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Using Discourse-Based Strategies to Address the Lexicogrammatical Development of Generation 1.5 ESL Writers

- For academic writers to use a word, they must know not only its basic meaning, its pronunciation, and the contexts in which the word is used, they must also possess more complex knowledge—a word’s collocational patterns and grammatical constraints (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Halliday, 1987, 1994). Gaining the lexicogrammatical knowledge needed to use words appropriately in college writing is a particular challenge for Generation 1.5 ESL writers. These students, who come to college with a rich academic and nonacademic vocabulary developed through years of formal study and daily interaction in English, often produce awkward or even ungrammatical sentences when they use this vocabulary productively. This paper focuses on lexicogrammatical errors commonly found in the academic writing of Generation 1.5 ESL students and discusses how discourse-based strategies for teaching grammar can be adapted to help these learners use academic vocabulary in a semantically and grammatically appropriate way. These strategies include having students look at models, teaching dictionary use, and developing students’ analytical self-editing strategies.

Introduction

When we say that a student does not know a word, we generally do not mean that he has never heard or seen it. In fact, we usually discover that he doesn’t know a word by observing the way he uses it. At the deepest level of “not knowing,” a student would not know a word’s existence. But errors in vocabulary already attest to the student’s knowledge, at some level, of the words he is using (or misusing). He may have learned to say the word without learning what it stands for; or he may have learned what a word stands for without having learned the exact written or spoken form of it; he may have but a blurred sense of both the meaning and form of a word; he may know the word well enough to move past it as he reads but not well enough to initiate its use in his speaking or writing; or he may know one meaning of

a word that has multiple meanings. Or finally, he may know a word and what it stands for without having a sense of how the word is affected, semantically or syntactically, by the words around it. (Mina Shaughnessy, 1977)

When reading this quote, it's easy to think that Mina Shaughnessy owned a crystal ball. Although she wrote 30 years ago and was reflecting on the vocabulary use of students whose first language was English, her observations apply equally to the vocabulary use of a group of college writers found in many U.S. universities today: Generation 1.5 ESL writers. Shaughnessy's words elucidate two issues regarding their lexical development. First, Shaughnessy points to the source of infelicitous vocabulary use that is often prevalent in the drafts of Generation 1.5 ESL college students. Generation 1.5 ESL writers, like the basic writers she studied, come to college composition courses with a rich academic and nonacademic vocabulary developed through years of formal study and daily interaction in English. However, they have not always "road tested" the lexical items they know; that is, they may know a word from reading it or from memorizing it for the SATs, but they haven't had to use it in their own writing until they write college essays. Further limiting their opportunity to "road test" words may be the fact that many of these students use English only during school hours. A second issue that the Shaughnessy quote helps clarify is the types of lexical issues found in Generation 1.5 student writers' texts, pointing not only to errors related to a word's connotation or denotation but also to vocabulary choices that affect the grammaticality of an entire sentence. The following are examples of the lexicosyntactic problems found in essays written by Generation 1.5 ESL writers:

Television does not *find* happiness, but serves more as a time out....
No way we can use cars if they are invented now.

Such lexical choices affect not only the meaning but also the structure of the writer's sentences. This article will focus on such atypical and ungrammatical use of words and phrases in the writing of Generation 1.5 ESL students. It is certainly true that many of the lexical issues that will be addressed in this article are problematic not only for Generation 1.5 ESL writers but for many developing college writers whose first language is English. Nonetheless, the discussion here will be confined to Generation 1.5 writers because of the way in which their misuse of lexical items gives rise to grammatical problems or awkwardness in the sentences they produce.

This topic is of particular interest because of the pedagogical challenges these lexicogrammatical patterns present. Such patterns, positioned as they are at the intersection between grammar and lexicon, are not well suited to traditional second-language approaches to grammar or vocabulary teaching. They are, however, well suited to discourse-based pedagogical activities, and this article will discuss several developments in discourse-based language instruction that can help Generation 1.5 ESL writers improve their handling of vocabulary in academic writing.

Background

What Does It Mean for Academic Writers to Know a Word?

