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Guest editorial: Considering postgraduate study in languages, linguistics and area studies?

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Studying at postgraduate level?

Début showcases undergraduate scholarship in the fields of languages, linguistics and area studies and since you are reading this article you clearly have some interest in these areas but have you ever considered pursuing your interest at postgraduate level? You could study bilingualism, forensic linguistics, American history, interpreting, Russian cultural studies, contemporary China, Latin American literature, European media, holocaust studies, migration and exile, Islamic law, African politics, Korean literature, Hollywood, globalisation and many more subjects which are currently covered by postgraduate courses offered in UK universities. These courses and others in the field of languages, linguistics and area studies, provide exciting opportunities to deepen your existing knowledge and to develop your studies in new directions.

On a practical note, you may already have student loans and be concerned about taking on more debt and so you will reasonably ask what are the advantages that you will gain from studying for a Masters degree in the fields of languages, linguistics and area studies? You will be able to demonstrate specialist knowledge of your chosen subject. You will develop high level skills of analysis and critical evaluation as well as the ability to independently solve complex problems. You will gain experience in managing a large project in the form of your dissertation. In addition, these courses help you to develop advanced skills in intercultural awareness, communication, presentation and time management, all of which are much sought after by employers. If postgraduate study in languages, linguistics or area studies appeals to you the following paragraphs aim to help you to navigate the process of choosing and applying for a course.

Timing

In your final year at university it can be hard to juggle the demands of your course with the pressures of deciding what you want to do next but it is worthwhile taking some time to explore your options for postgraduate study. Although some universities accept applications for Masters courses as late as August for a course starting in September, there are important advantages to applying earlier in the year. In particular, the deadlines for applying for funding usually fall around Easter and you will need time to prepare funding applications. Ideally, you should aim to identify the course(s) you wish to apply for by December for a course starting the following September but if you are reading this later in the year don't despair, just start looking now!

Finding the right course – the practicalities

As you walk around your university you might start to notice posters advertising Masters courses and your institution might also email you details of the postgraduate courses they offer. Posters and emails can provide a good starting point but there are many other valuable sources of information available. Consider speaking to your personal tutor or dissertation supervisor about your options; most lecturers are happy to advise students about courses at their institution and many will also be able to recommend suitable courses elsewhere. The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies has information on its website about where and what you can study as well as links to relevant subject associations who may be able to assist you in finding a course or even funding (www.llas.ac.uk/keythemes/studentresources). Your university careers service can also advise you and direct you to valuable resources such as the Prospects website (www.prospects.ac.uk). You can search for postgraduate courses online, for example, via the Prospects website, using the postgraduate branch of UCAS, UKPASS, (www.ukpass.ac.uk/) or on findamasters.com.

When you search for your Masters degree you are likely to find that the name of the course is followed by the letters MA (Master of Arts), MSc (Master of Science), MRes (Master of Research) or MPhil (Master of Philosophy). Postgraduate study in the field of languages, linguistics or area studies could lead to any one of these qualifications. It is worth bearing in mind when choosing a course that if you are studying for an MSc your course is more likely to take a ‘scientific’ approach and involve, for example, statistical analysis or quantitative methods. MA qualifications are likely to be more essay based or adopt a qualitative approach. An MRes or MPhil requires you to complete a larger individual research project sometimes alongside a smaller taught component.

Once you have found a course you are interested in look at the course website and contact the department for more details about individual courses and modules. Consider attending an open day or arranging a visit to the department. Course co-ordinators are usually very happy to provide information and answer any questions you have, they can also help guide you through the application process and assist you in applying for funding. When making enquiries remember to ask if the institution has any funding available for Masters students and how you can apply for it.

Finding the right course - course content

Languages, linguistics and area studies offer wide ranging opportunities for postgraduate study and courses in these fields can be found in many different academic departments and so finding the right course for you requires careful research. There are several important issues to consider when researching postgraduate opportunities:

- do you want to continue studying the same subject that you studied at undergraduate level?
- do you want to maintain a broad focus (e.g. modern languages or American studies)?
- do you want to specialise in a particular period (e.g. nineteenth century), a particular country or area (e.g. Latin America or East Asia) or a particular part of your discipline (e.g. applied linguistics)?

- do you want to specialise in, for example, French film rather than French literature or history? If so, you may wish to expand your search to include media as well as French departments.
- are you interested in a particular theme, topic or theoretical approach which could be the focus of your Masters (e.g. postcolonialism)?
- which modules are on offer, are any compulsory and do they fit your interests and any plans that you may have for your dissertation? Check that any modules you are hoping to take will be offered in the year you will enrol.
- if you already have a dissertation topic in mind are there staff who specialise in this area? In this case, you could contact your potential supervisor to discuss your proposed course.

Remember, a Masters degree can be an excellent opportunity to change direction, not all courses require you to have studied the subject at undergraduate level. A few Masters courses even offer you the chance to learn a new language.

Funding

Some universities and departments have funding available and you can find out more from institutional websites, by contacting the university postgraduate admissions office or the department to which you are applying. Some research councils, such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), have limited funding for Masters courses in languages, linguistics and area studies. Applications to research councils are co-ordinated through the university to which you are applying so, again, you should speak to the postgraduate admissions tutor for your course and do so as soon as possible. It can be difficult to find funding for Masters degrees so you may need to be creative when thinking about how to fund your study; it is worthwhile asking whether the university has any part-time work which might be suitable and try to find out how current students have funded their course.

Top tips

- (1) Take time to explore all your options remembering that there are many different courses on offer in the fields of languages, linguistics and area studies and they are located across a range of academic departments
- (2) Find out as much as you can about the course and speak to as many people as possible. Do not be afraid to contact the academic staff who deliver the course to which you are considering applying to ask for more information and details of available funding
- (3) It's never too late to come back to postgraduate study. Even if you decide not to do a Masters degree immediately after your undergraduate degree you can always come back to do a Masters at a later stage.
- (4) Choose a course that you are really going to enjoy!

The forgotten people: a dialect study on a Hutterite colony in East Central South Dakota

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Abstract.

In this study, the English variety of three Hutterite women from East Central South Dakota is described. The Hutterites are a communal society that immigrated to the northern United States and later to southern Canada in the 1800s and are one of few ethnic groups in the United States that have retained their mother-tongue—Hutterisch—as well as their religious language, German. To communicate with the outside world, all Hutterite children also learn English, making all Hutterites trilingual by adolescence. Their variety of English has been strongly affected by Hutterisch, a dialect of German that all Hutterites learn as their first language. In the instance of language contact examined in this study, the women's use of English showed the influence of Hutterisch in the areas of pronunciation, topicalization, preposition usage, and intonation.

Introduction

The English language is one of the *lingua francas* of the modern world. It is spoken on every continent and is a symbol of power and success. As it has spread, it has changed. Regional, political, and social divisions amongst people have created divisions amongst their respective varieties. In his article on language variety, Preston (1993, p. 23) argues that despite the belief that modern technology's effect on communication would eventually merge all of the dialects in the United States into one standard, no such assimilation has occurred. In some cases, modern communication has actually served to fortify these divisions even more. Linguistic variety is invariably linked with cultural norms and identity by its speakers. According to him, modern communication made people more loyal to their own cultures and forms of English by making the population more aware of the linguistic differences and variations (Preston 1993). The study of dialects is necessary to identify and bridge gaps between cultures within the United States. One particularly unknown and understudied speech community is the Hutterites of the Upper Midwest and Canada. This paper will attempt to analyse and describe the effects of language contact and the aspects of the English variety of this group.

Hutterite language

The Hutterites possess a rich history that is matched by an equally rich language situation. All of them share a first language—their own unique, unwritten Austro-Bavarian dialect of Upper German, known as Hutterisch. It is not mutually intelligible with German and has been largely influenced by Russian, Carinthian, and English. The children learn High German in elementary school so that they can read their German bibles and understand their German church services. In order to communicate with the outside world, they also learn English at about the same time. Therefore, all

who grow up in colonies, whether in South Dakota, Canada, Minnesota, or Montana, are trilingual by default, creating an interesting language mix that develops without much influence from the mainstream standard that exists in the rest of the country, or even on the farm down the road. Unlike most other immigrant groups in the United States that lose their native languages, Hutterisch remains strong and dominant among the Hutterites, even while its speakers have picked up the language of their new homeland.

Language contact and dialect

In other situations in which multiple languages exist in close proximity, mixing naturally occurs. Japan is one such country. McKenzie (2008, p. 278) noted a study done by Kay (1995, pp. 68–72), which explained that Japanese and English words have become mixed in Japan through loan words. Words are borrowed from English, yet they use Japanese substitutes for the English sounds that the Japanese language does not have. He also cites instances where compound words in English are translated directly into Japanese, creating unique compounds that sometimes even use half English and half Japanese (McKenzie 2008).

According to Fishman (2000, pp. 13-14), as long as the languages in a community do not compete but rather have clear roles, they have a better chance of retaining their independence from one another. If this is the case, in a language situation such as in the Hutterite community, the fact that each language serves such a separate, distinct purpose would prevent the languages from needing to mix. Other situations, like that of English and Japanese in Japan, do not have a distinction between the roles of different languages in their society. In those situations, the languages would be more likely to mix.

In her overview article regarding language contact, Silva-Corvalán (1995, p. 10) cites five language strategies that occur in bilingual situations that speakers use to lessen the differences between their languages:

In the use of the subordinate or functionally restricted language, beyond phonology, these strategies include (1) simplification of grammatical categories and lexical oppositions; (2) overgeneralization of forms, frequently following a regularizing pattern; (3) development of periphrastic constructions either to achieve paradigmatic regularity or to replace semantically transparent bound morphemes; (4) direct and indirect transfer of forms from the superordinate language; [and] (5) code-switching, which involves the use of two or more languages by one speaker in the same turn of speech or at turntaking points. Silva-Corvalán (1995, p. 10)

One of these strategies, the application of the superior language's structures onto the second language, was found to exist in the language contact situation of the Hutterites. I would argue that although the languages in a bilingual or trilingual community may be preserved due to the fact that the languages have distinct and understood roles, the types of mixing cited by Silva-Corvalán are still bound to occur.

