity is to have the students start with the lead sentence, and then be able to understand and respond to 5 of the sentences on this list said by the teacher (as the roommate) at native speed. Conversations might look like these examples:

Example 1

(Sentences that students make with their own words are italicized)

Student: *I've got to do homework tonight. I can't go.*

Teacher: *But the party is amazing!*

Student: *But I decided to study tonight.*

Teacher: *Come on! I want you to come with me!*

Student: *I have to study tonight!*

Teacher: Guess what everyone is doing?

Student: *I don't care.*

Teacher: A movie star is at the party! They're signing autographs!

Student: *Is that true?*

Teacher: I wouldn't lie to you!

Student: *I know. Let's go to the party!*

Example 2

Student: I've got to do homework tonight. I can't go.

Teacher: Since when are you so boring?

Student: *Since tonight.*

Teacher: Just look for 5 minutes and then you can come back.

Student: *If I go I won't be able to come back.*

Teacher: But it's happening now! You're missing it!

Student: *I know, but I can go to the next one.*

Teacher: Come on! I want you to come with me.

Student: *I said I can't! I'll go next time!*

Teacher: But you have to see this!

Student: *Please stop bothering me. I have to study.*

Of course, students will not be able to achieve this level of comprehension and response immediately. In order to prepare for this the teacher will (1) Introduce the sentences to the students and ask if they understand all the words/sentences, (2) Explain the words and sentences to the students, (3) have the students write practice conversations, (4) get in pairs (switching partners every 3-5 minutes) and make conversations while looking at the conversations they wrote, and (5) continue with pairs and make conversations while not looking at the conversations they wrote.

Students will write their practice

conversations on a form like this. They will get 4 practice conversation forms, and will have to use a different roommate sentence on each roommate's line. Student's responses need to be at least 2 words long.

Conversation 1

You: ***I've got to do homework tonight. I can't go.***

Roommate: _____

You: _____

Roommate: _____

You: _____

Roommate: _____

You: _____

After about 4-8 pairings between step 4 and 5 and/or once students seem ready (a class vote can be done to confirm the students' readiness) the students line up to the teacher and try to pass the situation one-by-one. If students are able to understand and respond quickly and coherently, they pass the situation. If students are unable to understand, or are unable to respond quickly and coherently, they have to go to the end of the line and try again until they are able to pass the situation. Sometimes this may take 4-5 attempts, and may possibly even have to be done after school, but this is not so common.

In addition to the VSR activities, I almost always try to write a background story to set up the VSR activity. I've found that it helps to get the students into the conversation. I

believe that having the students story-tell this story is also very effective in helping them build their interest in the activity. This is not based on data though, just something that I've come to believe after using these materials for over 2 years.

Conclusion

Overall, I've written almost 30 chapters of VSR activities and background stories. I've written 10 chapters for studying abroad, 10 chapters for love & relationships, and 8 chapters of higher level content for professional English. I'm currently planning to finish the last 2 chapters for professional English and begin writing a home stay book for lower level students.

Other than myself, two other teachers have begun using my materials at different universities. In the words of one of the teachers who has tried using the VSR activities, "It [VSR] is good because students can say what they want to say. It allows them to explore English in a more natural way, and it gives them the challenge to say all of this at native speed. There's a little bit of fear for the students taking the test at native speeds, but if you remind the kids that they can get another chance if they fail, and that the test is not to give them a score on their ability, but to provide a goal for them to overcome, then the students calm down and take on the challenge as best as they can."

I think that there's a real chance that this approach to teaching speaking and listening classes could make a large positive impact in language learning classrooms in Japan. Of course, research on a larger scale needs to be done to show this, but the preliminary results are very promising. If anyone

would like to try VSR activities in their classrooms, please send an email my way and I'll send some materials.

Bio Data:

Nathaniel French is currently the Co-coordinator & Membership chair for the Materials Writers SIG. He teaches in three universities in the Kanto area, and is also a series editor and author for ABAX. He is interested in making conversational and content-based materials in which students improve their language skills and participate in activities which give them numerous opportunities to express things in their own words.

Creating Classroom Audio using Online Sources

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Text-to-Speech in the language classroom

Text-to-speech (TTS) audio synthesis has come a long way in the past few years. The ubiquity of the mobile phone and other handheld devices has brought the erstwhile academic and specific use technology firmly into the realm of the mass-market consumer. Accordingly, the amount of market research and resources now being allocated to TTS systems is significant. To some degree this is a chicken-and-egg situation as it can be argued that TTS developments have come to age at the same time as the reduction in chip size and other concurrent mobile technology advancements have allowed handheld devices to experience a mass market boom in the past few years. The power available in these small machines is capable of running the underlying software for telephony and to power TTS engines. In other words, many of you will have rejected TTS in the language classroom based perhaps on negative experiences in the past, but I urge you to rethink this position. TTS is not yet able to produce audio materials that compete with professionally recorded output done with humans, but it can do a remarkably good job nevertheless, and if your needs are somewhat less than that of a major publishing house, you will be surprised and delighted at the quality of what is freely available.