As reflected in the Shaughnessy quote above, vocabulary items are not simply known or unknown (Henrickson, 1999). Rather different types of word knowledge are usually acquired incrementally, from the simple—word form and basic meaning—to the more complex—grammatical or collocational patterns of lexical items (Schmitt, 2000, p. 17). Writers learning to negotiate academic texts can often control word forms and basic meanings, particularly those common to oral language, but may have more difficulty with the lexicogrammatical aspects of vocabulary learning (Skarin, 2005). Colombi and Schleppegrell (2002), following Halliday (1987, 1994), claim that “being literate means being able to effectively use the lexicogrammatical patterns that are associated with particular kinds of written texts” (p.11). This suggests that learning individual vocabulary items is not as useful for developing advanced literacy skills as learning how vocabulary items merge with grammatical patterns and text types in academic writing. Although Colombi and Schleppegrell focus on native-speaker writers, the same seems to be true of advanced English learners at the college level. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) remark that “lack of productive vocabulary and lack of word-associated grammatical information are, in fact, major factors contributing to the poor writing skills of many university-level ESL students” (p. 76).

Many linguists now view the lexicon and grammar as overlapping or residing along a continuum, rather than as separate domains (see Bates & Goodman, 1997, for a cognitive view of this interface; see McGregor & Sheng, 2005, for a developmental view; see Contini-Morava & Tobin, 2000, for a functional view; see van Hout, Hulk, Kuiken, & Towell, 2003, for a formal view). The difficulty of identifying categories as exclusively lexical or syntactic is not simply a concern embedded in linguistic theory but is also relevant to language learning and teaching. One example to illustrate this is collocations, which have been discussed rather extensively in recent language-learning literature (e.g., Hill, 2000; Hoey, 2000; Moon, 1997). Hill (2000) remarks that “many years ago, J. R. Firth defined collocations as ‘the company words keep’—their relationships with other words. Another definition might be ‘the way words combine in predictable ways’” (p. 48). Collocations can thus include idioms (*Don’t count your chickens...*), compounds (*collective bargaining, crystal ball*), phrasal verbs (*give up*), fixed phrases (*how do you do*), and prefabricated routines (*the fact/point is...*) (Moon, 1997, pp. 44-47). While collocations are important for all levels of learners to express themselves naturally, they are particularly important for college writers because, as Hill (2000) also mentions, “complex ideas are often expressed lexically” rather than with “convoluted grammar” (p. 55). Again, this suggests that a stronger focus on lexical development and lexicogrammatical usage by college writers is useful.

Possible Sources of Problems in the Vocabulary Development of Generation 1.5 ESL Writers

Interface Between Oral and Written Language. It is well documented that Generation 1.5 ESL writers frequently come to college with strong oral

and communication skills yet struggle with academic English (Foin & Lange, 2007; Scarcella, 1996). For instance, Scarcella discusses one of the vocabulary difficulties common to Generation 1.5 college writers: acoustic approximations or “words and expressions that are picked up inaccurately in conversations and used incorrectly” (pp. 131-132). Colombi and Schleppegrell (2002) mention a related problem facing college writers. In discussing the theory and practice surrounding advanced literacy, they note Halliday’s (1987, 1994) continuum between oral and written language. A striking difference between oral language and written texts requiring advanced literacy skills is that academic texts can be characterized by high lexical density, what Colombi and Schleppegrell define as “the number of lexicalized elements in a clause” (p. 11). Shaw and Liu (1998) claim high lexical density stems from reducing clauses to phrases and nominalizations; for example, reducing *how they act to mode of operation* would result in a more lexically dense sentence that conforms to academic writing standards (pp. 1-2). The influence of oral language thus affects Generation 1.5 ESL writers in primarily two ways: (a) Generation 1.5 writers rely heavily on what they hear in oral communication, which is why they are sometimes referred to as “ear learners” (Reid, 1998), and (b) they may use lexicogrammatical chunks and structures common to oral language (clausal structures) rather than those more commonly found in academic texts (phrases and nominalizations). In short, effectively navigating the differences between oral language and more formal academic language may be especially problematic for Generation 1.5 ESL writers given that their language learning is primarily based in their communicative use of interactional English.

Receptive Versus Productive Learning. Given that Generation 1.5 ESL writers share characteristics with both adult native-speaker writers and with their ESL counterparts (Frodesen, 2002; Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002), it is surprisingly difficult to find helpful insights into the vocabulary use of Generation 1.5 ESL writers in the literature or research on either first and second language vocabulary development. Much of the literature on L1 vocabulary and literacy focuses on the development of children rather than adults (e.g., Bauer, Goldfield, & Reznick, 2002; Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994); this is also true of bilingual literacy research (e.g., Garcia, 2000; Lindsey, Manis, & Bailey, 2003). And much of the literature in traditional SLA vocabulary development is not applicable to Generation 1.5 learners, focusing as it does on less proficient learners, reporting, for instance, on how a learner most successfully retains the forms or meanings of concrete L2 vocabulary items (e.g., Bancroft, 2006; Griffin & Harley, 1996; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Prince, 1996).