Hutterite history

The Hutterites live in communal colonies that spread across the Upper Midwest. Founded by Jacob Hutter in the 1530s, the Hutterites form a branch of the Anabaptist movement that moved through Europe, chased by religious persecution, and eventually into North America. They are the least known of the three Anabaptist groups that exist today—the Amish, the Mennonites, and the Hutterites. Like their

Anabaptist cousins, they are historically pacifists, are uninvolved in government affairs and wear the traditional, conservative dress of the original Hutterites. The Hutterites are unique among the other Anabaptist groups in that they practise a community of goods, in which all possessions and resources are pooled for the common good and use, and in that they take advantage of modern farming and industrial technology. Friesen (2006, p. 573) credits the Hutterites with having more success than any other utopian commune, lasting for almost 500 years thus far.

The Hutterites have, however, met with outside opposition. They arrived in the Dakotas in 1874, and up until the early 1900s, the Hutterites enjoyed more freedom than they had in centuries. As Hostetler (1974, pp. 127-31) writes, peace ended when the United States entered World War I in 1917, when Hutterite men from South Dakota were forced to enlist in the military service. Because four of them resisted their work orders, they were sentenced to 37 years in prison and sent to Alcatraz, where two of them died of starvation and illness. This motivated most of the Hutterite colonies in South Dakota to move to Canada. During the Great Depression, many of those colonies returned to South Dakota where they remain to this day, and over time provisions have been made by the government to allow for conscientious objectors (Hostetler 1974, pp. 132-3). They now face very little of the kind of persecution that their ancestors endured.

Today, the Hutterites live much the same as before, except for their use of modern farming practices. Their presence in the United States and Canada goes widely unnoticed, except by those who live near them. In their local communities, even their closest neighbours tend to look upon them, at best, with confusion and, at worst, with suspicion and distrust. The misunderstandings that result in these communities are often linked to a lack of knowledge and respect on both sides, which could be remedied in part by outsiders making an effort to become informed about the rich history of the Hutterites.

Methodology

My research seeks to describe the effects of language contact on the Hutterites' variety of English. For this research project, I visited and conducted recorded interviews with three Hutterite women from a Hutterite colony in East Central South Dakota. Their names were Karen, Grace, and Melissa, and they asked that only their first names be associated with the study. My data was collected in two visits. On my first visit, they filled out a questionnaire asking them for their birthdays and for a list of the places, if any, that they had lived prior to their current home colony. I then asked them questions about their everyday lives to elicit conversation from them on familiar topics. That visit lasted two hours, and I retrieved about an hour of language data. My next visit consisted of two parts: another conversation-based interview and a time of more direct elicitation during which I asked questions about their language use and the nature of Hutterisch itself. For this visit, only Grace and Melissa were able to be present. This visit also lasted about two hours, and I again recorded about an hour of data.

Once I had collected all of my data, I analysed the conversations and was able to divide the data into the areas of pronunciation, topicalisation, prepositions, and intonation. For my analysis, I used Standard American English (SAE) as the model. My comparison with the Standard was not an issue of right speech versus wrong speech, and I do not believe that any one person speaks SAE. This standard was

meant only to serve as a tool for analysis. Each time that I listened to the data, I focused on a different category. I also paid attention to the strategies discussed by Silva-Corvalán, and I tried to find examples of borrowed words and phrases. Unfortunately, these were difficult to elicit. The women, to facilitate better communication with me, used words that I would easily recognise, and, when asked directly, they were unable to give examples of any borrowed words.

The interviews of the language participants were easily conducted in English. The language participants all demonstrated excellent fluency in English and each woman attested to her own fluency in both Hutterisch and German.

Limitations and assets

As my study began, I realised its various limitations. The most important of these is that I do not speak Hutterisch or German. Speaking one or both of those languages would have allowed my research and analysis to be much more efficient. However, I was able to overcome some of this by familiarizing myself with the basics of German as well as by asking questions about Hutterisch to my language participants. Another limitation to consider is that I was only able to spend limited time at one colony and with only three women, so the results of this study can only be applied with confidence to their particular situation, not to the entire group of Hutterites in the United States today.

A major asset to my study was my Hutterite heritage and my family's close connection to the colony. Not only was I able to build upon a previous positive relationship, but also I was able to be sensitive to their way of life. The risk of causing problems in the colony and using unethical practices during my study was lessened because I was strongly aware of the importance of respecting their way of life and maintaining a good working relationship with them.

Analysis

My analysis can be divided into four categories: pronunciation, topicalization, prepositions, and intonation. The examples in this section are samples of the larger body of data.

Pronunciation

One of the most salient aspects of the women's variety of English was their pronunciation. I was able to recognise five basic characteristics that were different from what would be considered a standard pronunciation, although their pronunciation varied within individual sentences. It was very obvious that the women had been taught standard American pronunciation and were influenced by their first language.

The first two differences in pronunciation were more frequent than the others and were ones that I had known from past casual conversations. They tended to replace their voiced and voiceless interdental fricatives, [ð] and [θ], with voiced and voiceless alveolar stops, [d] and [t], respectively. In (1a) below, we can see that the sentence has multiple interdental fricatives, all of which are in bold. In (1b), we can see which sounds were replaced with their respective alveolar stops.

- (1a) There's—there's lots of small things, but the main things are the same.
 (Grace)

- (1b) [ð]ere's—[d]ere's lots of small [t]ings, but [d]e main [t]ings are [d]e same.

In (2), we can see a similar example, in which the same word is used in two different ways.

- (2) Our minister doesn't [t]ink it's safe enough, I [θ]ink. (Grace)

Below, (3) shows that the fricatives can become stops even at the ends of words.

- (3) And one in Crystal Springs in Canada, for a mon[t]. (Grace)

The pronunciation of German consonants, particularly in regards to the occurrence of fortis/lenis pairs versus voiced/voiceless pairs, needs to be investigated in more detail. However, at this point the analysis shows that the speakers either devoiced almost all voiced alveolar sibilants, [z] to [s], or replace them with glottal stops [ʔ]. Of all the characteristics of Hutterite English, this one was the most constantly present. Most often, the change to the voiceless sibilant appears in nouns that use the voiced forms of the plural morpheme—words that would not overtly use the voiced sibilant but would be spelled with an s.

- (4) There're million[s] of differenc[es]. (Karen)

- (5) Our minister doe[ʔ]n't think it's safe enough, I think. (Grace)

In (4), the two plural words, millions and differences, would in Standard American English, use one of the voiced plural morphemes, but in this case the speaker devoiced the sibilant both times. The change to the glottal stop, in the case of (5), came in the middle of a word.

One of the more difficult changes to analyse was the alteration of the close-mid back rounded vowel, [o]. After a lengthy analysis, I came to the conclusion that the sound is not unrounded, but rather raised and without the glide that would exist in standard pronunciation. The sound is not quite fronted enough to be the near-close near-back vowel [ɔ].

Finally, in the variety of the Hutterite women, in many words that contained a mid-word or word-initial alveolar lateral approximant [l], the approximant became more velarised than the traditional “dark l” would be in SAE (Bronstien 1960, p. 125). Thus, in words like couple and poultry, which would have a velarised secondary articulation, the velarisation was more pronounced. In this context, it is interesting that according to Ladefoged (2006, p. 67-8) the alveolar lateral approximant also has a velarised secondary articulation in SAE.

Topicalisation

According to Ocampo and Klee (1995, p. 71), ‘Word order has been one of the most studied features of syntactic transfer. Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p. 55) state that it “seems to be the easiest sort of syntactic feature to borrow or acquire via language shift.”’ My analysis of the word order of the women’s variety confirms this claim. Topicalisation in their variety was found in two types of constructions.

First, the most common construction consisted of fronting of direct objects or prepositional phrases for emphasis. This is a common feature in German and possibly in Hutterisch as well because it is related to German. Such possibility for variation in word order reflects a key difference that exists between German and English: inflection. The inflection of verbs and the different declensions of nouns and adjectives in German allow for a more variation in word order that would account for the high rate of topicalisation that showed up in the English variety of the Hutterite women. For example, in (6), the direct object has been fronted.

- (6) DO SU V PP
String beans we have in that meal. (Karen)

In other cases, topicalisation was used to emphasize certain parts of the sentences. Sometimes, the topicalised noun came right next to the pronoun it renamed, as in (7). Elsewhere, as in (8), it came at the end of the sentence.

- (7) The minister, he has a prayer that he recites. (Melissa)
- (8) Like, when she has to go to town, my aunt, I go up there and take care of her.
(Melissa)

Prepositions

Learning prepositions in another language tends to be a very difficult task for language learners. The analysis of the use of prepositions in the women's variety of SAE demonstrated that their use of prepositions differed also from the ways in which prepositions are used in SAE. In (9)-(11), we see four examples of sentences with prepositions used differently than they would be in SAE.

- (9) Some years you can go straight through the night, but this year they have to quit about at twelve. (Grace)
- (10) We don't boast of our hair. (Grace)
- (11) Have the oven in the right temperature. (Melissa)

In (12), although the sentence is still completely understandable, there seem to be missing prepositions.

- (12) Sunday, you go 9:30 to church. (Karen)

In (13), we have another example which uses topicalisation to emphasise a prepositional phrase, creating a word order that would most likely not appear in Standard English.

- (13) So instead of crackers you eat the kanedle with the soup. (Karen)

Another way of saying this would be to put the prepositional phrase at the end, as in, 'So, you eat the kanedle with the soup instead of crackers.' (Kanedle is a soft, dumpling-like dough commonly used in Hutterite cooking.)

Intonation

According to Pike (1963, p. 23), most of the mistakes that are made in the attempt to determine the intonation patterns of a language stem from too little data. However, the data in this study seem to indicate that the intonation pattern of the women's variety of English differed from Standard English. For the most part, their English was much more evenly pitched than the Standard. They rarely used pitch to signal stress. Instead, they used length to denote emphasis in their sentences; the most important words were the longest words. In the following example, the most important words of the sentence were marked by length rather than pitch. The intonation of the sentence itself went steadily down until just after the word boring and from there remained monotone.

- (14) The mu:sic to me: was bo:ring because I don't care about Renaissance and all that stuff. (Karen)

Conclusion

The analysis outlines the preliminary findings of the study. Although this data must be applied with caution to the wider scope of the entire Hutterite population and even to the entire Hutterite colony that I visited, the English variety of three young Hutterite women is marked by some characteristics which may be contact-induced. Silva-Corvalán predicted the application of the superior language's structures onto the second language. This strategy was most apparent of the five strategies that she identified and was reflected in all four aspects of the analysis.