In this short article, I introduce only two TTS websites out of the vast array available. I discuss a few of the caveats to the use of TTS to generate classroom audio materials, and I demonstrate a method of how to start using TTS at no cost.

Wikipedia's article on speech synthesis (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech_synthesis) is a good summary of the issues at play in current TTS methodology. I would encourage you to read that. Language teachers need to be aware of two critical weaknesses as they impact on the potential value of their created materials. The first area is prosody and suprasegmentals. English speech is not a succession of isolated syllables. Phonemes are linked at the lexical word level and the phrase level by vocal effects that indicate (amongst other things) emotional content of the utterance. For example, I can say, "I love you" as a straightforward declarative sentence. I can also say it as a question, and I can choose which part of the sentence I'm questioning: "***I*** love you"/ "I ***love*** you"/ "I love ***you***". If I decide to inject irony into the meaning, I may elongate the 'love' in a sing-songy way. Currently, TTS systems cannot parse (i.e. analyse, describe and output) sentence-internal elements interpretatively. However, this lack does not mean that TTS cannot be used in the language classroom.

The second issue of importance to materials creators is text normalisation. This refers to the mechanical process of turning an input text string into an audio output. Humans are wonderful at text normalisation. We subvocalise intended readings of text automatically. Yet, if you give a TTS engine this sentence, “I record my record sales figures”, the TTS will have difficulty deciding which ‘record’ to use: re-CORD or RE-cord. This problem is seen with numbers, abbreviations, and when some—but not all—human users employ ellipsis and other speech reduction techniques. (If all humans used the same technique, it would be a relatively easy task to create an algorithm for the TTS engine.)

In linguistics, the term ‘unmarked’ refers to the basic propositional meaning of an utterance. In my experience with TTS software, most sentences come out very well if their underlying intention is the unmarked one. For example, “I love you” meaning “You are the object of my love” is usually a safe input sentence for a TTS engine, but the heavily marked “I love you” to mean “I wouldn’t touch you with a barge pole” (i.e. stressing, elongating and rising on the final phoneme of the ‘love’) is currently not so realistic with a TTS. In summary, materials writers can use TTS software more easily for

unmarked speech output if they write with an awareness of potential text normalisation problems.

Necessary technology

Audacity is an open-source, cross-platform software (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>). This section uses Audacity. If you have your own preferred method of recording system-internal sounds, you will no doubt be able to skip this.

To use TTS in materials, you need to be able to record without loss of quality the sounds you hear coming from your computer’s speakers. This may not be as simple as intuitively you think it should. In fact, some systems cannot do this easily without going to the expense of buying new USB cables and equipment to first export the sound out to the external equipment and back in again via the USB. Windows 7 and 8 now come with the option of recording to ‘Stereo Mix’ (apologies to Mac users, but read ahead to the Audacity part) which is another way of making the simple built-in recorder record system sounds. ‘System sounds’ refers to sounds coming from your system and that includes output from TTS engines. Audacity 2.02 and later also have the ‘Stereo Mix’ option (see fig. 1).



Fig 1. ‘Stereo Mix’ selection button in Audacity

Turn this on and everything that comes out of your speaker will be recorded in Audacity. This is useful for recording the audio-only parts of useful YouTube or other video services that you may wish to use in your classroom. You can create audio without worrying about other sounds in the room because the 'Stereo Mix' functionality only records system-internal sounds. You can record your own voice or other sounds later by changing this setting.

Search online for Audacity tutorials that show you how to combine audio clips, how to delete unwanted sections, how to space audio (for examples or for test audio), how to raise the volume and so on.

Two sites

Naturalreaders.com's demo shows a selection of regional accents. There are two male and three female voices in their US pull down menu, and three males and two females in their UK menu. All ten voices can be played back at twenty-one different speeds. Here's how I use this:

1. Type in a sentence. (Max 200 characters)
2. Select the voice wanted. Press the play button. It takes a few seconds for the speech synthesis to work.
3. Press the record button in Audacity.
4. When finished, stop the Audacity recording and move the track up to the end of the previous recording.
5. Position the recording start point to the end. Repeat from 1.

This is a demo of a commercial product. If you buy their lowest ranking product 'Professional Version', you will not get the full range of voices, only four. Their free download comes only

with voices that are already present in Microsoft's collection. I would not recommend either of these.

The question of copyright invariably is raised here. The law in Japan (Romney 2012) has guidance on the use of commercially available materials, such as newspapers, for non-profit educational use. Wider Japanese law also is specific about downloading copyrighted materials. The former is acceptable, the latter not. I suspect that using the demonstration version of an online product for educational uses still falls into the 'grey' area, but my interpretation (take that for what it's worth!) is that it is okay if there is no attempt to make any sales from such use.

Try out Naturalreaders. You will find that some sentences work like a dream and will not be able to distinguish the TTS output from natural speech. Other sentences will fail your usability test. When writing materials, select sentences that do work. In the 'old days', we used to trick our TTS engines by typing phonetically. We used to get exact output by configuring our spelling, use of hyphens and full stops. This is no longer possible in the same way with TTS, but some degree of control is available by altering some of the input variables.