This is not to say that traditional SLA studies of lexical learning are completely inapplicable to Generation 1.5 ESL writers. Theoretical concepts in SLA vocabulary learning (some of which overlap with L1 vocabulary learning research) provide insights about how one approaches the lexicogrammatical difficulties of this learner population.

The receptive-productive learning dichotomy is one such issue that presents a possible way to understand the lexical development of Generation 1.5 writers. It is believed that most vocabulary is learned receptively, that is, while

reading or listening (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987) for both native and nonnative speakers (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 76). Even when vocabulary is explicitly part of the classroom curriculum, it is still often taught and learned through receptive means (Webb, 2005, pp. 33-34). This tendency may be in part because receptive knowledge is a prerequisite to developing productive knowledge (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 74) or because receptive activities may simply be more convenient to teach and assess (Webb, 2005). This focus on receptive vocabulary learning in the classroom seems to have influenced vocabulary research as the productive use of vocabulary in SLA has been largely ignored. Yet, for researchers, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) argue that productive use is “where insights from discourse analysis are most important for supplementing what we already know about L2 vocabulary use and learning” (p. 74). They, therefore, suggest that researchers should focus more heavily on learners’ productive use of vocabulary because it is through such investigations that we come to understand learners’ knowledge of vocabulary. This line of thinking is also reflected by Shaughnessy (1977) when she says, “we usually discover that [a learner] doesn’t know a word by observing the way he uses it.”

For learners, Webb (2005) claims that gains in receptive knowledge are made when words are learned receptively while gains in productive knowledge are made when words are learned productively (p. 34). Given that most vocabulary is taught and learned receptively, we may assume that before writers come to university, their primary gains in academic lexicogrammar have been made receptively through reading. This imbalance between receptive and productive knowledge of words is relevant to Generation 1.5 ESL writers because, as Shaughnessy (1977) noticed about basic writers, they will likely possess receptive knowledge of a large number of words and lexicogrammatical patterns but productive knowledge of primarily those words frequently encountered and used in familiar social contexts.

Incidental Versus Intentional Learning. A second dichotomy applicable to Generation 1.5 ESL writers involves incidental versus intentional or explicit learning (Schmitt, 2000, p. 116). Intentional vocabulary learning activities involve “committing word forms to memory along with their meanings” while incidental word learning includes words that are “picked up’ during reading or listening activities while the listener’s or reader’s goal was to comprehend the meaning of the language heard or read, rather than to learn new words” (Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996, p. 327). Similar to native speakers, Generation 1.5 ESL learners may intentionally learn vocabulary when required, such as when preparing for the SATs; nevertheless, most of their vocabulary is acquired without much conscious effort. Generation 1.5 ESL writers’ lexicogrammatical difficulties may arise from both their incidental and intentional learning practices. Given that their incidental learning is primarily situated in their use of oral language, their lexicogrammatical patterns are, as mentioned earlier, (a) often common to oral discourse and (b) sometimes “picked up” incorrectly. Additionally, their methods of intentional learning can lead to writing that is “dotted with words that they have memorized for the verbal portion of the SAT” (Scarcella, 1996, p. 131). Memorizing word lists removed from their surrounding discourse very often leads to these words’ being used in inappropriate lexicogrammatical contexts.

The language difficulties of Generation 1.5 ESL writers are varied. Scarcella (1996) notes vocabulary difficulties, morphological and sentence structure problems, and other language difficulties such as rhetorical problems related to English morphology as some of the obstacles Generation 1.5 college writers face. As discussed above, many of these error types relate to the ways that vocabulary intersects with grammatical constraints. As such, the remainder of this article will focus on this area of Generation 1.5 ESL writers' vocabulary use, specifically addressing two questions: (a) What are the lexicogrammatical errors common to Generation 1.5 ESL writing and (b) How can discourse-based language instruction help these learners tackle them?

