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## Introduction

Active Learning is as much a part of the International School of Liberal Arts at Miyazaki International College (MIC) as our small class sizes, practice of team teaching, motto of respect and diligence, and focus on global citizenship. We ensure student engagement through myriad avenues, developing critical thinking skills as well as educational empowerment within our Liberal Arts curriculum. One of the ways that we foster an Active Learning environment is through faculty research. Our faculty's research projects are central to their pedagogical practices. Conducting research enables the faculty to stay current in our fields, keep fresh perspectives, and bring that knowledge back to our students. Moreover, it models the act of Active Learning so central to MIC: in taking our research into the classroom, we show our students the worlds into which their classrooms open doors--our research applies and extends what we do in our classes, makes the larger importance of our respective fields clear, and ignites both us and our students.

Thus, in this special issue, MIC faculty spotlight recent research connected to their teaching. Phil Bennett elucidates the efficacy of the revamped English program in "Vocabulary Learning in the MIC International Liberal Arts Program and the Skills of Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing." Brendan Rodda unravels some of the 'trickiness' of two of the main interpretations of Robert Frost's most famous poem "The Road Not Taken" by applying Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG) to conduct text analysis in "Linguistic Features and their Relation to Theme in Frost's 'The Road Not Taken.'" In "Individualized Reading Development Outside of Class: A Review of readtheory.org," Cathrine-Mette Mork examines the efficacy, strong points, and pitfalls of readtheory.org reading acquisition software. Katherine E. Bishop looks at the way fantasy literature thematically and narratively bolsters Active Learning in "The Pedagogical Fantastic: Active Learning Through and In Fantasy Literature," concentrating in particular on J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Lastly, Aya Kasai illuminates the use of various movement exercises to counter bullying behaviors and build community in "Counseling Psychology Pedagogy: A Lesson Module on Bullying with the Theatre of the Oppressed."

# Vocabulary Learning in the MIC International Liberal Arts Program and the Skills of Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing

Phil Bennett

## The School of International Liberal Arts English language program

The current version of the MIC English language program has been running since the 2015 academic year. Planned, developed, and revised by faculty, the program is intended to "foster students' ability for self-expression, questioning, evaluation, analysis, and creative thought through the medium of English" (SILA English Program Handbook, 2017, p. 1). The three main components of the English program are the courses currently named English 1/2/3, Reading 1/2/3, Academic Writing 1/2, and Introduction to Cultures of the English-Speaking World, although the program also includes the language learning element of the team-taught courses and the TOEIC workshops.

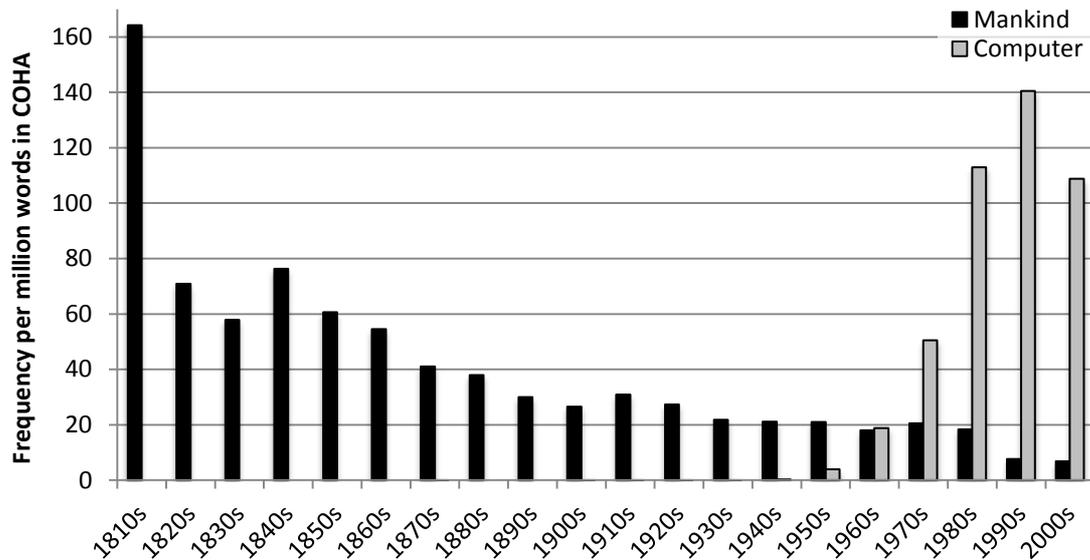
The underlying ethos of the program loosely follows Nation's *Four Strands* approach to curriculum design (2007), in which learners are exposed to an approximately equal balance of activities designed to provide meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. The first two of these strands emphasize the importance of receiving and transmitting messages in the second language. Here, the role of language as a medium of expression is paramount, and activities such as discussions, essay or journal writing, extensive reading, and listening to conversations are commonly used. The language-focused learning strand of the program sees language more as an object of study. Discrete elements of language such as grammar patterns, vocabulary, or other discourse features are analysed, practiced, and reviewed with a view to improving learners' accuracy and variety of expression in English. Fluency development, the final strand, involves practising already-known language features, often repeatedly, in order to encourage effortless and automatic, or in other words, fluent, language use.

Vocabulary knowledge clearly has a role to play in all of these strands, and vocabulary objectives are included in each of the three program courses. Owing to the challenging nature of studying content material in a foreign language, it is likely that lexical goals are a prominent feature of many of the team-taught courses as well. The goal of this paper is to explain the vocabulary goals of the MIC language program as well as how they are assessed and to present data obtained from various courses that demonstrate the importance of lexical knowledge to language learners in each of the four skills.

## Vocabulary goals and assessment at MIC

The goals of the MIC language program are based on the New General Service List (NGSL) (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2013a), a list of 2,800 words that appear frequently across a range of contexts. The NGSL was developed in response to the need for an updated version of Michael West's (1953) General Service List (GSL), a hugely

influential word list, but one that was showing signs of age owing to shifts in language use brought on by advances in technology and societal changes. For example, the GSL contains words such as *shilling* and *mankind*, which are much less commonly used than in the past, and omits words that have become far more prominent in modern life, such as *computer* (Figure 1). In contrast, the NGSL is derived from an analysis of texts mostly written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and can therefore claim to be more representative of modern English discourse.