More data would further refine what has already been analysed, but for now we can identify that the English variety of the Hutterite women differs from SAE in the areas of pronunciation, topicalisation, preposition usage, and intonation.

Especially in the area of pronunciation, additional data could help to determine the variation that appeared in their use of interdental fricatives. In a follow-up study, we could investigate whether the replacement of the interdentals is a matter of register of the interview situation, if this phenomenon occurs in a set pattern, or if it is only present in careful speech.

More analysis of the Hutterisch language would also be very helpful, both in attempting to better describe the English variety that they speak and in learning more about the people themselves. My hope is that this study will motivate researchers and scholars to explore this area of linguistic research and that it will encourage others to seek out an otherwise forgotten people.

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Linguistic habitus and language policy in the Iberian Peninsula

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Abstract

The Iberian Peninsula has always been a place with a variety of overlapping cultures and languages which has created a complex and mixed cultural and linguistic habitus for the people. The language policies looking to change the linguistic realities within the Autonomous Communities of Galicia, Catalonia, and Euskadi since the transition to democracy at the end of the 1970s have produced some complex questions. Is one language preferable to another for the community? What should be the language of education? This discussion examines the cases of Catalonia, Galicia and Euskadi and determines why language policy might not be so significant in creating and cementing an individual's linguistic habitus. Analysing the Statutes of Autonomy and the language policies are done so as to determine the desired linguistic habitus. The actual linguistic situation is then analysed through looking at statistics and other evidence to give a picture of the success of the language policies. In turn, this leads to a truer picture of whether a linguistic habitus in the Autonomous Communities can be determined by agency (language policy) or by structure (prestige).

Introduction

The Iberian Peninsula has always been a place with a variety of overlapping cultures and languages. This has created a complex and mixed habitus for the people, both culturally and linguistically. Within the Kingdom of Spain, the focus of this essay, the issue of language has played a very significant role in society and has begun to be addressed by the constitution and state structures. From the transition to democracy to the modern day, Spain has seen vast changes in society: economically, socially, politically and linguistically. From the suppression of all but Castilian, to the multi-levelled linguistic reality of today, the issue of people's linguistic habitus has not been far from discussion. The selection of language policies to change the linguistic realities within the different autonomous communities of Galicia, Catalonia, and Euskadi¹ has produced some complex questions which this essay will attempt to answer. Can the selection of these language policies actually influence the linguistic habitus of the people, or even change it? Do other factors play a more important role? Placing the problem within the agency-structure debate within political science (and of course sociolinguistics) the essay tries to establish if agency orientated factors such as language policies or structural factors such as a language's prestige, are able to determine a person's linguistic habitus. Firstly the essay will discuss and define the issue of linguistic habitus and determine why language policy is possibly not significant in the cases of Catalonia, Galicia and Euskadi.

¹ The term Euskadi is preferred here rather than *Basque Country* as the English term can refer both to the cultural and political area inside and outside Spain, whereas Euskadi is specific to the Autonomous Community within the Kingdom of Spain

Linguistic habitus

Bourdieu's definition of habitus in its most basic form is that 'the habitus is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways (sic.)' (Bourdieu 1991, p.13). In his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu, through a critique of the objectivist and subjectivist divisions of sociology, outlines his theory of habitus as a middle way, reconciling the agency-structure debate. The debate centres on the ideas that either people's behaviours are determined through individual actions or alternatively through structural factors such as class, gender or even race. Habitus on the other hand, resolves these two opposing views as a theory on human behaviour. Gilbert sums this up nicely, '...the theory offers an explanation of human understanding and action which goes beyond individualism, but does not resort to abstract social forces' (2001, p. 48). This habitus is what people use to make the best capital gain; culturally, financially and socially. May goes further, explaining Bourdieu's theory that between two groups, cultural capital is accepted as being that of the dominant group, and therefore is considered socially valuable (2001, p.48). This is particularly important when discussing issues of culture, ethnicity and also language in a multi-plural society or State.

Thompson states that an individual's linguistic habitus is merely, 'a sub-set of the dispositions which comprise the habitus' and is 'acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts' (1991, p.17). Vann (1999, p.74) explains it is the product of experience and inculcation. Within the structure-agency debate, the linguistic habitus of an individual can receive pressure from the structure (e.g. expectations to speak a certain way in certain contexts by society) or from the agent (one's individual choice and experiences such as learning manners in school or at home). An individual's disposition to speak a certain language in a certain context also gives them the ability to make the best capital gain. In order to achieve a better capital gain, can an individual's disposition be influenced or even changed? If so, is it more likely for change to take place due to the actions of agents (in the case of this essay, language policy, since it is created by individuals in government) or of the structure (which are social norms and pressures, such as the prestige of a certain language)? The situations of the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Euskadi and Galicia in the Kingdom of Spain are useful in answering these questions. The mix of languages creates a complicated linguistic habitus for individuals which each Community is trying to change. This essay will show that despite the opportunities a linguistic policy can create in an Autonomous Community, structural issues of prestige are a greater determining factor in creating a linguistic habitus.

Within the context of the essay, the structural factor 'prestige' (and in turn its ability to influence a person's linguistic disposition), refers to the positive or negative image a language has on its intended users, which for the case studies are the languages of Catalan, Galician and Euskara in the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Galicia and Euskadi respectively. Language policy, referring to the policies enacted by the relevant Autonomous Communities, on the other hand is agency based as it is created by individuals with a direct impact through education and other state institutions.

How does a linguistic habitus become appropriate or desired? Webb *et al* state:

The state partially orchestrates this collective habitus by creating the conditions under which certain things come to be viewed as natural and inevitable...and others

unthinkable...so it can establish what constitutes acceptable behaviour (Webb et al 2002, p.93).

The implication is that the state has power over what is acceptable or appropriate in the linguistic field, including the languages that can or should be used by society. Theoretically, it therefore means that an appropriate linguistic habitus can be invented by the state, through the selection of language policies. However in practice, is this possible? A legal declaration of what is acceptable or appropriate in the linguistic field must therefore be found. With the case of Spain, the Constitution and Autonomous Statutes would enable us to construct an appropriate linguistic habitus for the individual in Catalonia, Euskadi and Galicia.

Linguistic habitus in the Iberian Peninsula

In the Spanish Constitution of 1978, Article 3.1 declares, 'El castellano es la lengua oficial del Estado. Todos los españoles tienen el deber de conocerla y el derecho a usarla.' Article 3.2 does not however rule out the use of other languages, 'Las demás lenguas españolas serán también oficiales en las respectivas Comunidades Autónomas'. This allows for individual (as well as societal) bilingualism in the Autonomous Communities according to their Statutes.

Catalonia

In Catalonia, the Statute of Autonomy 2006 Article 6.1 states, 'el catalán es la lengua de uso normal y preferente de las Administraciones públicas' with Article 6.2 going further, 'Todas las personas tienen derecho a utilizar las dos lenguas oficiales y los ciudadanos de Cataluña el derecho y el deber de conocerlas.' This defines the individual's desired linguistic habitus in Catalonia as bilingual by stating that everyone has the right and importantly, the duty to know both official languages. By also stating that Catalan is the preferred language in public administration, it implies diglossia where Catalan is the higher language and Castilian is the lower, creating a form of hierarchical bias towards Catalan.

The Catalan Autonomous Community wishes to normalise and promote the use of Catalan, whilst respecting an individual's linguistic right to speak Castilian (Preamble I, Ref. 1998/02989) marking a desired change in the linguistic habitus of individuals. The Ley de Política Lingüística 1998 entails creating a bilingual society of bilingual individuals, since it accepts Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution and Article 6 of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy as a basis of policy. It stems also from the 1983 Law that Àngel Pradilla says, 'aimed to eradicate its [the Catalan language's] linguistic inferiority' (2001 p.64). This obviously would mark a shift in the linguistic habitus of the people of Catalonia. The 1998 Ley aimed to promote peoples' knowledge of Catalan by, 'avanzar en la generalización del conocimiento completo y el uso normal de la lengua catalana' (Preamble II, Ref. 1998/02989) again actively moving to change or influence peoples' language choice in certain contexts from Castilian to Catalan. The diglossic situation in Catalonia is also cemented by stating the Administration and Community institutions, 'deben utilizar de forma general el catalan' (Preamble IV, Ref. 1998/02989) making it the officially high, prestigious language compared to Castilian. These inferences are also supported by Àngel Pradilla who deduced that the normalisation of Catalan was to make it reach into all sections of society (2001, p.64) which would also include Castilian speaking immigrants. Therefore, a Catalan-dominated linguistic habitus is officially given more

social and symbolic capital than Castilian which in turn alienates people who don't have any connection with Catalan, notably immigrants. Vann also agrees, as,

...linguistic dispositions of this Catalan habitus have very often been manifest in social markets. In these markets, the popular Catalan position has generally been determined by practising the Catalan language, which has provided both real and symbolic profit. (Vann 1999 p.75)

In this respect, the 1998 Ley de Política Lingüística is merely a reflection of this social profit. Amongst one's peers, be they family, friends or work colleagues, any social capital to be made is through the use of Catalan when communicating instead of Castilian.

Catalan is spoken by 50.1% of the population habitually even though only 40.4% said it was their first language (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya 2004, p. 28) which shows a preference of Catalan in everyday situations which in turn supports the 1998 Ley's wish to advance peoples' knowledge and use of the language. However, the Catalan linguistic habitus is not evenly distributed. There is a marked difference between the Barcelona metropolitan area, where more of the population is inclined to use Castilian habitually, and the rest of the Community where a Catalan-dominated linguistic habitus is more likely to be found (IEC 2004, p.29). Between friends the Catalan-dominated linguistic habitus prevails except in Barcelona where almost double the number of people use Castilian (IES 2004, p.40). With neighbours, in the workplace, in small and large shops, the doctor and to strangers, again the statistics generally show the same is true; a Catalan-lead linguistic habitus dominates in Catalonia except Barcelona (IES 2004, pp. 42-57). This does not mean that Catalan does not exist at all in Barcelona; it is only 6% less likely to be spoken in small shops whereas it is up to 30% less likely to be used amongst friends (IES 2004, pp.48-49, 40-41). In total numbers however, Catalan is spoken more than Castilian in Catalonia (IES 2004, p.28). It must be noted however, that migration from the rest of Spain and Castilian-speaking countries may have a direct affect on the language use in the Barcelona metropolitan area compared to the rest of Catalonia, being that immigrants are more likely to live in economically developed Barcelona than anywhere else in Catalonia and are more likely to speak and be spoken to in Castilian (Codo 2008, p. 189). Àngel Parilla sees the 1998 Ley as having a positive development on the linguistic habitus of Catalonia, 'Looking at the change from 1986 to 1991, we can see an improvement in each area [understanding, reading, speaking, writing]' (2001, p.73) although he does note that the 'imbalance is clear' (2001, p.74) between Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia. In education, the statistics show the use of Catalan-only or more-Catalan-than-Castilian in schools is apparent, although in Barcelona is it slightly more balanced (IES 2004, pp.44-45). This illustrates that the development of Catalan as the primary linguistic habitus of an individual in Barcelona is possible and that in this sense, Catalan's prestige, officialised in the 1998 Ley de Política Lingüística is having an effect. Indeed, Àngel Parilla states, 'that it is in the areas of education...that linguistic policy has given the most satisfactory results' (2001, p.64).