Lexical Choices, Grammatical Consequences

This section examines the types of academic written vocabulary that are problematic for Generation 1.5 ESL writers. In the areas of the lexicon examined here, these writers' grammatical knowledge about a lexical item or phrase is not consistent with their clear grasp of its meaning and function. The examples given in this section are drawn from the unedited writing of students in our program. The student writers whose writing is sampled here are all first-year college students and Generation 1.5 ESL writers enrolled in an entry-level writing course designed to meet the needs of Generation 1.5 ESL students (Holten, in press).

Metacognitive Verbs

One problematic aspect of academic vocabulary for this group of multilingual writers is metacognitive verbs, those that are used to introduce a quote, paraphrase, summary, or reflection on the ideas of other authors. Using these verbs in academic writing is a thorny issue because, for a writer to know how to use a given verb, he or she must select the appropriate one to convey intended meaning and also understand its semantic and grammatical constraints—the types of subjects the verb will take and the grammatical structures that can follow it. It is in this latter area—these verbs' grammatical effects on the syntax that follows them—that the Generation 1.5 ESL writers in our program seem to have the most difficulty, as we see in the following examples.

- 1.a. He has *researched that* “internet use can have serious negative long-term social effects, ranging from depression to loneliness.”¹
- 1.b. He *criticizes that* cars would create more accidents and deaths in the nation.
- 1.c. I *found* Wilson's criticisms of automobiles *as* a wake up call for myself.
- 1.d. Kraut and Lundmark *argue how* the Internet affects peoples lives in the sense they spend their time online.²

The preceding examples make obvious the considerable active grammatical and lexical knowledge these students possess. The writers of the preceding sentences have receptive knowledge of a wide range of metacognitive verbs, and, in the main, they use them in a semantically appropriate way. The challenge of

these most academic of verbs seems, therefore, not to lie so much in knowing what the verbs mean and when to use them but how to use them productively, which entails abiding by the lexicogrammatical pattern of each verb.

The preceding examples also reveal the unique challenges student writers face when attempting to edit their writing for lexical errors with these verbs. Upon closer examination, it is clear that some of the lexical errors will be more straightforward to edit than others. Sentence 1.d., for example, is easier to edit than Sentence 1.a.

To produce a grammatically correct sentence, the writer of Sentence 1.d. has only to change “how” to “that.” Sentence 1.a., on the other hand, requires more work, and there are more potential paths to produce a grammatically correct sentence that conveys the writer’s intended meaning. To follow the path of least resistance, the one that would involve the least change to the grammar of the sentence, the writer could simply change the metacognitive verb from “research” to “discover.” Accurately conveying the writer’s intended meaning, however, might require a more complicated series of changes, such as adding the noun phrase “internet use” after the verb “research” and tacking on a participle phrase to the end of the sentence to produce the following sentence: “He has researched internet use, finding that it can have serious negative long-term social effects, ranging from depression to loneliness.”

Predication

A second area where the lexical choice of Generation 1.5 ESL writers may result in ungrammatical sentences is that of predication, or the semantic compatibility of the subject and the verb that follows it. An example of this can be found in the introduction to this article: *Television does not find happiness*, but serves more as a time out.... As we explain it to students, this sentence is not properly constructed because the subject, *television*, and the predicate, *does not find happiness*, cannot “keep company with each other”; in this case, the predicate, *to find happiness*, requires an animate subject, not an inanimate one such as *television*. Such a semantic mismatch in subjects and verbs is called “faulty” predication. This is also an issue for monolingual English writers, as can be seen from the number of pages devoted to the topic in many college-level writing handbooks.

The following are several more examples of the faulty predication found in the texts of the Generation 1.5 writers in our program.

- 2.a. *The perception* of being able to display an appearance of confidants, based upon your body, *will give* the worker *an upper hand*.
- 2.b. With this (unlimited access to information on the Internet) being possible *the use* of communication with other humans *is avoid*, making the society we live in isolated.
- 2.c. *Invention and necessities* help *develop each other* through history.
- 2.d. *His idea* about marginal places *can be places* that make you feel comfortable even if the outside world would not agree on or would think otherwise from your own opinions and actions.
- 2.e. Based on Frazier’s idea of value of “marginal” places and activities,

the places and the activities we tend to be at *do not quite work for ourselves*, yet we try to make it seem as we belong.
2.f. *Television does not find happiness*, but serves more as a time out....

Again, these sentences demonstrate not only the rich academic vocabulary that the students have to draw on but also the complex sentence structures they have mastered to convey sophisticated ideas. It is perhaps in part this very complexity that causes them to produce sentences with predication problems.