**Figure 1: Frequency of *mankind* and *computer* since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) (Davis, 2010-).**

The NGSL was divided based on frequency into five bands of approximately 560 words each in order to provide more narrowly-focused learning goals that might be accomplished within a semester of study. Bands 3-5 were taken as the primary goals for explicit teaching in the three levels of the MIC language program, with bands 1 and 2 being assigned as prerequisites, words that some learners would be expected to know prior to entering the college, and that others would gradually acquire during their studies. As the example entries in Table 1 may suggest, words gradually become more difficult in each lower frequency band, but even in band five, the words are still likely to be frequent enough to be encountered on a regular basis by learners at MIC. In the English courses, learners are expected to be able to use vocabulary from the band of the NGSL that is assigned as the goal for their program level as well as any lower-level bands. Likewise, in the Reading courses, the goal is for learners to be able to recognise the meanings of words from the appropriate NGSL band in addition to any lower-level bands.

**Table 1: Example entries in the five bands of the NGSL**

| <b>Band</b>         | <b>Example entries</b>                                 | <b>Language program goal</b> |
|---------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 1 (1-560 words)     | <i>the, point, mean, until, several</i>                | Prerequisite                 |
| 2 (561-1120 words)  | <i>accept, evidence, source, similar, protect</i>      | Prerequisite                 |
| 3 (1121-1680 words) | <i>reveal, sector, struggle, consequence, threaten</i> | Level one                    |
| 4 (1681-2240 words) | <i>compete, justice, permanent, integrate, slight</i>  | Level two                    |
| 5 (2241-2800 words) | <i>efficiency, regularly, adequate, embrace, mere</i>  | Level three                  |

These goals were taken into account when developing the texts for the Reading courses, with efforts made to increase usage of words from the appropriate NGSL band for each course level and to limit the use of words from higher (less frequent) bands. For these reading texts, activities have been developed to pre-teach or review students' knowledge of target vocabulary and to provide regular review activities in the form of quizzes or simple games. Productive knowledge of vocabulary is also taken into account when rubrics are used to assess written paragraphs and essays in the Academic Writing or Cultures courses and audio recordings of student conversations or monologues in the English courses.

The degree of emphasis on vocabulary probably varies in class depending on each teacher's preferred style of instruction, but the Reading courses address vocabulary learning most explicitly. In addition to the texts and activities discussed above, students register in an e-learning program called PraxisEd (<http://praxised.com>), in which they are assigned a number of *sessions* to complete, requiring them to study vocabulary presented both aurally and in written form in a variety of contexts. On average, students in the class of 2021 (the current second years) spent around half an hour studying vocabulary during each session ( $n = 54$ ; Mean: 33 min 12 s; St. Dev.: 9 min 34 s). Over the entire three-semester program this amounts to around 77 hours of intensive vocabulary study using PraxisEd, although the standard deviation value indicates wide variation in study time between individuals ( $n = 54$ ; Mean: 77 hr 00 min 00 s; St. Dev.: 46 hr 24 min 02 s).

Finally, the Reading course is also where vocabulary knowledge is formally assessed by examination. The test used for this is the New General Service List Test (NGSLT) (Stoeckel & Bennett, 2015), a multiple-choice instrument designed to evaluate written receptive knowledge of words in each of the five bands on the NGSL. Students take the test four times during the English program, first as part of the placement tests then as part of the final exam in each of the three Reading courses. After each test, students are given a report of their scores, with previous scores also recorded so that they have some tangible evidence of their improvement over time (Figure 2).

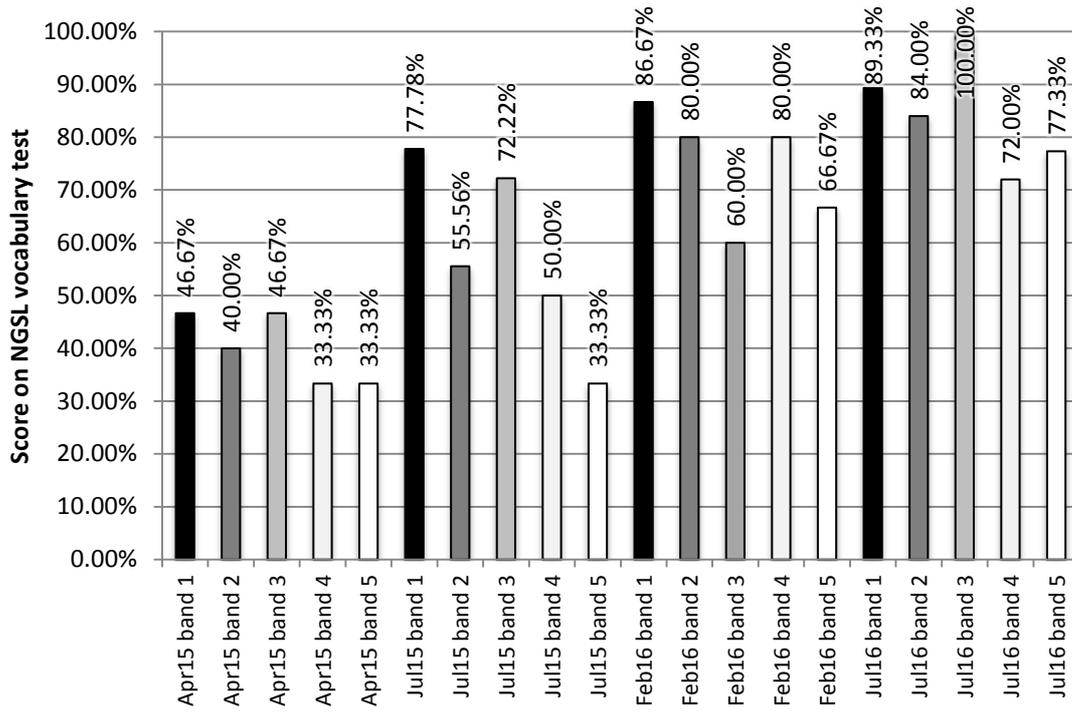


Figure 2: Sample report from the NGS� showing scores from four test administrations.