My favourite TTS site is cereproc.com. It does not have the speech speed control that is useful for creating audio of different speeds for lower-level learners, but I find that the range of accents present is highly usable for me. It is the product of a Scottish-based company, so perhaps that--and the very UK specific accent range--influences my judgement.

It does have a cloud system as well as its demo bar. You pay for 10,000 characters. If you take this route, open two browsers. Log in to one and keep the other on the demo bar. In the free demo bar, try out the accents and sentences until your heart is content. When you are ready, type the sentence in the logged in browser. In this way, you can get the most for your pound. Again, the issue of copyright while using the free demo's output in educational settings in Japan probably applies.

Both TTS sites do produce very good results. For classroom audio, these will suffice most of the time. Also, it is a great way of introducing students to a variety of accents.

Waveform wizardry

As a final word, let me add that Audacity has the capacity to add more nuanced

output. If you select the exact part of a wave, you are able to increase the volume locally to just that selection. You can also increase its length without changing pitch, and you can alter the pitch of the selection without changing its time length. These three aspects--volume, pitch and length--are the basis for English suprasegmentals. With time and practice, it is possible to take any base TTS output sentence and create fully-nuanced audio that might match a human speaker. However, that does take time and effort. I have used this in a class of four students to teach the principles of prosody, which worked very well. I wouldn't spend all of the time required to create perfect TTS audio, personally, as the given output is usually suffice for my needs. Occasionally, I will tweak the waveform to alter the meaning.

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Word Calculation Game

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Learner level: From middle elementary

Length of the activity: 15 minutes for each question set

Resources used: PowerPoint or paper based material (PowerPoint is suggested)

Goals: To increase learners' vocabulary as well as speaking proficiency

Preparation

Teachers prepare several *word calculations* (an example below), a type of activity that requires students to think of the answer from the words shown by the given pictures and through adding and subtracting letters based on the given formula (Okada, 2007).

Based on the question, teachers create a PowerPoint or paper based presentation, including 1) one sheet with each picture or arithmetic symbol (in the case of above, teachers prepare three pictures (air plane, rain, and bat), five arithmetic symbols (2 pluses, 2 minuses, and 1 equal sign), two papers with letters ('ba' and 'n') and one paper which shows the number of letters in the answer, so this case needs 11 slides or papers).

(Question)

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \begin{array}{c} \text{air plane} \\ \text{rain} \\ \text{bat} \end{array} & - & & + & & - & \text{ba} + n = _ _ _ \\ \text{air plane} & & \text{rain} & & \text{bat} & & \end{array}$$

(Answer)

air plane - rain = plae

plae + bat = plaebat

plaebat - ba = plaet

plaet + n = planet

Procedure

1. Students are separated into groups, and try to answer each question through discussion.
2. Each question is shown three times:

The first presentation shows one picture or one arithmetic symbols in turn in the same way as flashcards. At this time, the students must not write down anything on paper. The second presentation is the same as the first presentation, but this time, students are allowed to take notes, and in the third presentation, the students can see the question on a single page (the same as the example). (Therefore, it is suggested to use PowerPoint, but paper based presentation is also applicable).

1. Between each presentation, students may have intervals of three to five minutes, in which they can discuss the answer.
2. When the students have reached an answer, a group member will go to the teacher's table, write the answer on a paper given by the teacher, and put the paper in a box the teacher prepared.
3. If the students can answer correctly, the group will receive points based on how quickly they can answer the question. For example, if students can answer after first presentation, the group receives 7 points. If the answer is reached after the second presentation, the group receives 4 points. And if after the third presentation, the group receives 2 points.
4. The answer is shown after the final presentation.
5. A group has only one chance to answer the question, and cannot

change their answer.

6. The group receiving the highest number of points wins.

Options

1. If the target is vocabulary learning, the teacher should ask the students to learn new vocabulary prior to the class activity since this process induces first exposure of the target vocabulary. If the focus is improvement of speaking proficiency, prior study may not be necessary.
2. In the first implementation, the rules of the game should be explained clearly, especially for those who are not highly proficient. Showing an example is recommended for smooth action in the activity, because students might be confused if they do not understand the rules. After the rules are explained, the activity is started.
3. At the end of the class time, it is recommended that the teachers review the target vocabulary for students, so that they can pay attention the vocabulary again. Homework for the next class may be given durring this time.
4. This activity can be used for any level, by changing the level of target words and the length of each formula.

Rationale

The following rationales explain why this activity is worth implementing. Firstly, Nation (2001) suggested that learners can generate vocabulary knowledge when they encounter or use the previously encountered words in different ways. Through this activity, students listen and read the

target vocabulary as well as speak and write. This means in the first interval, students should discuss because note-taking is prohibited. On the other hand, students would use the written form of the language in the second and third presentations for taking notes. Therefore, the students use and encounter the target vocabulary within four different macroskills. This can improve learners' vocabulary construction.