Similar to lexical errors with metacognitive verbs discussed in the preceding section, some of the sentences exhibiting faulty predication require a simpler editing process than others. For example, to correct sentence 2.b., the writer merely has to unearth the true subject (*communication with other humans*) of the verb *is avoided* and delete the problematic subject *the use of*. Successful editing of this example, then, is simply a matter of uncovering the true subject of the sentence's main verb.

Some of the preceding examples, however, involve a more complicated editing process and an understanding that words, in particular verbs, adhere to certain lexicogrammatical patterns. Take sentence 2.c., for example. The writer has chosen the verb *develop* and made it a reciprocal verb by adding the phrase, *each other*. *Develop each other* is not correct, although it is a very smart error because it effectively connotes that *necessities* and *inventions* act upon each other; in grammatical terms, they are both agent and patient, acting as both doer and receiver of the action.

To correct this phrase, the writer needs to know the lexicogrammatical constraints under which the verb *develop* operates. Specifically, it is an ergative verb and can, therefore, appear in three forms:

1. Active voice with an agent that does the developing (*They developed a new technology.*)
2. Passive voice with the grammatical subject undergoing the change and a specified or unspecified agent (*A new technology was developed by scientists.*); and
3. Middle voice with the grammatical subject undergoing the change and no recoverable agent (*The flower developed on the branch.*).

These three forms do not include the reciprocal form. To edit successfully, the writer must know about this restriction on the verb's form.

Multiword Lexical Unit—Collocations, Idioms, and Sentence Frames

A close examination of the unedited writing of Generation 1.5 ESL students in our program reveals lexical problems in another area: the frequent use of formulaic language that more seasoned readers and writers would term unnatural or unconventional. The following are a few examples:

- 3.a. I find it interesting to meet people [from the other side of the world]
on the other half of the world.

- 3.b. We *laid effort down every ounce* to save our friendship. [put (every ounce of) effort into]
- 3.c. I was *bored through my head*. [bored out of my mind]
- 3.d. *To my own experience*, when I was a kid, my mother often teach me manners. [In my experience]
- 3.e. *According to the passage* “Isolated by the internet,” *Stole argues* against most internet users, who speak positively about it. [According to Author X, author’s claim]
- 3.f. The letter *set the official realization of our friendship’s end*. [marked the (official) end]

As can be seen from the preceding examples, multiword units are a complex area of lexical development, including as they do word combinations such as idioms, collocations, and fixed and semifixed functional expressions. Some of these expressions, 3.c. for example, are idiomatic and have to be learned as whole, unanalyzed chunks. Others such as 3.e. are more flexible and functional. DeCarrico (2005) refers to these as variable or flexible “lexical phrase frames” (p. 108) because their basic form is fixed, but they contain slots that can be filled by different lexical items. Lexical phrase frames are of particular interest when discussing the vocabulary choice of Generation 1.5 ESL writers because their form, in some cases, has not only a lexical but also a grammatical component. One example of this would be formulaic lexical phrase frames that introduce an author’s ideas, arguments, or research findings. The grammatical aspect of these phrases is often tricky for Generation 1.5 ESL writers, as the following examples suggest.

- 4.a. *According to Kraut and Lundmark’s studied, it said,...*
- 4.b. *According to the passage “Isolated by the internet,” Stole argues* against most internet users, who speak positively about it.
- 4.c. *According to his observation made from the study and everyday experiences, his theory* on television is inevitably correct.
- 4.d. *Based on the research of Kubey and Cziksentsmihalyi, they recorded people having feelings of “passiveness, boredom, irritability, sadness and loneliness.”*

Again, these examples clearly display both the lexicogrammatical strengths and limitations of this group of writers. The writers clearly understand the dual function of phrases such as “according to” and “based on”: (a) to structure the subsequent discourse and (b) to signal to readers that information from another text is about to be summarized, paraphrased, or quoted. They also control the syntax of sentences that begin with these discourse-structuring sentences; that is, the phrases themselves are sentence-opening prepositional phrases and are followed by a main clause with a subject. These prepositional phrases also create semantic restrictions on the kind of subject that can occupy the main clause that follows them.

While they do not break any strict grammatical rules, the example sentences above, as written, would probably not seem natural to more experienced

academic readers. This is because the sentence subjects are not the ones that readers expect based on the beginning prepositional phrases. Most readers expect the grammatical subject of the main clause to relate to the topic of the writer's research or thought. Instead, as the subject of the main clause, the writers above have chosen the noun in the sentence initial prepositional phrase or its referent. The choice of such grammatical subjects has both stylistic and functional consequences. Stylistically, it makes the sentence seem repetitive. And functionally, it focuses readers' attention on the researcher or author, not on the issue or research finding and the argument or claim being made about it.