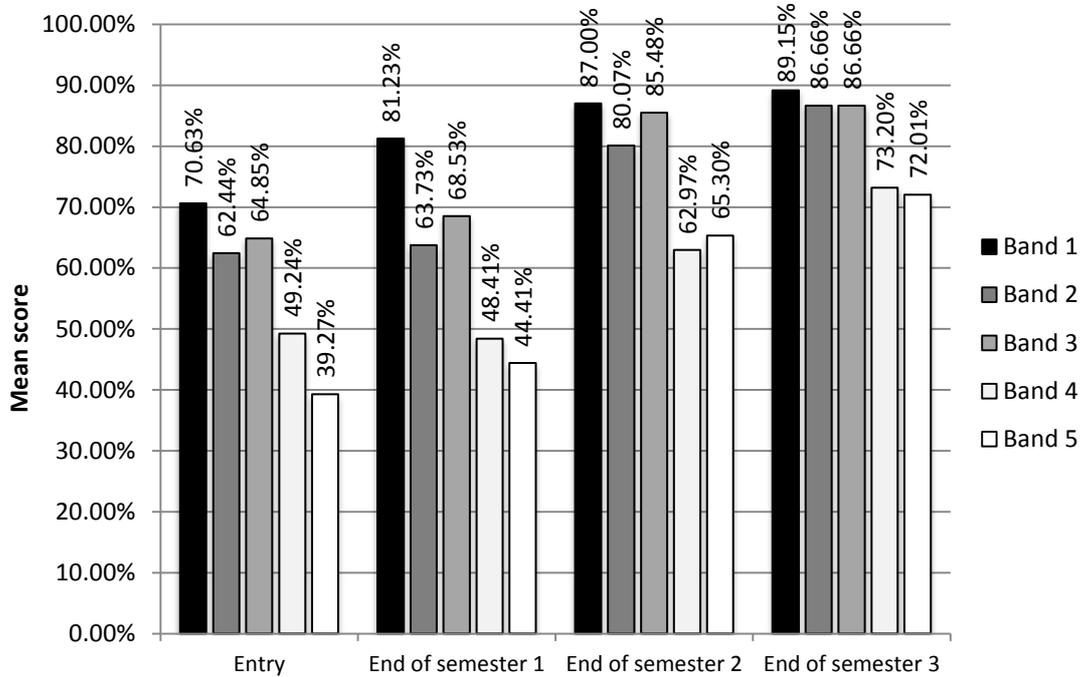


Figure 3: Mean scores on NGS� vocabulary test (n = 101)

### Overview of vocabulary development during the SILA English program

So far, two cohorts have completed all three semesters of the English language program. In total, 101 students have taken the vocabulary test on all four occasions, and the mean scores for each band of the vocabulary test are plotted in Figure 3. In general, the values in Figure 3 show the expected pattern of greater knowledge of higher frequency vocabulary than lower frequency words<sup>1</sup>. There are, however, some fluctuations in this pattern. In particular, it appears that for most of the first three semesters, learners' knowledge of band 3 words is slightly greater than that of band 2. Band 3 words are explicitly taught during the program, whereas words in bands 1 and 2 are not, which may partially explain this result, but the same pattern can be seen in the test students take on entry to the program, which suggests that there may be a real gap in MIC learners' vocabularies for many band 2 words. Consideration should be given to this issue by attempting to identify band 2 vocabulary that is unknown by many learners and providing targeted instruction.

Repeated measures ANOVA tests with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction applied found significant differences between the mean scores at the four time intervals for each of the five test bands (Table 2). Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were used to identify where these significant differences occurred during the language program. Table 3 shows that for Band 1 vocabulary (the most frequent words), there was significant growth in vocabulary knowledge over the course of the first and second semesters (i.e., from entry to the end of semester 1 and from the end of semester 1 to the end of semester 2.) In both cases, highly significant results were found ( $p < .0005$ ). The improvement in scores from the end of semester 2 to the end of semester 3 was not significant, however. This suggests that even without explicit instruction, learners were able to make large gains in vocabulary knowledge among these most frequent word forms. The lack of a significant gain during the final semester is not a major concern as mean scores were already approaching 90%, and it is likely that a ceiling effect was present.

**Table 2: One-way repeated measures ANOVA tests on NGSLS scores over time ( $n = 101$ )**

| Vocabulary band | df    | Greenhouse-Geisser error | F       | Sig.   |
|-----------------|-------|--------------------------|---------|--------|
| Band 1          | 2.463 | 246.338                  | 73.697  | <.0005 |
| Band 2          | 2.448 | 244.788                  | 98.467  | <.0005 |
| Band 3          | 2.627 | 262.735                  | 110.426 | <.0005 |
| Band 4          | 2.974 | 297.425                  | 105.760 | <.0005 |
| Band 5          | 2.882 | 288.250                  | 143.276 | <.0005 |

<sup>1</sup> The vocabulary test results reported in this paper are based on scores after a penalty for incorrect answers has been applied. The penalty is equal to one-third of a point deducted for every incorrect response, and is intended to compensate for random guessing on multiple-choice tests, which degrades measurement (Stoekel, Bennett & McLean, 2016). Since the testing format used at MIC does not allow students to skip items, this penalty results in a linear transformation of scores that does not alter the ordering of persons by ability. The scores learners actually receive in the English program (i.e., for grades and reports) do not have this penalty applied.