The language policy has given individuals the option and opportunity to adopt a Catalan-dominated linguistic habitus. It is however the prestige already associated with knowing Catalan within the community and people's individual choice that are making this a reality. Catalan is used in a variety of social contexts and is growing in use in place of Castilian. This change in balance has not yet occurred in cosmopolitan-Barcelona, although the numbers of people in Catalan-immersion (or dominated) education continues to rise (Angel Pradilla 2001, p.78). In this sense, the linguistic

habitus of individuals in Catalonia has begun to change, and will change further, having been made possible by the language policy, but made successful by the prestige and social capital of the language.

Galicia

In Galicia, Article 5.1 of the Statute of Autonomy 1981 says, ‘Los idiomas gallego y castellano son oficiales en Galicia y todos tienen el derecho de conocerlos y usarlos, and Article 5.3 ‘Los poderes públicos de Galicia garantizarán el uso normal y oficial de los dos idiomas...’. This places both languages legally on an equal footing. Society therefore is treated as a bilingual entity, although individuals within it may not be. Diglossia between Castilian and Galician is not legally expressed as part of the linguistic habitus of Galicia. This means neither language is legally more prestigious or preferable than the other, although an individual’s opinion may differ.

In Galicia, the main aim of the Ley de Normalización Lingüística 1983 (Ref. 1983/90056) is, ‘la puesta en marcha de...la plena recuperación de nuestra personalidad colectiva...’ and, ‘uno de los factores fundamentales de esa recuperación es la lengua’. The job of the language policy therefore is to enhance the use of Galician by individuals within the Autonomous Community. Article 1 confirms this by stating, ‘Todos los gallegos tienen el deber de conocerlo [el idioma gallego] y el derecho de usarlo’ which means that all Galicians would therefore have to be bilingual, because of Article 3.1 of the Spanish Constitution. The major problem with Galician as a medium of communication and in developing its use in an individual’s linguistic habitus is that it lacks the social prestige of Castilian, instead being seen historically as a backward, rural language (Wright 2004, p.215) and even to the present day, ‘it is not the language of advancement, prestige and “cool”’ (Beswick 2007 p.249). People see more social and economical capital vested in communicating in Castilian, a view also supported by Beswick (2007, p.222), ‘its [Galician’s] sociolinguistic relationship with Castilian has not been resolved’. The importance of prestige is touched on by Williams and defined as, ‘the relative value of one language over another in social advancement’ (1992, p.137) emphasising the significance of class on language use and prestige. With Galician, the idea that it is used by the poor and rural gives it less prestige than the urban and more ‘profitable’ Castilian language. The Xunta has attempted to end this negative issue of prestige by saying in Article 6.3 of the Ley, ‘los poderes públicos de Galicia promoverán el uso normal de la lengua gallega’ therefore trying to demonstrate its usage in more formal contexts.

Uniformly, across age, educative-level and gender boundaries, Galician is well understood by over 80% of the population and around 15% know it more or less (Instituto Galego de Estadística 2007). However, the younger and more educated someone is, the less likely they are going to speak it which shows the importance of prestige in linguistic habitus. If younger and more educated people refuse to speak the language, it is because it is of low benefit to them regardless of the educative incentives and policies in place to promote the knowledge of the language. Hermida comes to the conclusion that Galician use in schools ‘tends to degalicianise Galician-speakers’ because Castilian is the preferred language in schools (2001, p.127) which implies to students that the Galician language and culture do not have a high level of prestige. It is important as she notes Galician’s presence in schools is vital for the language to become a part of people’s linguistic habitus since it is a ‘means of presenting it to pupils as being perfectly valid for general communication’ (2001, p.127). She explains that the prestige of Galician is knocked due to its lack of use in

the mass media and in church where it is used in only 7.2% of sermons (2001, p.128). Beswick, in a more recent study also notes the Church's resistance to using Galician (2007, p.186) as well as the limited use of Galician in the media (2007, p.183). The influence of this on younger generations is significant and Beswick notes that only a well marketed image for Galician could, 'persuade the 14-year-old Galician girl, and many others like her, that it is okay, or even rather prestigious, to talk about pop idols in Galician' (2007, p.249). If the linguistic habitus of younger individuals were to incorporate both languages in the public and private sphere, then arguably the language policy can be deemed successful. The statistical information however, shows a strong divide between the use of Galician according to age, despite similar levels of knowledge and understanding (IGE 2007). Whereas an older individual's linguistic habitus inclines them to communicate in Galician in a variety of high and low social contexts (at work, with government administration, in banks, in shops, with friends and at the doctors), younger generations, women more than men, are inclined towards using Castilian in shops, banks, with friends and with government administration (IGE 2007). This shows a trend away from Galician as people's linguistic habitus, despite the language policy implementation. Even speaking to their parents at home, amongst the youngest especially, 55% prefer Castilian (IGE 2007). Only those over 30 years are more likely to speak Galician, and even then, it is just over half (54%) (IGE 2007). Not continuing a linguistic habitus over to new generations and the lack of (social or economical) capital attached to the language demonstrates the negative attitude people have towards Galician. Unfortunately for Galician, people under the age of 50 don't appear to view it as being so important or having much value, as around 53-55% of parents speak to their child (or mainly speak to them) in Castilian (IGE 2007). This downward trend will inevitably continue if people's attitude towards the language does not change.

Beswick does not believe that Galician is on the verge of death, instead she ascribes to the view that Galician, if actively and positively proclaimed by the Xunta, can make a comeback as part of a bilingual autonomous community and help to revitalise the Galician identity. If the language policy is able to do this, by making the use of Galician more widespread in contexts and sections of society that are highly regarded, then the situation, and the linguistic habitus of individuals will have changed towards a direction that they see more favourably. There have been some improvements and maybe the language, like Beswick believes, is not in eternal decline however much still needs to be done to change the linguistic habitus of individuals and society. As the language policy is not actively tackling this issue of prestige, it proves that an individual's linguistic habitus is heavily dependant upon the structural factor of prestige and use within society and that a language policy alone cannot change this dramatically.

Euskadi

In Euskadi, Article 6.1 of the Statue of Autonomy 1979 states, 'El euskera...tendrá, como el castellano, carácter de lengua oficial en Euskadi, y todos sus habitantes tienen el derecho a conocer y usar ambas lenguas.' This implies that the Basque linguistic habitus of society is bilingual, allowing for Castilian and Basque. Institutional diglossia (i.e. a preference of one language over another within institutional contexts), which would create a hierarchy between the two languages, is ruled out because in Article 6.2, 'Las instituciones comunes de la Comunidad Autónoma, teniendo en

cuenta la diversidad socio-lingüística del País Vasco, garantizarán el uso de ambas lenguas,...’ again confirming the political and institutional equality of both languages.

The *Ley Básica de Normalización del uso del Euskera* (1982) attempts to place the Basque language at the forefront of public life, therefore supporting a mainly Basque-speaking linguistic habitus for the individual. The Preamble recognises, ‘al euskera como el signo más visible y objetivo de identidad de nuestra comunidad...’ Article 2 also says, ‘la lengua propia del País Vasco es el Euskara’ although Article 3 also makes Castilian an official language. This creates a sense of prestige around Basque, and importantly links it to ‘national’ identity and encourages its use as the ‘natural’ language of an individual’s linguistic habitus.

However, the statistics show that 52% of the population of the Basque Autonomous Community are monolingual Castilian speakers with 72% saying they considered it their first language (Eustat 2008). Of the few individuals who consider themselves bilingual, only about 20% use Basque more often than Castilian (Eustat, 2008). This shows the linguistic habitus of many individuals to be Castilian (-dominated) which makes the aims of the language policy that much harder to enact. Cenoz and Perales already note the difficulty in keeping Basque as a first language pointing out, ‘the most important factor affecting the use of Basque is the number of Bascophones in the subject’s social networks’ (2001, p.95). This proves that the social capital of Basque is directly linked to its extent of diffusion throughout society.

Of those who speak Basque, the statistics show that they are up to 25% more likely to speak Basque in municipal offices than Castilian, but in more familiar settings such as with friends, workmates or local shops, this drops to only a 16%-5% preference (Eustat, 2008). It is not surprising that Castilian would be used more as over half the general population are monolingual non-Basque speakers. On the contrary, those who do know how to speak Basque are not monolingual as Cenoz and Perales note, they are, ‘bilingual in Basque and a romance language’ (2001, p.94) again influencing and affecting their linguistic habitus where Castilian in most non-formal situations has more social capital. In more formal situations, it is evident that Basque-speakers find using Basque gains them more social profit. At home, equal numbers of Basque speakers were inclined to speak either Basque or Castilian although there is a conscious recognition by 75% to speak to their children in Basque (Eustat 2008). This again has future implications for the linguistic habitus as native-Basque speakers are generally helping to maintain its use whilst neo-Basque speakers may increase. The language policy has helped as it has increased the supposed-value of knowing Basque to be virtually equal with that of Castilian particularly in public administration. The language policy also supports the use of Basque immersion schooling. Notably, over half the number of students throughout the Basque Autonomous Community now go to a Model D school (Basque immersion) and this trend appears to be increasing as more pupils experience Basque-only education instead of Castilian-only (Eustat 2007). This will have positive implications in the future for the success of a Basque-dominated linguistic habitus in individuals as long as it is sustained and improved upon. The more Basque becomes known by individuals, the more it will be diffused in non-formal situations (since more people will understand it) and therefore the more the linguistic habitus of individuals will change towards an equally Basque-language and Castilian-language orientation in all contexts, as the capital gained from knowing Basque in different social contexts will become greater. The attitude of people towards Basque is positive. Fishman states that in 1986, ‘48% of the population is of the opinion that Basque is very useful in finding

work; 66% is of the opinion that those who know Basque have better jobs than those who do not' (1991, p.173). Both percentages higher than the actual number of Basque speakers showing that Castilian speakers too have a positive attitude towards knowing Basque. This issue of attitude and in turn, prestige, is important for the success of the language policy in creating the appropriate linguistic habitus.