Since the sentences above are both well structured and functionally appropriate, it may be difficult for the writers to understand what is wrong with them or exactly how to rewrite them. To edit their sentences successfully, writers must recognize differences in the semantic rules that govern the choice of the main clause subject in functional expressions introducing an author's research or argument. Specifically, they must notice that in sentences such as "In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn argues..." the subject in the main clause is the author or researcher whereas the subject slot of sentences that begin with "according to" is filled by the topic of research or the author's argument. This is indeed a subtle distinction in form.

Discourse-Based Instruction and Lexicogrammatical Issues

As the preceding discussion should make clear, we hope, Generation 1.5 ESL writers are at the point in their writing and language development at which they need help learning to use their rich vocabulary in ways that meet the expectations of academic readers. This can best be done by modifying discourse-based approaches traditionally used to teach grammar features for the teaching of lexicogrammatical patterns (c.f. Hinkel & Fotos, 2002). Activities that ask students to examine a certain lexical item in authentic stretches of discourse beyond the sentence level focus their attention on how the use of words and phrases overlaps with grammatical forms.

Several factors argue for implementing a discourse-based approach to lexicogrammatical editing in the writing of Generation 1.5 ESL writers. The first is the students themselves. The Generation 1.5 ESL writers in our program have often been taught to edit and proofread their writing as a native speaker of English would; that is to say, their approach to correctness is anchored not in rules of use but in their fluency in spoken English, which in turn reinforces strong intuitions about what sounds correct in written English. In addition, they vary as a group in their knowledge of formal English grammar, and even those who know some grammar may not use it as they compose or edit their writing. Given their background, inclination, and previous instruction, more traditional approaches focusing on language tend not to work well with these multilingual writers since the methods presuppose that students know grammar rules and grammar terminology, and that the students can identify grammatical structures and apply the rules to their own texts. Having them focus on form, and the intersection between meaning and form, in extended and authentic discourse is much better suited to the intuitions that Generation 1.5 ESL writers have for English.

A second factor is the nature of lexicogrammatical patterns themselves. The operative word in the previous sentence is “patterns”; this word suggests that there are discernible patterns in the intersection between some types of lexical items and grammar or syntax, but these are only patterns. In contrast, grammatical and syntactic features of the language are so patterned that rules can be formulated about a given feature³. Lexical items lend themselves less to such rule formulation. Take, for instance, the metacognitive verbs discussed earlier in the article. Many of the most common are followed by noun clauses beginning with *that*; these include such verbs as *argue*, *say*, or *report*. Not all metacognitive verbs, however, follow this syntactic pattern; one notable exception is the verb *discuss*, which adds *the fact that* or *whether* before a noun clause. It would, thus, be difficult to formulate a rule governing the grammar of metacognitive verbs as a class. Such variation influences how “teachable” via typical approaches to grammar instruction lexicogrammatical patterns are.

How then can discourse-based approaches to teaching grammar be tailored to help Generation 1.5 ESL students fine-tune their vocabulary use for writing? Outlined below are a few suggestions.

Looking at Models—Where Vocabulary and Grammar Intersect

One discourse-based approach that seems to work well with the Generation 1.5 ESL writers in our program is text analysis. To focus students on lexicogrammatical patterns, we have students analyze how published academic writers use certain lexical items. For instance, to familiarize students with the constraints on grammatical subjects in phrases introducing an author’s ideas or research (i.e., “In X book/article, Author Y...” and “According to Author Y’s article, Z is true”), students look for such phrases in the published texts they are reading for the course, in extracts from published texts provided by the instructor, or in search engines such as Google or Google Scholar. They then record the examples they have found in two separate columns, an *according to* column and an *in* column.

If the focus were on the lexicon alone, the students’ task would end here, but since it is important for them to understand the semantic and grammatical constraints of these functional phrases, they also note the grammatical subject of the examples in each column either by bracketing the subject, writing it out, or highlighting it. They are then asked to see if they notice a difference in the main clause subjects of the two sentence frames used to introduce information from sources. This is a useful technique that can be applied to other expressions that function to introduce quotes or paraphrases from sources including *as indicated by*, *based on*, and so forth.