In addition to using these four skills, students are shown the target vocabulary with pictures. The visualization of new words can improve word storage (Kellogg & Howe, 1971), and "Dual Coding" (visual and linguistic knowledge) supports retrieval process (Paivio & Desrochers, 1981). Therefore, this activity can support word memorization as well as word retrieval.

Words used in negotiation can be learned more effectively (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994). This activity requires students to interact with each other to answer the questions. Through this process, the students use the target words in negotiation within spoken or written forms. It can reinforce the target vocabulary development for students.

Furthermore, "Holding" target words in one's head improves word storage (Okada, 2007). In the first presentation of a question, students are not permitted to take notes, and therefore they must keep the target words in their brain, and it induces deeper processes of

vocabulary construction. Note taking prohibition in the first presentation aims at this effect, in addition to creating spoken conversations.

Finally, this activity adopts a game type of classroom activity, different from usual test forms. The reason for this is that a game can sustain the learners' effort, motivate the student to take action, and to provide challenge in language use (Lee, 1995).

Based on these rationales, there are several benefits that can be expected through this activity. The first is that learners can learn vocabulary with several cues (letters, sounds, pictures), and this can effectively develop students' vocabulary. Moreover, learners can use target vocabulary in the conversation. This provides the natural use of target words in their production; in other words, for practice, the learner does not need to include the target words in the speech unnaturally.

Under this condition, learners can improve productive knowledge (speaking, spelling, pronouncing) as well as reinforce receptive knowledge (listening, reading) since the learners are required to speak out and listen to the target words in discussion as well as spell it out onto the paper and read it on the computer.

In the discussion, students can also improve their strategic competence. Because students need to convey their intention clearly even if they do not understand target words or some other expressions for negotiation, they would have to use strategies in their

discussions.

Furthermore, this activity will be fun and exciting, so this improves students' motivation more than general classroom activities. Finally, this activity can be used for any word, giving flexibility to the application.

Caveats

The teacher should also consider the limitations for this activity in application. If students are not prepared enough (especially when asked preview questions about the target words), they might face difficulty in participating in the activity, even though this activity is group work and students can support each other.

In addition, it is possible that the given pictures are not clear for students, especially pictures for abstract words. This may confuse the students' thinking processes. It was also pointed out that the task is time consuming; therefore, the teacher should plan carefully when implementing this activity.

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Taking a Trip

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Learner level: Lower intermediate

Length of the activity: 40 minutes

Resources used: One set of worksheets per student

Goals: To increase learners' competence in identifying and producing first conditionals and increase their understanding of how they are used for

making future plans, recommendations, commands and requests

Preparation

Make copies of the worksheets for all of your students. The students will be split into groups, so a randomizer such as playing cards might be helpful to get

the students moving and working with different people.

Procedure

1. Split the students into groups. Hand out the worksheets to the students and paraphrase the following explanation.

“Your class is going on a school trip. The class will be traveling to Bakersfield to see the famous Victoria Museum and Stronghold National Park. The teachers have prepared a plan for the day.”

2. Make sure that the students understand the situation. Lead the students in marking the first two sentences (parts 1,2 and 3) then let the students read and mark their papers.
3. Give the students some time to copy the verbs in part 4, and then have them work in pairs to answer the questions in part 5. After some time, elicit answers from the students. Clarify if necessary.
4. Have the students complete parts 6, 7 and 8 as pairs. Wander the room, helping groups as is needed. After five minutes, have each of the students write one of their sentences on the board.
5. Split the students into pairs. Hand out the worksheets to the students and paraphrase the following explanation to the students.

“Wally and Kurt are best friends but their personalities are very different. Kurt is very adventurous

and loves to go do new things. Wally is quite timid and worries about the future. Every time that Kurt plans a new adventure, Wally thinks of all the things that could go wrong. To get Wally to go with him, Kurt has to have a solution to all of Wally’s concerns.”

6. Make sure that the students understand the situation. Let the students read and mark their papers. (Part 9)
7. Give the students some time to make a plan, come up with problems and make solutions in parts 10, 11 and 12. Sometimes students will debate about the plan, so setting a time limit will help keep the class moving.
8. Have the students role-play a conversation between Wally and Kurt in part 13. Weaker students can look at the first conversation for ideas. If there is enough time, have the students switch papers or a group can perform in front of the class.

Options

1. This lesson can be easily adapted for different ages or interests. Some ideas include schedules for business meetings, parties, vacations, or weddings.
2. For stronger students, the lesson could include weakening the condition with the phrases should, happen to, and should happen to.
3. You could also practice using may, might, and could in the results clause.