However, other factors play an important role. The media is predominantly Castilian-language (Cenoz and Perales 2001, p.98) and the political connotations of overtly expressing a Basque identity (particularly due to the violent nature of ETA) can be viewed negatively. In terms of Basque identity, the Basque language was not always prominent. In fact, in the early days of Basque nationalism, the exclusive concept of race was more important than language which differs from Catalan nationalism which took more inclusive civic overtones and consistently laid importance on the Catalan language (Conversi 1997, p.179). History, mixed with the current political situation and the effects of institutional factors such as the media, also influence the linguistic habitus of people in the Autonomous Community. As earlier stated, being a Basque speaker means being bilingual in Spanish too, so to move towards a monolingual Basque speaking situation is legally impossible due to Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution 1978. Also, the economic relevance in using Basque compared to Castilian is limited in a globalised world, which in turn limits the use of the language in certain contexts.

Looking at the linguistic habitus of individuals in the Basque Autonomous Community, it can be inferred that forward steps have been taken towards making it orientated towards the Basque-language. Although the number of Basque speakers is still minimal, it is increasing and education will play a major role in upgrading people's knowledge of the language. The increase in the knowledge of Basque by individuals and therefore its new presence in an individual's linguistic habitus is also confirmed by the level of prestige people place upon knowing it, by speaking to their children in Basque, or even sending them to Basque immersion schools. People's positive perceptions of the language created by the linguistic policy are evident in the education system where Basque immersion dominates. Therefore it can be deduced that the individual actions made possible by the language policy are the key in successfully beginning the change in the linguistic habitus of people in Euskadi and will be further determined by the structural issue of prestige and social capital that the language holds.

Conclusions

When looking at the language policies of the Autonomous Communities of Spain, the issue of prestige plays a dominant role. In Catalonia and Galicia, where knowledge of the respective languages is high, the prestige of the Catalan language has meant that the linguistic habitus of individuals to accommodate and promote it has been largely successful. It is the default language of administration and education, giving it a significant edge over Castilian in terms of prestige. Galician on the other hand suffers from a lack of prestige which has meant the preferred linguistic habitus for individuals has not taken shape in the Galician Autonomous Community as quickly or successfully as wished. The use of the language is uncertain, neither being well used by the respected institutions of the Church and media, nor as the main medium of education. The linguistic policy has not yet fully reversed the negative effects of the lack of prestige and it is this issue that most needs to be tackled. In Euskadi, the prestige of the language and the social capital related to it has meant that Basque,

despite its minimal usage at the moment, will in the future become more used as part of an individual's linguistic habitus in the Community. The rise of Basque-only schooling and the successful intergenerational passing-on of the language are evidence of its success as a language with prestige. Looking at the Autonomous Communities of Spain, it can be inferred that the judicious selection of language policies more essentially shaping an appropriate linguistic habitus for the individual. However, what makes a language policy successful and influential is based on the prestige a language holds in its respective community.

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“Dear Mr. Smith” vs “Hi there”: an investigation into the language of modern business emails

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Abstract

The modern world is becoming a really hectic place – the increasing pace of life demands faster and more efficient communication. This is particularly reflected in the business environment. The vast majority of communicative activity occurs via electronic means, with paper letters becoming obsolete. The fast pace pushes for a change in business register, away from the traditional formal letter, rules of writing which are often taught in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Modern email is becoming less formal and begins to resemble spoken interaction. This study examined a number of business emails sent to the authors, who are both English L2 (second language) speakers. The authors wrote emails in the tradition of a formal paper letter, but the responses were found to be much more informal. Emails were much shorter than paper letters, the register seemed to have shifted towards very informal, comparable to conversational, and the use of personal pronouns increased. Moreover, emails seem to have developed a range of features typical of only this genre, like specific greetings and absence of elements that are normal for paper letters.

Introduction

In a modern European school, every pupil is taught about ancient civilisations which mastered different skills in a particular period of time. For example, the Greeks invented philosophy and Mathematics; Egyptians were masters at building, while the Chinese discovered how to make paper. One might imagine what impact it would have made if these nations had the means to communicate internationally and exchange knowledge much earlier – the technologies being developed today could have come into an existence and spread across the globe centuries ago. This brings us to the importance of globalisation in the world today, as it gives technology and consequently business a chance to expand to unlimited boundaries involving people from all over the world. Business has become increasingly dynamic, international corporations are being established globally, and a tremendous amount of resources are being transferred across borders. Economists write about expansion of international trade, increase in foreign direct investment and overall globalisation of business (e.g. O'Brien and Williams 2007).

Undoubtedly, rapidly growing businesses require rapid communication in order to keep up with the pace. Today, electronic media has proven to be an efficient and effective way of exchanging information. Now most business correspondence,

such as job applications, memorandums and even day-to-day matters are processed electronically. The use of electronic mail has become increasingly popular (see Crystal 2001; Radicati Group 2008a; Ferris Research 2005). These developments will be discussed in more detail below.

In business, one-to-one emails are seen as a replacement for a traditional business letter, although, as noted by a number of scholars (Baron 1998; Gimenez 2000; Danet 2002), emails are not written in the same manner as paper letters due to various factors, primarily the genre's environment. With a growing number of businesses and electronic mail users, an even faster way of writing and answering is required, hence a change in the register of an email will inevitably take place developing new features of the genre. The latter fact has already been examined by Gimenez (2000), a more detailed discussion of which will be provided below.

We have set out to explore the language of emails in a formal context, and try to update the prescriptive book examples. Danet (2002) writes that examples of business letters are outdated; prescriptive textbooks use some examples written as far back as the 1860s. Most importantly, we are interested in how modern time pressures have made business emails in our corpus different from the standard traditional business letters. In this article we look at the structure, lexis and register of an email and make note of what is particularly different from a prescriptive example.

Research background

Email has become an increasingly prevalent means of communication. According to *Internet Society* and *Matrix Information and Directory Services* (2000, cited in Crystal 2001), the number of internet users in 2000 reached 800 million. In 2008 the Radicati Group (2008a) estimated that there were two billion internet users worldwide. Rounded, the estimates show a 125% increase in eight years. Moreover, research by the Radicati Group (2008b) has shown that the number of business email users around the globe was approximately 831.7 million in 2008. By business we mean 'non-personal', i.e. the authors of these emails have professional relations with their correspondents. According to Ferris Research (2005), an individual business email user sends approximately 38 emails daily, while receiving 102. In the corporate world, email is replacing traditional means of information exchange, e.g. memos or phone calls (Markus 1994, cited in Baron 1998). A perfect example of this is provided by Microsoft Corporation, where 99% of communication takes place by email (Kinsley 1996, cited in Baron 1998).

Following the underlying trend, one may say that numbers will continue to increase in the coming years. Evidently, such pace of interaction between users is making it hard to keep up with all the formalities established by previous generations, such as traditional business letter format and register. Consequently, as we will reveal below, a shift in register has occurred, with reasons to believe it will continue to evolve in the forthcoming years.

As cited by Baron (1998, p.144), 'It is a linguistic truism that all living languages change'. Providing this statement is true, and since email is a piece of a living language, borrowing characteristics from endophoric and exophoric language (discussion of which will be provided below), Baron demonstrates that the language of email is bound to change.

Table 1 summarises examples of formal business letters given by Morton (1996); Jones, Bastow & Hird (2001); Cotton, Falvey & Kent (2001).

Table 1: Business letters – elements of the genre

Greeting	Dear “Title Surname” or “Dear Sir/ Madam”
Statement of purpose – why the person is writing	I write regarding the home-improvement loan that you have with Central South Bank I wish to express my thanks for...
Closing phrases	usually an encouragement to contact the sender
Ending	Yours sincerely or Yours faithfully
Signature	a full name

The authors of this paper are L2 English speakers who have learnt English through formal education and have been taught Standard English (SE) through prescriptive methods. Our generation was taught to write formal letters in an old-fashioned way and not much attention was paid to the rules of writing emails. Gimenez (2000) used 11 EFL textbooks and found that only two deal with email, leading to an assumption that teaching in writing emails (whether the students are L1 or L2 speakers) is not considered important, and that rules of writing emails are self-taught, leading to an independently developing genre. We found that the emails we analysed deviated from the much less formal example given by Cotton et al (2001).

Methodology

Data Collection and Analysis

A corpus of business emails was collected for the purpose of this assignment. The research participants included academics from several universities, Aston University staff and prospective employers. There were no family members of the researchers among the participants.

Due to the limited number of emails, we were able to use mostly qualitative techniques for data analysis. The emails in the corpus had been compared to the traditional textbook examples of formal letters, and presence/absence of, and differences in, the main features of a genre were discussed. Some quantitative methods (e.g. corpus-based research) were also used: a corpus of emails was created, totalling 27 letters from 15 authors and 1142 words. Aston University ACORN corpus (<http://acorn.aston.ac.uk>) was used as well.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues included getting written permission from the people involved in our project (i.e. academics, staff and prospective employers) through online consent forms. People involved in the project had no obligation to participate in this research and were able to withdraw from the project whenever they wished. They were also given the right to contact us at any time if they had any inquiries about the project. The identities of the authors are not revealed.

Analysis and discussion

Deviations from tradition

Length

Jones et al (2001), Crystal (2001) and Baron (1998) agree on one thing: emails have to be, and are, brief. The mean length of an email in the corpus of this research is 43 words; the length of the example paper letter in Morton (1996) is about twice that. Crystal (2001) says that it is a common practice to write emails so that they would fit onto one computer screen due to time constraints in the corporate world. Baron's (1998) findings reveal the same.

Greetings

During our research we have found many deviations from the traditional business style. As we will reveal below, the formal business register seems to be shifting towards a more informal register of friendly letters. One of the most prominent divergences from the traditional features of register has been found in greetings. There is no more "Dear^Title^Surname" structure: it has been replaced by structures like "Dear^First Name", "Hello^First Name", "Hi^First Name" and only the first name. According to Kay *et al* (2001) and Jones *et al* (2001), these structures are conventionally used, and are much more likely to occur, in personal, informal letters. Table 2 below summarises our findings.