A drawback of text analysis is that it asks students to notice language and vocabulary forms but does not necessarily require them to practice these. Therefore, it is important to follow up on text analysis with style-imitation and text-conversion activities that oblige students to use the lexicogrammatical patterns they have analyzed. In the case of the functional expressions that introduce a source (e.g., *according to*, *based on*), students can search for sentences in their own, their peers’ texts, or published texts where such discourse frames are employed. They can then rewrite these sentences, using an alter-

nate expression to the one that was originally selected, paying attention both to the grammatical subject in the main clause and to any changes in meaning and style that using an alternate phrase may bring to the text itself.

Productive text analysis as described here has many benefits for these novice academic writers. First, it instills the habit of not just reading texts for content, but reading as a writer. Text-analysis tasks also ask students to read beyond the text's macrolevel, the level of ideas, but to read at the word, phrase, and sentence level. As many composition experts attest (c.f. Kroll, 1993), writers, especially novices, learn a great deal about style, organization, and phrasing from seeing the hand of the writer, not just the writer's ideas.

Teaching Dictionary Use

A dictionary or thesaurus is an excellent tool for figuring out grammatical or semantic restrictions on words or phrases. But these are tools that many Generation 1.5 writers do not exploit fully or well. McAlpine and Myles (2003) aptly attest to this when they state:

Writing fluently in a second language requires knowledge of the conventional contexts and collocations surrounding a word. While this information may be presented implicitly in dictionaries geared to advanced ESL learners, many students do not have the dictionary savvy to extract it. (p. 71)

In several ways, this statement is even truer of Generation 1.5 ESL writers.

First, many of them turn to dictionaries only as a last resort, preferring to rely on their own vocabulary store, which has been gleaned through many years of daily interaction and reading English. They are, therefore, not practiced dictionary users and may even consider using this reference tool a nuisance. They are usually even less familiar with how to access information from a thesaurus. For those who do use a dictionary, it is most likely a dictionary for native speakers of English such as Dictionary.com, which, unlike a learner's dictionary, contains only implicit grammatical information about a word, in other words, that which can be picked up from sample sentences. In addition, if students do consult a dictionary, they may search only for a word's meaning or its spelling, completely overlooking the information about how to use a word, both the implicit information contained in sample sentences and the explicit information that some learner dictionaries provide by, for example, highlighting prepositions or noting the word forms or structures that follow a word.⁴

Generation 1.5 ESL writers, therefore, need overt instruction in how to use these reference tools to collect information about the syntactic behavior of words, which they can turn around and use as they write and edit their texts. But can such instruction be considered "discourse-based"? Yes, it can—especially today when the most useful learner dictionaries such as *The Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (Sinclair, 1987) are corpus based. Students can be taught to look at dictionary sample sentences from authentic and varied written and spoken corpora to discover a vocabulary item's grammatical and semantic boundaries. The added benefit, of course, is that the dic-

tionary compiler has done the hard grammatical and semantic analysis for the student writer. But it is, of course, important for the novice writers to *do* something with this knowledge. That is where text analysis comes into play. Teachers can pair the study of dictionary sample sentences with text-analysis tasks that require students to apply the knowledge about word use gained from the dictionary. They might, for example, be directed to underline in an authentic text (either their own or a published text) the lexical item or phrase they have looked up. After finding the lexical item, they might be asked to highlight the syntactic or grammatical features associated with that word or phrase based on the information from the dictionary. Such exercises can help students become better text analysts. In other words, students learn from the dictionary's sample sentences what kind of grammatical information they should attend to when they come across a word in their reading that they might want to use in their writing. In the long run, this may make them more independent, and appropriate, vocabulary users.

Another way in which teachers can ensure that dictionary use goes beyond the sentence level is by situating such instruction in an appropriate pedagogical context. The most obvious discourse context for this is in the discourse of student essays. Teachers can, for example, show students how to use the dictionary to recast sentences in their writing that contain lexicogrammatical problems. Even the most reluctant Generation 1.5 dictionary user may become a convert if she can see how dictionary information can help her edit independently. A less individualized, whole class activity could ask students to work with a dictionary or thesaurus to rewrite a paragraph-length published or student text, substituting synonyms provided by the teacher for key verbs in the paragraph. In the following sentence from a paragraph about American education, the student must replace the word *beat* with the word *instill*: "In American schools, they try to *beat into us* that we are lucky to live in a democratic country." To successfully recast the sentence, they use the dictionary to determine the grammatical behavior of the verb *instill*. Their rewritten sentence will appear as follows: "In American schools, they try to *instill in us* that we are lucky to live in a democratic country" or "In American schools, they try to *instill the idea* that we are lucky to live in a democratic country."