Worksheet: School Trip to Bakersfield

1. Read the schedule with your partner.
2. Circle the word *if*. Underline the verb phrase that follows it.

Time	Plan for Friday	Notes
8:00	Meet in the hotel lobby	If you are late, the bus will leave without you and you will receive 0 points.
9:00	Arrive at the Victoria Museum	If you brought a large bag, please leave it on the bus.
9:15-11:00	Explore the museum and fill out worksheet one	If you forget your pencil, the teachers will have a few extras.
11:00	Meet at the bus	Everyone will have less time to eat if you are late.
11:30-12:30	Eat lunch	There are Mexican, Chinese, and German restaurants. If you want something else, you should bring your own lunch.
12:30	Meet at the bus	
2:00	Arrive at the Stronghold National Park	
2:00-3:00	Animal and plant presentation and fill out worksheet two	Ask the park rangers if you have any questions.
3:00-4:00	Hike	If it looks like rain, you should bring a raincoat.
4:30	Meet at the bus	
6:00-7:00	Dinner at the hotel	If you have any allergies or food needs, please tell your teacher as soon as possible.
7:00-10:00	Free time/Musical/Circus	If you don't reserve or pay for the shows, you won't be allowed to go.
11:00	Lights out.	You will receive 0 points if you are found out of your room.

4. Write the verb phrase that follows if in column 1 and the other verb phrase in column 2.

Column 1

Column 2

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. These are all first conditional sentences. With your partner, please answer the following questions.

5a. What is the rule for how these sentences are formed?

5b. What is the difference between sentences using will + verb, should + verb, and the verb by itself?

6. The if clause can go at the beginning of the sentence, or at the end. Write a sentence with the if clause at the beginning of the sentence. Don't forget the comma. Then re-write the sentence with the clause at the end.

7. Please complete the following sentences.

If it rains tomorrow, what will you do?

I will _____ if it rains tomorrow.

What should I do if I catch a cold.

If you catch a cold, you should _____.

What will you do if it snows tomorrow.

If it snows, _____.

If you have questions, ask the teacher.

8. mMake your own sentences.

The Adventures of Wally Worrywart and Kurt Courageous

Wally and Kurt are best friends but their personalities are very different. Kurt is very adventurous and loves to do new things. Wally is quite timid and worries about the future. Every time that Kurt plans a new adventure, Wally thinks of all the things that could go wrong. To get Wally to go with him, Kurt has to have a solution to all of Wally's concerns.

This is Kurt's plan for this Saturday.

	Time	Plan	Wally's Problem	Kurt's Solution
1	6:00 AM	Get up, dressed, etc.		
2	7:00 AM	Meet at Shinjuku Station		
3	7:30 AM	Take the train to Hakone		
4	9:00 AM	Arrive, begin sightseeing		

9. With your partner, please read this conversation and fill in the problems and solutions.

Kurt: What do you think of my plan?

Wally: Well... I don't get up easily. What if I sleep in?

Kurt: Don't worry. If you are worried, I'll call you and wake you up.

Wally: But Shinjuku station is really big. What if we can't find each other?

Kurt: If you are worried about that, we should pick a meeting place now. How about in front of Alta?

Wally: That sounds okay. What do we do if we get hungry? There is no time for breakfast.

Kurt: If you are worried about getting hungry, you might want to bring some food.

Wally: If Hakone is cloudy on Saturday, what will we do?

Kurt: If it's cloudy, we will bring an umbrella. Don't worry so much.

Wally: Okay. Let's go then.

10. Next Saturday you and your partner are free: no work, house cleaning, or homework to do. Please pick a time and make a plan to do something together.

	Time	Plan	Problem	Solution
1		Meet at		
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7		Go home		

11. Imagine you are Wally and think of problems that might happen.

12. Imagine you are Kurt and think of solutions to all of the problems.

13. Role-play a conversation between Wally and Kurt.

A Guest from Overseas

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Learner level: From intermediate

Length of the activity: 90 minutes

Resources used: one set of worksheets (see Appendix 2) per student; white- or blackboard; CD player or iPod (with speakers)

Goals: To provide 4-skills training with an eye towards an important business context language competency: preparing for an English-speaking business associate's visit to your company

Preparation

Make copies of the lesson materials (Appendix 2) for each student. Record the listening script ahead of time to a CD-R or iPod.

Procedure

After distributing the handouts, ask students to read the instructions for the activity. Confirm their understanding of the task through comprehension-verifying questions. Lead them to complete the e-mail cloze individually. Upon completion, check the answers as a group and discuss possible alternatives as well as the effects of substituting, e.g. the auxiliary *will* for *would* at the beginning of a polite request.

Draw student attention to the fact that activity 2 will include a response to the e-mail received in activity 1. Ask them to read the instructions and verify their understanding of the task's requirements. Remind them of the

conventions for business e-mails as demonstrated in activity 1, and direct them to "check off" each requirement as they complete it. In order to make economical use of time, set the task as homework and ask that they submit their response in e-mail form to the instructor before the next lesson.

Lead them to read the lead-in for activity 3, and confirm their understanding of the circumstances.

As a group, discuss the different customs associated with meeting someone for the first time by culture as set-forth in 3a.

In 3b, ask them to match new vocabulary words with their respective definitions alone or in pairs – without using a dictionary – and check the answers together.