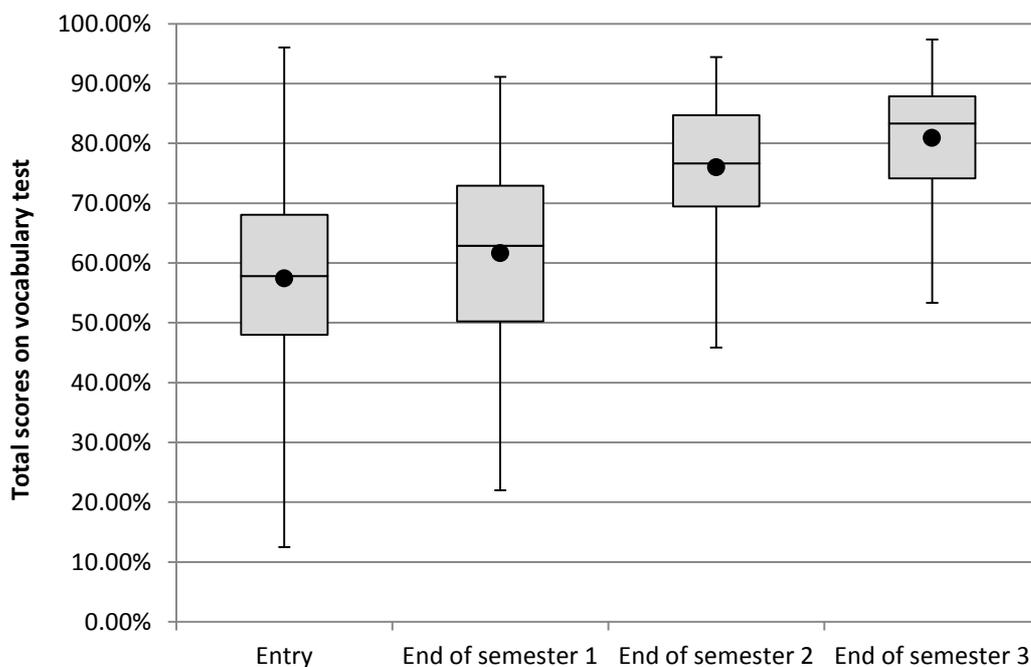
**Table 3: Post hoc (Bonferroni adjusted) tests for NGSL scores at four time intervals ( $n = 101$ )**

|               | Time              | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Post hoc tests (Bonferroni adjusted) $p$ |               |               |               |
|---------------|-------------------|--------|-----------|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|               |                   |        |           | Entry                                    | End of sem. 1 | End of sem. 2 | End of sem. 3 |
| <b>Band 1</b> | Entry             | 70.63% | ±18.50%   | /  | <.0005        | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 1 | 81.23% | ±11.96%   | /  | /             | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 2 | 87.00% | ±9.82%    | /  | /             | /             | .272          |
|               | End of semester 3 | 89.15% | ±8.88%    | /  | /             | /             | /             |
| <b>Band 2</b> | Entry             | 62.44% | ±20.95%   | /  | 1.000         | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 1 | 63.73% | ±16.37%   | /  | /             | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 2 | 80.07% | ±13.71%   | /  | /             | /             | .008          |
|               | End of semester 3 | 86.66% | ±10.86%   | /  | /             | /             | /             |
| <b>Band 3</b> | Entry             | 64.85% | ±17.87%   | /  | .179          | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 1 | 68.53% | ±18.42%   | /  | /             | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 2 | 85.48% | ±12.48%   | /  | /             | /             | 1.000         |
|               | End of semester 3 | 86.66% | ±10.86%   | /  | /             | /             | /             |
| <b>Band 4</b> | Entry             | 49.24% | ±18.01%   | /  | 1.000         | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 1 | 48.41% | ±17.94%   | /  | /             | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 2 | 62.97% | ±16.40%   | /  | /             | /             | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 3 | 73.20% | ±13.52%   | /  | /             | /             | /             |
| <b>Band 5</b> | Entry             | 39.27% | ±20.09%   | /  | .084          | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 1 | 44.41% | ±20.91%   | /  | /             | <.0005        | <.0005        |
|               | End of semester 2 | 65.30% | ±16.44%   | /  | /             | /             | .001          |
|               | End of semester 3 | 72.01% | ±14.39%   | /  | /             | /             | /             |

Table 3 also shows that for bands 2 to 5, there was no significant growth in vocabulary over the first semester (i.e., from entry to the end of semester 1), but apart from the case of band 3 words, significant growth was seen over all other time periods. It is unclear why this would be the case, as the SILA program presumably offers considerable opportunities for learners to gain knowledge of these words. One possibility is that in general terms, learners' vocabularies will develop most rapidly in those areas where gains are easiest to be made. In other words, during the first semester, many MIC learners still had gaps in knowledge of the most frequent 560 words (band 1), and this is

where most developments therefore took place. By the end of the first semester, however, the mean score for band 1 had risen to 81.23%, indicating that fewer opportunities for improvement would be found among these words. As a consequence, greater improvement was seen in knowledge of words in bands 2-5 during the second and third semesters. However, since it is imperative in the SILA program for learners to acquire core vocabularies as rapidly as possible, this is something that should be considered in greater detail.

It should also be noted that a focus solely on mean scores hides the variation that exists between learners. This is an important point, as the weakest learners are likely to face the most difficulties comprehending course materials and may therefore be the most likely to withdraw from the college. The standard deviation values in Table 3 indicate that in most cases, the range of scores learners achieve in the five vocabulary test bands narrows over time, but this offers only a limited picture of the reality. The chart in Figure 4 has been plotted to provide greater detail on the distribution of vocabulary test scores over time. The data plotted here are students' total scores on the test, rather than scores for each band. The chart uses a box and whisker format in which each half of the grey box represents 25% of the learners, with the line through the middle of the box representing the median value. The whiskers indicate the upper and lower 25% of scores, and the ends of each whisker the maximum and minimum scores. The dots signify the mean scores. It can be seen that while scores gradually increase over time, the largest increase appears to be during the second semester. It is clear that the range of scores gradually narrows as students progress through the program, but also that even after three semesters of study, 25% of the students are still showing knowledge of around 75% or less of the words in the NGSL, and some are scoring barely above 50%. It is these learners who are most likely to experience difficulty comprehending classroom input and written text, and who will struggle to reach the TOEIC threshold of 500 points to enter upper division courses.