Developing Analytical Self-Editing Strategies

Often, the Generation 1.5 ESL students in our program edit their texts in quite holistic ways; what this means is that they rely on their intuition or the "it sounds right to me" test. In many ways, this approach is quite effective for this group of students because they have so much fluency in oral English and so much experience reading English texts. Thus, once a student hears her text aloud,⁵ she can often find many vocabulary words and phrases that she wishes to revise. However, this strategy sometimes fails them. Often, in hearing how the text sounds, students can discover that something is amiss with a word choice or a turn of phrase, but they admit not always knowing how to edit bits that seem odd.

As a rule, to edit effectively, Generation 1.5 ESL writers need to move beyond their intuition-based strategies for editing, which may help them find

textual problems, to more grammar-based analytical strategies, which will help them not only find but also solve the types of lexicogrammatical problems discussed above. With predication errors, for instance, writers must consider the grammatical relationship between subjects and verbs. Yet even identifying the subject and main verb of a sentence can be a challenge for some Generation 1.5 ESL writers, especially since many have not had much formal grammar instruction in elementary or high school. Thus, before they can begin to analyze the sentences they have produced for faulty predication, they may need some instruction in how to identify these pieces in their own and others' sentences. Students then work on text-marking strategies such as underlining the verb and circling the subject. Once they can identify and focus on a sentence's subject and main verbs, sentences in which subjects and verbs are semantically mismatched seem to almost pop off the page at them. When Generation 1.5 ESL writers combine grammatical analysis with their powerful intuition and extensive vocabulary, such errors become quite obvious and easy to edit because they can rely on the meaning of the words rather than just on the grammar.

In using these analytical self-editing strategies, students are focused at the sentence level. But using them is more than a sentence-based activity. It is a discourse-based activity, because the enterprise is both discourse based and authentic. It is authentic because students are analyzing and editing their own sentences within larger paragraphs, not sentences made up by textbook writers. It is discourse based in that the aim is for them to find problems and edit them in paragraph-level stretches of text. In so doing, they need to determine the impact on the paragraph or text as a whole of any change they make to one sentence.

Conclusion

By focusing on the lexicogrammatical difficulties of Generation 1.5 ESL writers, we hope to have highlighted not only common problems such as the use of metacognitive verbs, faulty predication, and multiword lexical units, but also useful discourse-based strategies to help these students address difficulties relevant to academic writing and editing. Helping these learners strike a balance between developing an eye for identifying parts of grammar with which they may be unfamiliar and using their already developed ear for meaning seems to be key for successfully addressing these common problems. We believe this balance can be achieved by using discourse-based approaches. Such approaches develop their analytical or "eye" skills by helping them find their own sentence-level lexicogrammatical errors within a larger text; they also allow learners to make use of their strong intuitions about sound and meaning by encouraging them to consider the consequences that their lexicogrammatical choices and edits have for the surrounding text.

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Endnotes

- 1 Other errors, in addition to the focal error, are present in some of the examples. All errors from the original texts have been left in with the focal error in italics, unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Some may find that “argue how” is not a problematic lexical choice. In fact, a Google search reveals approximately 100,000 uses of this phrase (and, for comparison, 39 million uses of “argue that”). From the examples online, the most common use of “argue how” in academic texts is to introduce a process or a way of doing something: “We ... argue how lack of investment in an area of expertise early on may foreclose the future development of a technical capability in that area (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).” Its use in the example from the Generation 1.5 writer’s text seems less appropriate because the writer is not reporting an author’s argument about a process or way of doing something but is reporting an author’s arguable claim: “the Internet negatively affects people’s lives because they spend too much time online.”
- 3 Grammatical rules, of course, are not hard and fast, and for every rule, there is an exception. Nonetheless, it is easier to formulate rules of use for grammatical features than it is for the lexicon.
- 4 McAlpine and Myles (2003) provide an extremely useful discussion of ways ESL writers can benefit from the information in dictionaries and the difficulties they may have accessing, understanding, and using this information. Many of their observations are equally applicable to Generation 1.5 ESL writers.
- 5 We have found that quite a few Generation 1.5 students in our program do not read their own texts aloud as they write or before they submit them.

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