Table 2: Greetings

Greeting	Raw frequency
Dear^First Name	8
Hello^First Name	4
Hi^First Name	4
First Name Only	4
Good Morning^First Name	3

Analysing the data in the table, a conclusion can be made that the "Dear^First Name" structure is still prevalent; the genre of a business email still bears old features of a traditional (though not formal) letter. However, starting an email with "Hello" and "Hi" is also becoming acceptable. It should be noted that the structure "Good Morning^First Name" was used in three letters by one person.

In the beginning it was presumed that greetings will be less formal in emails from staff at the researchers' University due to something that the authors and the correspondents have in common – in this case, the institution – which might contribute to a degree of actual or presumed familiarity. However, as more emails from people outside the University were analysed, it was revealed that both inside and outside emails had informal greetings.

A possible reason for informality in greetings is power relations. It is a tradition and common sense to greet and address a senior with respect (e.g. "Good morning, Mr^Last name" in speech or "Dear Mr^First Name" in writing), however a senior may address a junior (in rank or age) by their first name, and that will be considered to be acceptable. Baron (1998) also mentions the importance of power relations, saying that differences between forms of computer-mediated

communication (CMC) result from them. Although her own research has found that lack of the interlocutors' physical presence allows for a more 'level playing field than writing' (Baron 1998, p.151), it may not always be the case. The researchers' status within the exchange is lower than their addressees' (students vs. staff or lecturers; jobseekers vs. prospective employers), and therefore the greetings are less formal.

In some cases there was no greeting at all. In one example the presumed reason for the absence of the greeting is because the email was sent immediately after being read. This is consistent with Jones *et al* (2001), who say that salutations can often be omitted. As Danet notes:

Many people have commented that composing an email message feels like talking even though it is written; others have noted that at least in some respects it even looks like talking—some of its linguistic features resemble those of speech. Danet (2002, p.3)

Baron's (1998) research has also found similarities between email and speech in terms of immediate response possible, as well as various factors of informality (for further discussion see below). In fact, research on register of email being similar to speech dates as far back as Shapiro and Anderson (1985, cited in Baron 1998).

One may conclude from this that the fast-paced environment in which business emails are sent resembles a conversational environment: the co-respondents need to reply to each other's messages rapidly, without contemplating the form in great detail, focusing on the core of the message. This may lead to typos, which we have found as well, and which is also consistent with Baron's (1998) findings.

Another example has the first name of the addressee in the body of the email but not in the greeting, which greatly deviates from the conventional letter (formal or otherwise) format.

An interesting example of a greeting is "Hi there". During the corpus search, in the British National Corpus (BNC) the phrase was mostly found in dialogues in literature between friends or people well acquainted with each other (hence – informal spoken language); in ACORN there were only five results, of which three were in spam emails – apparently one of the most informal email types.

Signatures

Another significant shift from the prescribed 'standard' has been found in signatures. Morton (1996); Jones *et al* (2001); Cotton *et al* (2001) write that formal letters are signed with a full name, yet this rule was adhered to only in four out of 27 emails in the corpus. All the others were signed only by the first name. Moreover, it must be added that two out of four emails had a so-called 'automatic signature' which is created and pre-set, and then automatically added at the end of the email. This fact reduces the number of emails signed with a full name even more.

One email had no signature at all:

Dear S

It is good of you to put yourself forward as a student representative for Teaching Committee, but the slot for a Level 2 student has already been filled.

Thank you again for offering.

This could be explained by the email's structure: at the start of the text there is always a heading, wherein it is indicated who the sender and the recipient are, as well as the subject of the email.

Other features

Other features of the genre were absent in nearly all emails in our corpus or replaced by something very different. The statement of purpose was absent in all emails. The traditional "Yours sincerely" was replaced by more informal phrases, and the final paragraph phrase about contacting the sender was found in seven emails out of 27. There could be several reasons for the absence of some features above. The speedy information exchange process comes to mind: most of the emails were written in response to certain authors' queries, usually in a period of time ranging from a few minutes to a few hours.

Yet all the features of a genre cannot be attributed solely to the environment and context in which texts are produced. The most likely reason why the statement of purpose is absent lies in the interface of email pages. Emails have headings with fields indicating the sender (From), the addressee (To) and the subject, therefore it is easier for both users to state the topic in the subject field than to write an introductory sentence. In fact the technological environment in which emails are written makes the statement of purpose and signatures seem like unnecessary repetitions.

Formality and email's similarity to speech

Although characteristics of spoken and written languages usually differ, depending on context, Chafe (cited in Baron 1998, p.136) notices that spoken language may adopt some characteristics of the written language, while written language may borrow traits of speech. Although email is a way of recording language for distant communication and thus is classified as a written language, many features of speech have been noticed to be present in electronic mail. Baron (1998) has provided a thorough analysis of email language and how similar it is to speech. We have used her model of a spectral speech-writing continuum to analyse certain features in our corpus. Our findings are summarised in Table 3. Baron's findings date back to 1998, i.e. 11 years our research. Our current research might be observing new trends in emails.

Politeness				
Forms of Address	Formal		Informal	We found frequent usage of 1 st person (<i>I</i> – 20 times) and 2 nd person (<i>you</i> – 43 times) pronouns. Recipients are addressed by first name.
Salutation, Signature	Obligatory		Optional	Greetings and signatures discussed above.
Level of formality	High		Low	Our findings correlate with Baron's – email is more informal than writing, however it includes formal stylistics
Contextual Features				
Physical proximity	Separated in time and space		Face-to-face	Our findings correlate with Baron's – the means of communication allows, and the context of the environment demands, rapid response. Yet 'rapid' can mean from minutes to hours, depending, e.g. on the workload of the respondent

Table 3: Spectral analysis of emails adapted from Baron's (1998) model.

Features under headings of *Writing* and *Speech* formatted in bold are the prevalent ones.

Nature of conversation	Lack of physical presence helps level the field		Known age, gender, status contribute to hierarchy	Our corpus falls somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, particularly in terms of first name usage. There are two equal opinions – that through use of first names one can exercise power and that a first name used to address a senior may reduce power relations.
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As can be seen from our analysis, some features are the same as in Baron's findings, and some are opposite. Less adjectives and adverbs are used because Baron wrote about email in general, and we focus on business emails, which, although informal, are still presumably closer to writing. On the other hand, there are few subordinate clauses and disjunctions, which, as opposed to Baron's findings, leads to a conclusion that since 1998, emails, even business ones, have acquired elements typical of spoken language.

These include looking at an email as a dialogue (assuming that a quick exchange occurs), with elements of spontaneity (e.g. "No problem", occurring in the beginning of an email), simpler syntax ("Do you have the forms?"), dealing with present ("How are you getting on with the medical form?") and occasionally requires some sort of external contextualization (an email starting with "This is fine by me" or "That's absolutely fine" evidently requires an explanation or some point of reference to a previous conversation, which is not acceptable in a traditional letter). Moreover, according to Baron (1998), written language (especially in business letters) is considered to be formal. As we have observed, in many cases a limited amount of formality is present in the emails provided. As Baron (1998, p.147) sums up:

... email tends to use more casual lexicon, to be less carefully edited, and to assume a greater degree of familiarity with the interlocutor (...). In email, for example, the use of first names is quite common, even with people you have never met.

The lack of formality is expressed in contractions (don't, that's, I'm) and colloquial expressions ("It is a shame to have these clashes"; "emailing you a little while back", "Keep me informed"; "don't hesitate to get in touch"). Interesting trends were found in phrases used instead of "Yours sincerely". These are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Endings

Kind Regards	13
Best Regards	3
Best Wishes	2
Best	2
Regards	1

As it can be seen from Table 4, "Kind regards" is the most prevalent way to end an email. Taking all of the above into account, one may presume that it is a semi-formal expression and it is accepted by the majority of users. Cotton *et al* (2001) use "Best Wishes" in their example, which is still not from the register of friendly letters, like e.g. lots of love. Applying Baron's (1998) spectral model again, it leads to a conclusion that emails may be placed around the centre, but towards the informal side of a formal-informal spectrum, since although some formality is still retained, many features point to decreasing formality.

Conclusion

We have found that business emails have not only deviated greatly from traditional business letters, but also have developed specific features of their own. These include absence of the traditional elements of a formal letter, decreasing formality throughout the messages from greeting to closing phrases, and increasing similarity to speech.

There could be several reasons for this. One of the most important ones, is the environment in which emails are written. This includes the nature of business communication with the need for speedy exchange, making email resemble a spoken conversation. The other side is the way emails are structured, which leads to abandoning traditional business letter elements.

Another reason could be the power relations within the organisation, and the way co-respondents perceive their own power. This is reflected in formality of greetings, signatures and the lexicon (colloquial presumably being used by those of higher rank in the organisation).

There could be a third reason – the changing nature of business, going from a highly structured, formal organisation to a flatter, team-based one (for discussion of this see e.g. Keuning & Opheij 1994), which may presume that the formality is decreasing with the structural change, and the employees are having their faces visible behind their names.

All things considered, one may presume that an entirely new genre, with its unique register swinging around the middle of a speech-writing spectral continuum, has emerged. It is still developing, and has not settled down. The register of it is very far away from the formal, highly structured register of business letters, shifting

towards the register of friendly ones, and of spoken language with spoken grammar (contractions, ellipses, deictic features) and colloquial expressions.

Further research

One of the focal points of this research is comparison of emails to 'prescriptive' examples of business letters, looking for possible reasons for deviation in technological and corporate context; however indications for further research would be an investigation into the correlation between language used and gender as well as age. For example, it would be interesting to learn about the effect that the gender or age of participants has on formality of emails and their similarity to speech. During this research, the participants' gender was not accounted for; hence it is not really clear how language differs in this respect.

Moreover, due to time constraints, this research was not able to account for power relations and familiarity of the interlocutors within the organisation to a full extent. These topics could also be a vast area for further research.