**Figure 4: Distribution of total scores on the NGSL test over the first three semesters**

## Vocabulary knowledge and the four skills

### Reading

Reading is probably the skill that has attracted the most attention from vocabulary researchers. This is partly due to issues of data collection; it is easier to collect large samples of written text to investigate than audio recordings. It is also recognised that written text typically contains a greater proportion of infrequent words than spoken discourse, which leads to a greater lexical challenge for language learners. Several studies have examined the question of how great a proportion of words in a text learners need to know in order to display satisfactory comprehension of that text. Current thinking suggests that although there appears to be no clear cut off point at which comprehension becomes automatic (Schmitt, Jiang, and Grabe, 2011), learners should recognise around 95% of the words in a text for minimal understanding, and 98% for adequate comprehension (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010). Encountering a text that is more demanding than this is likely to be a frustrating experience for language learners, who must resort to frequent dictionary use and decoding strategies in order to understand the meaning. Not only is such work considerably slower than fluent reading, but it also occupies significant mental resources, making higher-order thinking skills such as understanding point of view or implication much harder to achieve (Grabe, 2009).

The importance of vocabulary knowledge for reading comprehension can be examined by investigating the relationship between students' scores on the NGSL vocabulary test and their scores on the reading section of the TOEIC test or the institutional reading test. Table 4 shows the relationships between scores on the NGSL vocabulary test and students' most recent score at that time on the reading section of the TOEIC. It is clear that vocabulary knowledge as measured by the NGSL

**Table 4: Pearson correlations between NGSL test scores and TOEIC reading scores**

| Vocabulary test | <i>n</i> | Pearson correlation with most recent TOEIC reading score |         |        |         |         |         |
|-----------------|----------|--|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
|                 |          | Band 1   | Band 2  | Band 3 | Band 4  | Band 5  | Total   |
| First test      | 255      | .485**   | .593**  | .580** | .571**  | .617*** | .661*** |
| Second test     | 217      | .469**   | .661*** | .574** | .660*** | .639*** | .719*** |
| Third test      | 110      | .423**   | .434**  | .405** | .513**  | .591**  | .574**  |
| Fourth test     | 101      | .438**   | .587**  | .589** | .581**  | .515**  | .681*** |

\*\* = Moderate effect size; \*\*\* = Strong effect size

**Table 5: Pearson correlations between NGSL test scores and institutional reading test scores**

| Vocabulary test | <i>n</i> | Pearson correlation with reading test score from same semester |         |        |         |        |          |
|-----------------|----------|--|---------|--------|---------|--------|----------|
|                 |          | Band 1   | Band 2  | Band 3 | Band 4  | Band 5 | Total    |
| Second test     | 176      | .482**   | .588**  | .545** | .526**  | .532** | .643***  |
| Third test      | 108      | .540**   | .751*** | .569** | .702*** | .568** | .813**** |
| Fourth test     | 102      | .491**   | .615*** | .517** | .582**  | .520** | .699***  |

\*\* = Moderate effect size; \*\*\* = Strong effect size; \*\*\*\* = Very strong effect size

test has a moderate to strong relationship with performance on the TOEIC reading section, and that this relationship remains relatively consistent over time. The general pattern is also for a closer relationship between knowledge of less frequent vocabulary (i.e., bands 4 and 5) and TOEIC reading score than for knowledge of high frequency vocabulary with TOEIC. This is unsurprising, as the items testing knowledge of less frequent words are likely to be better at discriminating between learners of different ability than items for high frequency words, which are more likely to be known by all students. It also emphasizes the importance of learners achieving reasonable scores on all sections of the vocabulary test and developing well-rounded core vocabularies. The picture is much the same in Table 5, where moderate to strong relationships can be seen between vocabulary knowledge and reading ability throughout the language problem.

### *Listening*

As the popularity of English-medium or CLIL instruction continues to grow in Japan (Brown & Iyobe, 2014), an increasing number of students in Japan are being placed into programs that require them to comprehend input on academic content in English. While some studies have suggested that the required lexical coverage for adequate comprehension of aural input is lower than that of written text, at around 95% (Van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013), other investigations into L2 comprehension of lectures in English have found that lack of vocabulary and note-taking techniques, as well as limited awareness of the use of metaphor in language all present significant challenges for language learners (Hellekjær, 2010; Littlemore, 2001).

One limitation to the data presented in this section is that the vocabulary test used at MIC assesses knowledge of vocabulary in a written medium. While it might be assumed that orthographic and phonological vocabulary sizes would be similar, there is evidence that low-level learners may recognise more words by sound than by sight and that higher proficiency learners have larger sight vocabularies (Milton, 2009), so it appears that lexical knowledge develops at a different rate in the two media. Instruments for measuring aural lexical knowledge are available (McLean, Kramer & Beglar, 2015; Milton & Hopkins, 2006), but no such instrument is used at present in the SILA language program.

This important caveat notwithstanding, Table 6 presents the correlations between students' vocabulary test scores and their most recent scores on the listening section of the TOEIC test. It appears that while correlations are lower than those for reading,

**Table 6: Pearson correlations between NGSL test scores and TOEIC listening scores**

| Vocabulary test | <i>n</i> | Pearson correlation with most recent TOEIC listening score |        |        |        |        |        |
|-----------------|----------|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                 |          | Band 1   | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Total  |
| First test      | 255      | .415**   | .497** | .454** | .469** | .518** | .547** |
| Second test     | 217      | .314*  | .565** | .495** | .545** | .560** | .599** |
| Third test      | 110      | .244*  | .294*  | .245*  | .289*  | .416** | .356*  |
| Fourth test     | 101      | .377*  | .419** | .468** | .478** | .507** | .565** |

\* = Weak effect size; \*\* = Moderate effect size

there remains a moderate relationship between scores on the two instruments. Despite the questionable suitability of the vocabulary test to assess aural skills, between 12 and 36 per cent of the variation in TOEIC listening scores could be explained by variance in knowledge of written vocabulary.

### *Speaking*

It is only recently that formal objectives have been set for speaking skills in the English program, and the institution has only been running the productive skills version of the TOEIC test for three years. However, speaking skills have long been emphasized and indirectly assessed through the use of discussion activities and class presentations. The recent move to have students present their senior thesis findings orally, either in a poster presentation or formal open-audience setting ought also to provide positive backwash for the development of speaking skills.