Instruct them to scan the accompanying article in 3c (adapted from Wolfe, 2012) and underline every occurrence of the vocabulary words from 3b. Check the answers together.

Direct them to read the article again to answer the True/False questions in 3d. Check together, and confirm their understanding of the answers by requiring them to orally make "False" statements "True" as well as demonstrate where in the text they found their answers.

For 3e, prompt students to demonstrate the different factors involved with a "proper handshake" with the instructor (and each other) as

a wrap-up.

Lead them to read the instructions for activity 4, and confirm their understanding. Divide the group into pairs, distribute “Form A” to one of the pair and “Form B” to the other. Instruct one student to play the role of the host employee (Form A) and the other to play the role of the company’s travel agent (Form B). Demonstrate the kinds of questions the different players might ask each other to accomplish the task. When all parties have finished, discuss their choices as a group.

Ask the students to consider the answers to questions 5a - c while listening to the recording, and discuss the answers. Instruct students to fill-in the itinerary details during the second listening, and then check their answers as a group. Prompt the students to pair up and discuss with a partner any experiences they have had in which their travel plans have been changed.

Options

The e-mail cloze in activity 1 can also be completed with a partner in the event that learning styles lean more towards a preference for group work.

In order to minimize preparation time and allow for adjustments to the rate of delivery, etc., the listening script for activity 5 can be read aloud by the teacher.

To accommodate mixed-ability classes, “bonus” questions that require greater proficiency can easily be added to activities 3 and 5 at the instructor’s discretion.

Rationale

The lesson’s theme was carefully chosen to accommodate a realistic language competency that intermediate

adult/Business English learners in an EFL context might be called upon to exercise. In addition, the specific tasks were chosen to approximate the language functions most likely to occur in said language competency: eliciting travel details, familiarizing oneself with foreign cultural norms for meeting someone for the first time, making arrangements for lodging, and understanding last minute changes to travel details. In terms of methodology, the reading and listening components were designed in light of the basic model for teaching receptive skills as set forth by Harmer (2007, pp. 270-275), and all of the exercises were selected to provide ample opportunity to exercise as many of the micro- and macroskills listed by Douglas-Brown (2004) as possible. The sequence of the four skills in this case – writing, reading, speaking, then listening – were determined solely by how their accompanying tasks fit into the storyline I established.

Looking at the exercises in more detail, the writing component (activities 1 and 2) allows for both “writing-for-learning” and “writing-for-writing” (Harmer, 2007, p.330), respectively. Inclusion of check-boxes in the instruction set for activity 2 serve as a formative assessment tool in which the students can determine for themselves if they have fulfilled all the necessary criteria for creating a successful business e-mail in this context.

The reading sequence features a lead-in (3a) that acts as a top-down processing/schema activation activity, and the matching exercise (3b) pre-teaches the vocabulary that will enhance reading comprehension moving forward. The act of scanning the text for the vocabulary words (3c)

is in itself an important reading macro-skill (Douglas-Brown, 2004, p. 188), and the “True/False” questions (3d) check reading comprehension of the adapted version of an article by Wolfe (2012). Finally, 3e is a wrap-up that also functions as a means for catering to kinesthetic learning styles.

The final two activities (4 and 5) represent the speaking and listening components of this integrated 4-skills lesson. The speaking activity uses a communication game – specifically an information-gap exercise – to get students immediately talking with an eye towards developing fluency. The listening component allows for two listenings: one for gist and one for detail. While there is no official lead-in, the recording mimics a voice mail message – including the “leave a message” prompt by a different speaker and the obligatory “beep” tone – that gives clues as to what kind of recording it is and what one could conceivably expect to hear. The storyline for the entire lesson also serves to activate schemata for this component as well. Lastly, the discussion question is designed as a convenient wrap-up.

Caveats

In the ideal classroom, students are all operating at more or less the same level of proficiency and share similar learning styles and personalities. However, the fact is that a great deal of variety amongst learners often exists, and these differences must be accounted for while attempting to conduct this lesson as well. In particular, careful attention must be paid to the pairings for the speaking exercise (activity 4), as it is quite possible that the more proficient and/or enthusiastic of the pair could

potentially “do all the work” to ascertain the necessary information. Similarly, in-activity monitoring by the instructor is a must as struggling students may require encouragement and scaffolding in order to meet the learning objectives.

Likewise, delivery of the audio component may need to be adjusted to suit the needs of the particular group. While the script for the listening component was originally intended to be delivered at a natural rate and recorded for the sake of authenticity, doing so may prove to be an obstacle for some learners. For this reason, the instructor may choose to deliver the audio script “live” to maintain control over rate and other variables.