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Using podcasts for learning English: perceptions of Hong Kong Secondary 6 ESL students

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Abstract

This article examines the Hong Kong secondary six (S.6) English as a Second Language (ESL) students' perceptions in the use of podcasting in English learning. Podcasting is a medium for the delivery of information with a large number of podcasts on various topics. It was introduced by Apple's iPod, and is now rapidly increasing the variety of podcasts with educational purposes. The educational benefit of podcasts has been investigated by many experts, yet the idea has still not been introduced in Hong Kong. In the current study, all of the participants agreed that podcasts had enhanced their language skills. Though most of the findings are very impressive, some problems have also occurred. Implications of these results for teaching and learning are discussed.

Background

There is a common perception that Hong Kong students are extremely exam-oriented and passive in class. The Center for Enhanced Learning and Teaching revealed that most Hong Kong students are often prone to rote-learning and lack the initiative to explore ideas by themselves (1996). In this regard, the Hong Kong government has established the Information Literacy Framework for Hong Kong Students to enhance students to learn actively through information technology resources (Education and Manpower Bureau 2005).

In the international context, increasing attention has been given to the use of podcasting as an interactive means in education (Holtz and Hobson 2007; Palmer and Devitt 2007; Salmon and Edirisingha 2008). Podcasting, one of the recent fastest-growing technologies, is defined as an internet-based means of broadcasting information (Holtz and Hobson 2007, p.7). According to Savel *et al* (2007, p.94), the simplest way to get a podcast is through the combination of iPods and iTunes. Podcasting programmes can be found in the iTunes Store (Figure 1) and one just needs to click the "subscribe" button. When the iPod is plugged into a computer, the updated podcast programmes will be downloaded into the iPod. Previous research has considered whether podcasting could be feasible in classes, discussion groups or lectures to gain educational benefits (Evans 2008; Salmon and Edirisingha 2008; Sze 2006). A majority of the students reported that podcasts have value as an additional learning resource enhancing their learning experience. Yet, whether podcasts will specifically bring benefits to language learners in Hong Kong awaits further investigation.

Figure 1: iTunes Store Sample



Literature review

With a 15% increase in the number of podcast users around the world each month, it has become one of the most discussed educational technologies (Podcasting in the Classroom 2008, p.7). It provides educators with a variety of teaching strategies to tackle the needs of the students. Jowitt (2008, p.15) suggests that the advantages of podcasts include the mobility of the device and the flexibility of the content, which eases student learning. In Hong Kong, most students lack exposure to English. Since the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the Hong Kong government has adopted Chinese as the medium of instruction. Hong Kong students do not have enough opportunity to use English, even at school (Standing Committee on Language Education and Research 2003). New technology may be able to build up their motivation in language learning. It is worthwhile investigating whether podcasts can increase students' interest in the language.

At the same time, there are various types of podcasts on the internet targeting different audiences. The podcasts offer all kinds of interesting topics which students can browse through. Some of them even provide transcripts for students to read (e.g. ESL podcasting). Harris and Park (2008, pp.548-550) discuss various types of educational podcasts, such as those that are teaching-driven, service-driven, marketing-driven and technology-driven. Fontichiaro (2008) agrees that providing students with a chance to experience podcasts which match their own interests can promote their willingness to learn. Specific advantages for language learning by using podcasts have been investigated by Sze (2006), a Hong Kong educator. He has discussed how students' listening and speaking skills can be developed through listening to podcasts. Despite the lack of related research in the Hong Kong school context, he has pointed out that using podcasts as a medium to help students learn English is beneficial since student motivation can be enhanced.

Previous research has seldom been carried out in Asia, and podcasting is still a very new technology in Hong Kong. This research investigates the Hong Kong ESL

students' perceptions of podcasts, and helps us to understand how we can incorporate podcasting into our teaching.

Objectives

To study the students' perceptions of using podcasts, three questions were set as the main components of this research:

- (1) What are Hong Kong students' attitudes towards podcasts?
- (2) Do the students agree that podcasts are a useful tool in language learning?
- (3) Are there any problems that are encountered by the students while using podcasts?

Research methodology

A case study approach was employed, which aims at providing a more subjective and interpretive stance in the education field (Gall et al 1996; Johnson 1992; Stake 1994, 1995). The current study also employs a qualitative approach, and hence a deeper investigation (i.e. interviews and questionnaires) is undertaken. Chappelle and Duff (2003) agreed that these instruments provide in-depth data which help in understanding the perceptions of students. Students' perceptions are reported individually in each case. Corresponding quotes from the interview transcripts and the journals are used to support the findings. Furthermore, the questionnaires are summarized and analysed as statistical data.

Instruments

Denzin (1978) discusses methodological triangulation, which is using more than one method to gather data to increase the credibility and validity of the results. In this study, three types of instrument are used—interviews, journal writing and questionnaires. The interview is divided into two parts: the pre-research period (Table 1) and post-research period (Table 2). The first interview is a structured interview with five questions. It mainly focuses on the interviewees' perceptions of using new technology in learning English.

Table 1: Pre-research interview questions

(1) Are you interested in using new technology?
(2) Do you have an iPod?
(3) Have you ever heard of podcasting?
(4) Do you enjoy learning English?
(5) Would you like to use a new technology to learn English?

Straightforward answers can be obtained from the structured interview (Wallace 1998) so I could determine whether the interviewee was willing to participate in the research. The second interview is semi-structured. Questions focus the three objectives of this research.

Table 2: Post-research interview questions

(1) Do you like podcasts? Why?
(2) Do you think podcasts are a useful tool in language learning? Why?
(3) Are there any problems that you have encountered while you are listening to the podcast? What did you do?

Follow-up questions are also asked, so that the answers of the students can be interpreted more accurately. All questions are asked in English and the students can respond in Chinese. This allows them to share more complex ideas in their mother tongue. The quotes of the conversations are translated in the discussion of this article.

The second instrument was a journal (Table 3). It is used each week during the experimental period. Students were required to write a journal each week to show their participation in the podcasting activity. Brock et al (1992) argue that journals can show the hidden affective variables that greatly influence the way students learn. During the experimental period, students are given feedback by the researcher on their journal entries (i.e. which programme is suitable for them to listen to), and hence their participation can be enhanced.

Table 3: Questions for journal entries

(1) Which podcast have you chosen this week? Why?
(2) Do you enjoy listening to the podcast? Is there any problem? Why?
(3) Has this podcast enhanced your interest in learning English? Why?

A questionnaire was used to collect the students' rating on the use of podcasting, which can also provide statistical data (Meyers and Well 1995). Within the questionnaire (Table 4), 13 questions are included. Some of the questions are either sharing the same meaning (e.g. 2 and 10) or contradicting each other (e.g. 6 and 13). This helps to control the accuracy of the data. This is particularly useful for distinguishing whether the participants are answering the questions thoughtfully or just randomly.

The study

Context

The research ran for eight weeks from mid-November 2008 to mid-January 2009 in a Hong Kong Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI) secondary school. Since most of the original students of this school do not meet the minimum academic requirement set by the Education Bureau, most of the secondary 6 students come from other schools. In fact, the students are not very good at English. Most of them got two to three marks in their Use of English (UE) public exam, which is equivalent to grade E/D. The context can provide all round evidence for the research, as students with different abilities can also be included.

Table 4: Questionnaire: Students' rating of their use of podcasts

Put a 'Tick' in the appropriate box in each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Fair	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I enjoy listening to podcasts					
2. I don't know how to handle this new technology.					
3. Podcasts are difficult.					
4. Podcasts are useful for language learning.					
5. Podcasts bring me no fun at all.					
6. I will not listen to podcasts again after this research.					
7. I think podcasts help me a lot in language learning.					
8. Podcasts are easy to handle.					
9. I don't think podcasts are interesting.					
10. Podcasts are too new to me.					
11. The content of podcasts is not suitable for us.					
12. I like listening to podcasts.					
13. I will listen to podcasts in future.					

Participants

At the beginning of the research period, 10 secondary 6 ESL students were randomly selected to attend the pre-research interview, which aimed to investigate the students' attitude towards participating in the research. If they had negative perceptions towards the technology even before knowing it, they would not be invited to participate in the research. The selection is information-oriented, which helps maximise the utility of information from the participants (Flyvbjerg 2006, p.230). After the interview, students A, B and C were chosen. The students' were aged 17 and 18. These students have different language learning backgrounds, in which one of them studied in an English as the medium of instruction (EMI) school, while the other two studied in CMI schools. Unlike the other two students, student A, who had studied in an EMI school has been listening to podcasts for half a year. He had a rich knowledge about podcasts:

I listen to podcasts for 20 minutes each time, and I listen to it once every night. [Pre-research interview]

On the other hand, students B and C have shown their enthusiasm in enhancing their English learning by using this new technology.

Procedure

In the first week, three students were picked for the study according to their attitude towards the new technology. The three students were required to attend a training session in the language laboratory where computers, headsets and microphones were prepared. The students were taught on how these facilities are used for listening to podcasts. Podcasts from the iTunes store were also introduced to the students.

Starting from the second week, the students were given a list of podcasting websites (Appendix), in which they could choose the podcast that they would like to listen to. Then each week, the students wrote a journal entry. The journals were collected for monitoring the process of the research. Students A and B have continuously listened to podcasts during the whole process; however, student C discontinued the process after the second week. She did not want to listen to podcasts each week and would prefer spending time on her tutorial classes instead. The duration of the experimental period was six weeks. In the eighth week, all students attended the interview again and completed the questionnaire.

Results

The students like podcasting.

Among the three cases, students A and B have definitely shown their interest in podcasting. In the first week, student A has already requested to write about the same podcast for the rest of his journal entries. He mostly listened to ESL podcasting, which supplies podcasts on various topics about US culture to enhance students' English learning:

I only choose ESL podcasting. I only listen to that, because it suits my level. [First week journal entry, student A]

Student A listened to this podcast because he wanted to improve his English. Every week, he carried on his listening habits and provided feedback in the journal. Most of the time he talked about what he had listened to and he did not encounter any problems at all in the experimental period.