Again, the limitations of assessing competence in a spoken medium with a test of written vocabulary knowledge should be acknowledged, and a further consideration lies in the distinction between productive and receptive knowledge. While the NGSL vocabulary test assesses knowledge receptively (by requiring learners to identify the meaning of a given word form), speaking a language clearly operates in the opposite direction. Furthermore, issues of time pressure and fluency need to be taken into account when determining speaking proficiency. For this reason, the vocabulary test used at MIC may be at its least suitable for exploring the relationship between lexical knowledge and speaking proficiency. Evidence of this can be found in Table 7, where correlations fluctuate and vary in strength considerably. The only instance of a strong correlation is from the single occasion when first-year students took the TOEIC speaking and writing test. However, the total scores on the vocabulary test do correlate to at least a moderate strength, so some relationship might be claimed.

It is now widely recognised that spoken discourse has its own norms and patterns of behaviour, and that the vocabulary of speaking differs from that of written production (Nation, 2013). Assessment of speaking skills should therefore take this into consideration, but there remains the challenge of assessing oral production in a practical fashion. One possibility in the SILA language program would be to analyse recordings of learners' output at regular intervals and to evaluate how their use of vocabulary changes over time. Learners in the English courses regularly submit

**Table 7: Pearson correlations between NGSL test scores and TOEIC speaking scores**

| Vocabulary test | <i>n</i> | Pearson correlation with most recent TOEIC speaking score |        |        |        |        |         |
|-----------------|----------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
|                 |          | Band 1  | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Total   |
| Second test     | 57       | .515**  | .480** | .598** | .518** | .584** | .653*** |
| Third test      | 54       | .341*   | .510** | .334*  | .431** | .379*  | .520**  |
| Fourth test     | 97       | .361*   | .287*  | .353*  | .310*  | .419** | .438**  |

Note: Students typically take the TOEIC speaking test during the third semester, between the third and fourth administrations of the NGSL vocabulary test. Only one cohort (the class of 2019) has taken it during the first semester (just before the second vocabulary test.)

\* = Weak effect size; \*\* = Moderate effect size; \*\*\* = Strong effect size

recordings of their spoken English either in discussions with classmates or as fluency monologues. However, one issue with analysing productive language use is that the topic of discussion is known to influence lexical choice, and therefore topics would need to be selected carefully in order to avoid skewing the analysis. Transcribing such data is also a hugely time consuming process, meaning that any analyses could only be used for evaluation of the program in general at broad intervals, rather than during the semester for evaluation of the students themselves.

### *Writing*

As with speaking, writing requires productive knowledge of word forms, and some of the same concerns remain over the use of the NGSL test to draw conclusions about learners' capabilities in this medium. However, Stæhr (2008) found a strong correlation between receptive vocabulary knowledge and scores on writing tests, and it has been argued that pushed output is a highly effective way to expand linguistic knowledge (Swain, 1985), so there is some suggestion that the two skills are mutually supportive. Table 8 displays the correlations between vocabulary test scores and learners' most recent scores on the writing section of the TOEIC test. As was the case with speaking skills, there is considerable fluctuation both across the bands of the vocabulary test and between test administrations, but generally moderate correlations indicate a positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and writing skills.

**Table 8: Pearson correlations between NGSL test scores and TOEIC writing scores**

| Vocabulary test | <i>n</i> | Pearson correlation with most recent TOEIC writing score |                    |                     |                    |                    |                    |
|-----------------|----------|--|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                 |          | Band 1   | Band 2             | Band 3              | Band 4             | Band 5             | Total              |
| Second test     | 57       | .608 <sup>***</sup>                                      | .376 <sup>*</sup>  | .435 <sup>**</sup>  | .408 <sup>**</sup> | .493 <sup>**</sup> | .546 <sup>**</sup> |
| Third test      | 54       | .391 <sup>*</sup>  | .433 <sup>**</sup> | .612 <sup>***</sup> | .474 <sup>**</sup> | .366 <sup>*</sup>  | .578 <sup>**</sup> |
| Fourth test     | 97       | .358 <sup>*</sup>  | .400 <sup>**</sup> | .317 <sup>*</sup>   | .297 <sup>*</sup>  | .292 <sup>*</sup>  | .416 <sup>**</sup> |

\* = Weak effect size; \*\* = Moderate effect size; \*\*\* = Strong effect size

In truth, linear relationships between language production and receptive knowledge may be difficult to find. Writing is clearly a complex process influenced by grammatical abilities and the topic at hand as well as lexical knowledge. This is demonstrated by an examination of writing samples (a total of 51,493 words) obtained from the 2014 Japanese Popular Culture course, a second-year, third-semester course. The proportion of words produced by each learner ( $n = 23$ ) which came from each of the five bands of the NGSL was calculated, as well as the proportion of words produced that came from the New Academic Word List (NAWL) (Browne, Culligan & Phillips, 2013b), a list of 963 words that fall outside the NGSL but which appear frequently across a wide range of academic disciplines. Spearman's Rho correlations were then run between these proportions and learners' recent scores on the writing section of the TOEIC test. The results are presented in Table 9. The two bands that positively correlate with TOEIC writing score are band 1 (the most frequent words) and NAWL (specialised academic vocabulary), and these do so with moderate effect sizes. The remaining less frequent NGSL bands correlate negatively with ability as judged by TOEIC (i.e., less proficient learners are producing them in greater proportions in their

written output.) One of the ways in which grammatical awareness influences lexical choice is in the use of pronouns. Bennett (2017) found that greater pronoun use was a marker of higher proficiency learners in an analysis of the same set of data reported here, and when pronouns are used in place of less frequent lexical items, this will have the effect of increasing the proportion of high frequency words used.

**Table 9: Spearman's rho correlations between proportions of words produced by learners in written output from each vocabulary band and TOEIC writing score**

| Vocabulary band | Spearman's<br>r |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| NGSL band 1     | .457**          |
| NGSL band 2     | -.144           |
| NGSL band 3     | -.508**         |
| NGSL band 4     | -.166           |
| NGSL band 5     | -.528**         |
| NAWL            | .431**          |

\*\* = Moderate effect size

### The vocabulary challenge of MIC courses

Given the huge variety of tertiary-level academic programs worldwide, it is perhaps not surprising that little has been published on the lexical demands of the classroom environment. Studies have been carried out in elementary level classrooms (Meara, Lightbown, & Halter, 1997), but most investigations of university classrooms have focussed on the effectiveness of the CLIL approach or on specific difficulties learners face (Hellekjær, 2010; Littlemore, 2001). In the context of MIC, one of the challenges of a liberal arts curriculum is the (presumably) wide variety of topics, discourse events, and lexical exposure learners face. The following sections therefore attempt to shed some light on the potential lexical demands of MIC courses, albeit with the caveat that generalisations may be not be possible across disciplines or program years. Data is provided from a second-year team-taught anthropology course called Japanese Popular Culture in 2013 and the three Reading courses in the first and second years.