References

- Douglas Brown, H. (2004). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practice*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Longman.
- Wolfe, L. (2012). *Business Etiquette: 10 Tips on How to Shake Hands with Confidence*. Atlanta: About.com. Retrieved on January 10, 2013 from <http://womeninbusiness.about.com/od/businessetiquette/tp/10-Tips-on-How-to-Shake-Hands.htm>

Appendix 1

Listening Script for Activity 5

A: After the tone, please leave your message. (*tone*)

B: Hi, this is John Gregory from Refractories, USA. I’m just calling to let you know that my flight was changed because of mechanical problems with the plane, so instead of flying into Kitakyushu, it looks like I will be flying into Fukuoka. The plane is scheduled to

arrive there at 4:45, and I figured that after customs, picking up my luggage, and making my way to Fukuoka Station, I should be able to make it in time for the 7:00 bullet train. That will put me at Kokura at about 7:25 this evening. Unfortunately, I don't have your phone

number, so can you call me at about 7:30 so that we can arrange where to meet? My number is 090-XXXX-XXXX. Anyway, sorry for all the changes. Look forward to meeting you later tonight. Take care.

Appendix 2

1. YOUR SUPERVISOR HANDS YOU THE PRINT OUT OF AN E-MAIL FROM THE SECRETARY OF YOUR AMERICAN SUBSIDIARY'S BUSINESS MANAGER. UNFORTUNATELY, THE PRINTER WAS LOW ON INK AND SEVERAL WORDS IN THE E-MAIL ARE HARD TO READ. READ THE E-MAIL AND FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS.

_____ Mr. Tanaka,

Good morning. _____ is Mary Jones, and I am the secretary for John Gregory, business manager of Refractories USA, Inc. I am writing to _____ you that Mr. Gregory will be _____ your company during the week of January 7th to 14th.

_____ you please arrange a hotel room _____ him for his week _____ Tobata? We _____ appreciate it if you limit the total cost of a hotel room to ¥140,000 for the entire week. Also, _____ you please arrange for someone to _____ him up at the airport and drive him _____ your company when he arrives?

_____ you very much for your _____. Please _____ me know if you have any _____ questions.

Secretary

_____, Inc.

2. YOUR SUPERVISOR HAS ASKED YOU TO REPLY TO THE E-MAIL IN 1. PLEASE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Your name
- Your job title
- The reason your are contacting her

PLEASE ASK FOR THE FOLLOWING INFORMATON

- the airline name and flight number of Mr. Gregory's flight
- arrival airport
- arrival time
- is he a smoker or a non-smoker?
- does he have any dietary restrictions (e.g. food allergies, is he a vegetarian)?

BE SURE TO FOLLOW ALL OF THE CONVENTIONS FOR WRITING A BUSINESS E-MAIL, AND COMPOSE YOUR E-MAIL ON YOUR COMPUTER. WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED, E-MAIL IT TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR AT xxxxx@xxxxx.com

3. YOUR SUPERVISOR HAS ASKED YOU TO PICK UP MR. GREGORY FROM THE AIRPORT. YOU ARE NERVOUS ABOUT YOUR FIRST MEETING, SO YOU SEARCH FOR A HELPFUL ARTICLE ON THE INTERNET.

- a) Think about what kind of things are important in your home culture when you meet someone for the first time. Discuss with your group.
- b) Match the words in the box with their definitions.

agressive	extend	forceful	firmly	embarrassed
intrusive	sweaty	uncomfortable		

- i. _____ means *to offer or stretch out*
- ii. _____ means *anxiously self-conscious*
- iii. _____ means *overly strong or pushy*
- iv. _____ means *uneasy or anxious*
- v. _____ means *using a lot of power*
- vi. _____ means *not weakly or uncertainly*
- vii. _____ means *not welcome or not invited*
- viii. _____ means *wet or moist with sweat*

c) Scan the article below quickly to find the eight words and underline them when you find them.

7 Tips to a proper handshake*

1. Begin by Introducing Yourself

Before extending your hand, introduce yourself. Extending your hand should be part of an introduction, not a replacement for using your voice. Extending your hand without a voice greeting may make you appear nervous or overly aggressive.

2. Do not shake for too long

A business handshake should be brief and to the point. Holding on for more than three or four seconds can make other people feel uncomfortable.

3. Shake From Your Elbow

If you shake from the shoulder, using your upper arm instead of just your forearm, you risk jolting your handshake partner. The main point is to connect with your partner, but not be too aggressive.

4. Do Not Be too forceful

A handshake should be a friendly gesture, not a show of physical strength. An uncomfortable handshake is never a pleasant

experience for anyone. Imagine you are opening a door handle, and then use about the same level of strength in your handshake.

5. Avoid Offering a "Dead Fish Hand"

A limp hand is never a good idea when it comes to a business handshake, because it might make your partner think you are uninterested. You should grip firmly, but be sure to avoid a competition with your partner about "who can grip more forcefully."

6. One Hand is Better than Two

Avoid handshakes using two hands. It is always better in business introductions to use only one hand – your right hand – for the shake. The use of two hands with strangers can be seen as intrusive, and too personal. In fact, a two-handed shake is called the "politician's shake," because it appears artificially friendly when used on people you barely know.

7. Shaking a Sweaty Hand

If you shake hands with someone who has sweaty palms, do not immediately wipe your hands on your clothing, handkerchief, or tissue. This will make the the other person even more embarrassed or nervous. You will always have a chance to wash them later.

d) Read the article to answer the following *TRUE/FALSE* questions.