Though student B emphasised that his reason to listen to podcasts was solely to improve his listening skills, when he was asked how he would describe podcasting to other ESL learners, he stated:

It is fun and is easy to follow. [Post-research interview, student B]

He regarded podcasting as an interesting medium for language learning. He has written up every journal entry and each week he would try to listen to different types of podcasting. Most of the time, he enjoyed the podcast he chose:

I listened to a podcast about jokes. It is about some chats in the bar and it is hilarious. [Second week journal entry, student B]

I listened to an ESL podcast which student A has introduced to me. I also enjoyed listening to something about the U.S. culture. I think the jokes were quite interesting. [Third week journal entry, student B]

Student B expressed the opinion that podcasts were more fun than textbooks, because the contents were always up-to-date and entertaining. On the other hand, though student C did not carry on the research in the middle of the experimental period, she did follow the instruction given and listened to some podcast programmes in the first two weeks. Here is her feedback:

I have listened to a podcast about American jokes, they are fun. The stories are very interesting. But I cannot understand some of their accents. I think podcasts are useful for improving my listening skills, because I can learn more English. [First week journal entry, student C]

I listened to a podcast about songs. I think it is very weird, I mean the melody. It is not my cup of tea. [Second week journal entry, student C]

After each entry, I provided her with some more podcast sites, which she might be interested in. She explained that she was busy with her studies and did not want to listen to podcasts every week. I did not force her because I wanted her to develop her interest in podcasts on her own.

In the questionnaire statistics (Table 5), all three participants agreed that they enjoyed listening to podcasts and disagreed with the statement that ‘Podcasts bring me no fun at all.’ In the questionnaire, student A rates ‘strongly agree’ with the following statement:

I enjoy listening to podcasts.

Student B strongly agreed that he would listen to podcasts in the future and has indicated that he would not stop listening to podcasts after the research period. It can be concluded that podcasts are welcomed by the students.

Table 5: Questionnaire statistics

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Fair	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I enjoy listening to podcasts.				B, C	A
2. I don't know how to handle this new technology.	A	B, C			
3. Podcasts are difficult.	A	B, C			
4. Podcasts are useful for language learning.					<u>A, B, C</u>
5. Podcasts bring me no fun at all.	A, B	C			
6. I will not listen to podcasts again after this research.	A, B		C		
7. I think podcasts help me a lot in language learning.				C	A, B
8. Podcasts are easy to handle.					<u>A, B, C</u>
9. I don't think podcasts are interesting.	A, B	C			
10. Podcasts are too new to me.	<u>A, B, C</u>				
11. The content of podcasts is not suitable for us.	A, B		C		
12. I like listening to podcasts.			C		A, B
13. I will listen to podcasts in future.			C		A, B

The students agree that podcasts are a useful tool in language learning.

In the post-research period, a semi-structured interview was conducted, to acquire a more in-depth understanding of student A's initiation to listening to podcasts. One of the reasons that triggered student A to start listening to podcasts is his willingness to improve his English. He agreed that podcasts have improved his listening skills. However, when he was asked if any evidence can be provided, he admitted that he had started this habit just three months previously, and thus he could not demonstrate any proof of improvement. He stated the following in the post-research period:

In the beginning, I tried to read the transcript while I was listening. Without the transcript, it would be hard for me to catch up the content. Now, I am getting better, I try not to read the transcript. I am surprised that I can still catch up. [Post-research interview, student A]

I enjoy listening to the culture of the US. It is fun to learn things this way. Most of the time, I listen to dialogue. I think my speaking skills have improved as well. [Post-research interview, student A]

From the above quotes, it is shown that student A believed that podcasts had improved both his listening skills and speaking skills; he listens to podcasts every day.

Students B and C both agreed that podcasts had motivated them to listen to English. In the post-research interview, student B said that he listened to podcasts twice a week during the research period, as he wanted to immerse himself in English. After four weeks, student B found that listening to podcasts had strengthened his listening skills:

I think my listening skill has improved. I started having a preliminary expectation to the words that the speakers are going to say. It is quite exciting. [Fourth week journal entry, student B]

On the other hand, student C argued that if she did not have so many tutorial classes, she would have listened more to podcasts. Student C has shared more about her perceptions on podcasting in the post-research interview. She agreed that podcasting was useful for her language learning. After a six-week connection with podcasting, they all strongly agreed that podcasting was a useful tool for language learning in listening and speaking.

In the questionnaire, students A and B strongly agreed ‘Podcasting helps me a lot in language learning.’ Although student C did not continue her participation throughout the process, she also agreed with that statement. At the end, students A, B and C all strongly agreed: ‘Podcasting is useful for language learning.’ This indicates that they all realised the usefulness of podcasts in language learning.

The students find it hard to choose a suitable podcasts.

Choosing a podcast that is suitable for listening is not easy for any of the participants. Student A also encountered problems when he started listening to the podcasts:

I searched a lot of podcasting sites in the iTunes Store. Most of them are not for ESL students. I needed to keep subscribing and deleting the subscription. I finally stayed with this one (ESL podcasting) because it was designed for ESL learners. [Post-research interview, student A]

Student B also thought it was difficult to find a suitable podcast, because some of the podcasts were designed for native speakers. He thus spent a lot of time searching for podcasts. Student B agreed that some of the podcasts on the internet were boring and were not suitable for ESL learners.

Student C encountered two major problems when she listened to podcasts. First of all, the length of the podcast was too long, while the content of the second one did not arouse her interest. Podcasts are not solely designed for educational purposes and especially for ESL learners. It takes time for students to choose a podcast that suits them. Her complaints are reasonable and it encourages us to think how we can help.

Discussion

An interest in podcasting depends on the style of podcasting

From the above case studies, it is reasonable to suggest that podcasting can be introduced to Hong Kong ESL students. The participants have shown their willingness to use this new technology. However, student C’s case should be noted. She originally agreed to listen to podcasts, but then gave up. The reason behind her

move might be because the type of podcast was not suitable for her and thus hindered her involvement. According to Salmon and Edrington (2008), the style of podcast is important. It is the key to holding students' attention. It needs to be interesting to listen to as well as informative. Student C is typically one of those who gets lost in the style of podcast. It actually takes time to choose a suitable podcast to listen to. However, she lost her patience and was not willing to try again. This is a very good example for Hong Kong teachers who want to bring podcasts into classrooms. The style of podcast is extremely important to enhance the students' interest. Though it takes time, the benefits podcasts bring to students are overwhelming.

Podcasting is a useful tool for language learning in the Hong Kong ESL classroom

The aim of listening to podcasts is straightforward. Podcasting can work as an accessible platform for students to expose themselves to the language. In student A's case, he realized his listening skills and speaking skills were enhanced and agreed that podcasting was a useful tool for language learning. This finding is not a surprise to educators. According to Harris and Park (2008, pp.549-550), student A's choice, ESL podcasting is service-driven, which aims at delivering information to students and hence improves their language skills.

Student B also found that his listening skills had improved because he started having preliminary knowledge of the content. He believed this was because of his exposure to the language and his enthusiasm for listening to various types of podcast. Although student C did not enjoy the podcasts very much, she agreed that listening to podcasts had improved her language learning.

Bringing the benefits of podcasts to the Hong Kong context

Podcasts are under-utilised in the Hong Kong education field. Sze (2006) discusses how different types of podcasts could develop the listening and speaking skills of students. This research has shown that students in Hong Kong can also get benefits from podcasts. In order to match with the Hong Kong context, we do not need to download podcasts solely from the internet – podcasts can also be tailor-made to cater for the needs of the students (Harris and Park 2008; Stephens 2007). Teachers can design their own level of materials. Other materials like transcripts and visual images can also be provided in podcasts. Video podcasts can help expand topics that require image display (Corl *et al* 2008, p.26). Therefore, students at any level can also get benefits from them. Student podcasts can be developed to enhance the students' experience of learning and this would be quite suitable to be promoted in Hong Kong. Since the New Senior Secondary policy has focused on the students' interpersonal experience, podcasts can provide students with a more authentic and personal experience to learn the language (Curriculum Development Council 2007).

Length of podcasts affects students' perceptions of podcasting

In the research, the length of the podcast had a huge impact on the students' habits. Students B and C agreed that sometimes the length of the podcast was quite intolerable to them, especially when some of the podcasts did not provide any visual images. Student C particularly expressed that the length of podcasts was one of the factors that made her reluctant in continuing the research.

Chan *et al* (2006, p.115) suggest that the length of the podcast should be about five minutes, roughly the length of a typical song. This may help address the problem. On the other hand, Stephens (2007, p.55) notes that podcasts do not need much equipment to create. In order to minimize the disruption caused by the length of the podcast, teachers can create podcasts in accordance with students' preference. Richardson (2006) also encouraged educators to embrace this technology inside the classroom.

Conclusion

This research aims at finding out about the perception of Hong Kong ESL Secondary 6 students towards podcasts. Generally, the findings are positive and the research objectives are well achieved. The students all agreed that podcasts could increase their listening skills and they were interested in carrying on these listening habits. Some problems have also been identified in the research, including the length and the style of the podcast. All these problems can be solved if teachers design appropriate content for the students. The major benefit of podcasts is to provide more opportunities for students to expose themselves to the language. Although the small sample size of this research may not be able to reveal the whole picture of the Hong Kong context, the in-depth approach provides us with concrete and critical data for further research, such as research on students' interest in different podcast topics and levels. Furthermore, lower level students can also be investigated, as podcasts should not be limited only to senior students. Our students are ready to take on the challenges of podcasts. Whether the use of podcasts can be developed in the Hong Kong classroom or not rests on our willingness to try.

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Appendix: Lists of podcast directories and resources online

Podcast directories

Apple iTunes (download required) – <http://www.apple.com/itunes>

Podcast Alley – <http://www.podcastally.com>

Podcast Pickle – <http://www.podcastpickle.com>

Yahoo – <http://podcasts.yahoo.com>

Podcasting resources on the Web

iLounge – <http://ipodlounge.com>

Podcast 411 – <http://www.podcast411.com>

Podcast Expert – <http://www.podcastexpert.com>

Podcasting news – <http://www.podcastingnews.com>

ELT podcasts

Manythings (songs) – <http://www.manythings.org/songs/>

Manythings (jokes) – <http://www.manythings.org/jokes/>

Englishpodsong – <http://englishpodsong.blogspot.com>

Englishcaster (Vocabulary, idioms, slang, etc.) <http://www.englishcaster.com/idioms/>

e-poche (scripted conversations) – <http://www.e-poche.net/conversations/>

English through stories – <http://www.englishthroughstories.com>

ESL podcasting – <http://www.eslpod.com/website/index.php>

Phonetics – <http://phoneticpodcast.com>

Students podcasts (created by students)

Barcelona Young EFL Podcasts – <http://bylpodcasts.blogspot.com>

Japanese students' podcasts – <http://downthepond.podomatic.com>

Read aloud by students – <http://www.aidenyeh.podomatic.com>

Bardwell Road Centre Podcast – <http://www.bardwellroad.podomatic.com>

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