#### *Input from teacher talk*

Classroom instructors are a hugely important source of input for language learners, and in the field of ELT, much attention has been given to the notion of 'teacher talk' (Thornbury, 1996; Walsh, 2002). The number of EMI and CLIL programs has been growing in Europe and Asia in recent years, and this has led to greater interest in the language exposure that academic lectures in these programs provide (Dafouz Milne & Núñez Perucha, 2010; Low, Littlemore, & Koester, 2008), as well as the learning outcomes of such environments (Seregély, 2008; Vidal, 2011).

In the Japanese Popular Culture course of 2013, teacher talk input came mostly in the form of interactive lectures on course content, presentations of target language, and regular classroom management discourse. The total amount of words learners were exposed to in this medium, as well as the vocabulary bands in which these words

appeared, are shown in Table 10. The cumulative coverage as a percentage of all words is provided in the right hand column. In this analysis, words such as proper nouns (e.g., *Hatsune Miku, J-Pop*), Japanese words, and non-verbal utterances (e.g., *err, oh*) are assumed to be known by learners and are recorded in the first row of the table. The NGSL also contains a supplemental list of words such as numbers, days of the week and months of the year, which are likewise assumed to be known. Based on the cumulative coverage figures, it can be estimated that a learner who knew all of the words on the NGSL would recognise 95.14% of the words that appeared in teacher talk in this class. Referring back to the required coverage percentage discussed in the section on listening skills, this learner might be expected to have adequate understanding of this mode of input. Knowledge of the NAWL would add almost 1% coverage. Of course, this form of analysis is rather simplistic, since vocabularies do not grow in a band-by-band fashion, and MIC students of all abilities are likely to know at least some words from the NAWL even without complete understanding of the NGSL. Teacher talk is also likely to make frequent reference to class materials and content that has recently been studied, which will reduce comprehension difficulties for students. Nevertheless, this kind of analysis can give an impression of the lexical challenges of a particular mode of discourse.

**Table 10: Vocabulary exposure from teacher talk in the Japanese Popular Culture course**

| Vocabulary band                | Word count     | %      | Cumulative %               |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--------|----------------------------|
| Proper nouns etc. <sup>1</sup> | 5,637          | 2.87%  | 2.87%                      |
| NGSL supplemental <sup>2</sup> | 1,851          | 0.94%  | 3.81%                      |
| NGSL band 1                    | 154,151        | 78.42% | 82.23%                     |
| NGSL band 2                    | 17,535         | 8.92%  | 91.15%                     |
| NGSL band 3                    | 4,254          | 2.16%  | 93.32%                     |
| NGSL band 4                    | 1,862          | 0.95%  | 94.26%                     |
| NGSL band 5                    | 1,719          | 0.87%  | <b>95.14%</b> <sup>4</sup> |
| NAWL                           | 1,773          | 0.90%  | <b>96.04%</b>              |
| Off-list words <sup>3</sup>    | 7,783          | 3.96%  | 100.00%                    |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>196,565</b> |        |                            |

1. Proper nouns, Japanese words, and non-verbal utterances were removed from the off-list words.
2. The supplemental list includes numbers and months.
3. Off-list words are those that did not fall into any of the other lists.
4. Cumulative percentages in bold font have reached the 95% coverage threshold for minimal comprehension.

#### *Input from video materials*

The Japanese Popular Culture course makes extensive use of video materials to present material in class. During a typical semester, students will watch two 15-minute videos in the first few weeks of the course and three one-hour videos spaced through the rest of the semester. Since these materials were not designed for language learners, they have been adapted by adding subtitles and developing worksheets to guide learners through

the content. There is also considerable pre-teaching of vocabulary and time to share and discuss answers with classmates, and the video material is broken up into short (typically two or three-minute) sections to aid comprehension. Almost every section of these videos is played twice to allow learners to benefit from seeing and hearing the dialogue again. It is not known whether other team-taught courses make such extensive use of video material and it should therefore be noted that this course might be somewhat atypical in this regard.

The coverage figures in Table 11 suggest that the scripted dialogue of the video materials represents a somewhat greater lexical challenge than teacher talk. The proportions of words from bands 3 and higher have increased in comparison with unscripted teacher talk. As a consequence, the coverage figures, even with full knowledge of the NGSL and NAWL, do not reach 95%, meaning that even learners with this ideal level of knowledge would encounter unknown words on average more than once in every 20 running words. This highlights the need for pre-teaching of vocabulary when materials intended for a non-EFL audience are used in the classroom.

**Table 11: Vocabulary exposure from video materials in the Japanese Popular Culture course**

| Vocabulary band   | Word count <sup>1</sup> | %      | Cumulative % |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------|--------------|
| Proper nouns etc. | 1,775                   | 5.01%  | 5.01%        |
| NGSL supplemental | 345                     | 0.97%  | 5.99%        |
| NGSL band 1       | 26,540                  | 74.95% | 80.93%       |
| NGSL band 2       | 2,176                   | 6.14%  | 87.08%       |
| NGSL band 3       | 1,143                   | 3.23%  | 90.31%       |
| NGSL band 4       | 7,25                    | 2.05%  | 92.35%       |
| NGSL band 5       | 413                     | 1.17%  | 93.52%       |
| NAWL              | 377                     | 1.06%  | 94.58%       |
| Off-list words    | 1,918                   | 5.42%  | 100.00%      |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>35,412</b>           |        |              |

1. Word counts include repetitions of video material in class.

#### *Input from written materials*

As was mentioned earlier, it is much easier to obtain samples of written text than audio transcriptions. If future studies aim to expand the range of SILA course input that is examined, then taking a sample of course readings would certainly be the simplest way to approach this task. In this section, in order to broaden the scope of the study, written materials from both the Japanese Popular Culture course and the three Reading courses will be examined.