- i. You should extend your hand before introducing yourself. _____
- ii. The ideal length for a handshake is over 4 seconds. _____
- iii. You should use the same level of strength for a handshake that you would use for opening a door handle. _____
- iv. A limp handshake will show your partner that you are happy to meet him/her. _____
- v. A two-handed handshake is a sign of respect and politeness. _____
- vi. If you shake hands with someone with sweaty palms, it is best to wait until later to wash or wipe your hands. _____

*Adapted from *Business Etiquette: 10 Tips on How to Shake Hands with Confidence* by L. Wolfe (<http://womeninbusiness.about.com/od/businessetiquette/tp/10-Tips-on-How-to-Shake-Hands.htm>)



[FORM A]

4. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ARRANGING A HOTEL ROOM FOR YOUR GUEST. DISCUSS WITH YOUR COMPANY'S TRAVEL AGENT (YOUR PARTNER) WHICH HOTEL FULFILLS ALL OF THE NECESSARY CRITERIA, BUT DON'T LET YOUR PARTNER SEE YOUR NOTES.

NECESSARY CRITERIA

- maximum of ¥140,000 for a 7-night stay
- to be as near as possible to the company
- a room with a good view
- a good business center
- good laundry facilities
- very good in-room internet services
- good room service

NOTES:

36

MW's Between the Keys

WHICH HOTEL DID THE TWO OF YOU CHOOSE?

[FORM B]

4. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING YOUR CLIENT (YOUR PARTNER) FIND THE IDEAL HOTEL ROOM. DISCUSS WHICH HOTEL FULFILLS ALL OF THE NECESSARY CRITERIA, BUT DON'T LET YOUR PARTNER SEE YOUR NOTES.

	<i>Toyo Inn</i>	<i>Comfort Inn</i>	<i>Palace</i>	<i>Regal Hotel</i>
Cost (per night)	¥13,000	¥21,000	¥17,500	¥18,000
Distance from company	1.5 km	8 km	5 km	3 km
View	☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆	☆
Business center	N/A	☆☆☆	☆☆	☆
Laundry facilities	N/A	☆☆☆	☆☆☆	☆☆
Internet services	☆	☆	☆☆	☆☆☆
Television	N/A	☆☆☆	☆☆	☆
Room service	N/A	☆	☆☆	N/A

N/A = Not Available

☆ = good

☆☆ =

very good

☆☆☆ = excellent

NOTES:

WHICH HOTEL DID THE TWO OF YOU CHOOSE?

5. LISTEN TO THE TRACK WHILE TRYING TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

- a) What kind of recording is this?
- b) Who is speaking?
- c) What is the purpose of the recording?

LISTEN AGAIN, AND FILL-IN THE BLANKS WITH THE CORRECT INFORMATION.

Destination Airport: _____

Time of arrival: _____

Final destination: _____

Time of arrival: _____

Time of requested phone call: _____

Phone number: _____

The MATSDA/University of Liverpool 2013 Conference

Enjoying to Learn: the Best Way to Acquire a Language?

July 13th-14th, 2013 at the University of Liverpool

Plenary Speakers

Dave Allan Mark Almond Annie Hughes

Thom Kiddle Alan Maley Hitomi Masuhara

Freda Mishan Brian Tomlinson Jane Willis

Venue

The Rendall Building, University of Liverpool

Times

Registration: 08.30 on July 13th and 14th

Conference: 09.00-18.00 on July 13th; 09.00-16.30 on July 14th

Fees (to include lunch and coffee)

Students: £95 (£55 for one day)

MATSDA members: £120 (£70 for one day)

Non-members: £145 (£85 for one day)

MATSDA Membership

Contact Susie Pearson at <matsdamembershipsec@nile-elt.com>

Booking, Accommodation Enquiries and Payment

Contact Filomena Saltao <Filomena.Saltao@liverpool.ac.uk>; Tel - (44) 0151 7953129

Offers of Papers

To offer a paper for a forty five minute presentation contact:

Brian Tomlinson <brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com>

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39

SPRING 2013 Vol. XXI, No. 1

On the Inside

Co-ordinator's Column	2
Nate French	
From the Editor.....	3
Eric Lerstrom	
Submission Guidelines.....	4
Programme Chair Column	6
Azusa Sato	
Reward Probability and Uncertainty	7
Nate French	
Approaches to Material Writing	11
Brian Cullen & Sarah Mulvey	
Variable Sentence Response	13
Nathan French	
Creating Classroom Audio using Online Sources	17
Jim Smiley	
MW Sig Officers	20
Word Calculation Game	21
Noboru Sakai	
Taking a Trip	24
Eric Lerstrom	
A Guest from Overseas	30
Greggory Wroblewski	

The Materials Writers SIG is dedicated to continually raising the standards in the creation of language teaching materials, in all languages and in all media, whether for general consumption or for individual classroom use. The editors encourage participation from colleagues using new media or teaching languages other than English.