In the Japanese Popular Culture course, written texts consist of course worksheets designed to assist with comprehension of the video materials and short readings (of less than 1,000 words) which have been adapted from undergraduate-level academic papers and newspaper articles. Table 12 shows the cumulative coverage of provided by the NGSL and NAWL word lists, and it is clear that written text draws on

vocabulary in a different way to spoken discourse. In comparison with teacher talk and the video transcripts (which were mostly scripted but intended to be spoken), far fewer words from band 1 of the NGSL are used, and there is a corresponding rise in the use of less frequent vocabulary. Even learners who have achieved the English program goal of mastering the NGSL vocabulary would encounter a large number of unknown words in these texts, roughly once every 14 or 15 words on average. Given that a typical sentence in written text is somewhat longer than this, it should not be too difficult to appreciate the challenge many learners will face, as well as the need for explicit vocabulary teaching and an active-learning approach to instruction that allows learners to check comprehension both with peers and course instructors.

A final point to be noted in examining the materials from this course is the degree to which teacher talk dominates classroom input. Despite the use of active learning techniques, almost 80% of the words learners were exposed to in this course came from the instructors. This is not in any sense intended to be a criticism; the provision of summaries, reviews, and paraphrases of course content is an essential element of teaching in the SILA program, and classroom management language will appear in any course. Instead, the data presented here should be taken as evidence of the need to appreciate the important role of instructors' voices in the classroom in the provision of both content and language learning.

**Table 12: Vocabulary exposure from written materials in the Japanese Popular Culture course**

| Vocabulary band   | Word count    | %      | Cumulative % |
|-------------------|---------------|--------|--------------|
| Proper nouns etc. | 1007          | 6.67%  | 6.67%        |
| NGSL supplemental | 84            | 0.56%  | 7.22%        |
| NGSL band 1       | 10710         | 70.89% | 78.12%       |
| NGSL band 2       | 1064          | 7.04%  | 85.16%       |
| NGSL band 3       | 578           | 3.83%  | 88.99%       |
| NGSL band 4       | 361           | 2.39%  | 91.37%       |
| NGSL band 5       | 243           | 1.61%  | 92.98%       |
| NAWL              | 259           | 1.71%  | 94.70%       |
| Off-list words    | 801           | 5.30%  | 100.00%      |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>15,107</b> |        |              |

The Reading courses address reading skills in three separate ways. Timed readings are simplified texts which students are encouraged to read as quickly as possible while maintaining comprehension. This activity is intended to promote fluent reading by helping learners to process text in larger chunks rather than word by word and by facilitating speed of word recognition. Extensive reading involves reading large amounts of text at a level that is relatively comfortable for learners, without many unknown words. This helps students to encounter words in multiple contexts, which builds awareness of the range of meanings words can take, and helps to foster a positive attitude towards reading. Finally, intensive readings are intended to provide a challenge for learners by containing a higher, but still manageable, level of new vocabulary and

by providing opportunities to work on decoding meaning and deeper levels of text analysis. As the goal of intensive reading is to practice reading challenging materials, these are the texts that are most suitable for an analysis of vocabulary demand. The English program contains three levels, and most students enter at level one and proceed through levels two and three in the Reading 2 and 3 courses. Accordingly, texts from these levels were chosen for analysis.

The vocabulary goal of level one of the program is the band 3 words from the NGSL, while levels two and three focus on bands 4 and 5 respectively. When the Reading course materials were produced by faculty<sup>2</sup>, attempts were made to balance the vocabulary demands of the texts so that after target vocabulary has been taught, the coverage provided by the NGSL bands up to and including the goal for that level should reach approximately 95%. It can be seen in Table 13 that the coverage provided by vocabulary up to the target level band (indicated by italic font) is between 93 and 94%. Thus when the coverage provided by target words that have been pre-taught is added, the coverage should reach a level that is above the 95% threshold. Of course, as Figures 2 and 3 reveal, many learners do not have perfect understanding of the words in bands below the target vocabulary for their level, but it should be remembered that intensive readings are usually completed in class with reference aids available and classmates and course instructors able to offer assistance. Having some additional unknown vocabulary in texts also provides opportunities for learners to work on dictionary skills or guessing meaning from context, both of which are important for skilled readers.

Another interesting point shown in Table 13 is the gradual increase in vocabulary demands of the texts from course to course. Coverage provided by band 1 words gradually decreases from Reading 1 to Reading 3, while that of academic vocabulary, NAWL words, increases. The number of words required to reach minimal comprehension also increases throughout the curriculum, with words up to and including band 4 providing 95% coverage in Reading 1, band 5 being required for Reading 2, and NAWL vocabulary being necessary to reach the threshold in Reading 3. These trends suggest that the texts have been designed well to provide a steadily increasing challenge for learners in the SILA English language program.

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<sup>2</sup> Brendan Rodda produced the Reading 1 texts, Tim Stoeckel produced the Reading 2 texts, and Brendan Rodda was the principle creator of the Reading 3 texts, with some texts also produced by Phil Bennett.

**Table 13: Vocabulary exposure from Reading course intensive readings**

| Vocabulary band   | Reading 1 (level one) |        | Reading 2 (level two) |        | Reading 3 (level three) |        | Combined reading materials |        |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--------|
|                   | Count                 | %      | Count                 | %      | Count                   | %      | Count                      | %      |
| Proper nouns etc. | 371                   | 4.45%  | 127                   | 2.09%  | 1,030                   | 8.53%  | 1,528                      | 5.77%  |
| Supplemental      | 51                    | 0.61%  | 56                    | 0.92%  | 71                      | 0.59%  | 178                        | 0.67%  |
| NGSL band 1       | 6,457                 | 77.41% | 4,392                 | 72.28% | 8,158                   | 67.58% | 19,007                     | 71.76% |
| NGSL band 2       | 662                   | 7.94%  | 537                   | 8.84%  | 890                     | 7.37%  | 2,089                      | 7.89%  |
| NGSL band 3       | 268                   | 3.21%  | 367                   | 6.04%  | 567                     | 4.70%  | 1,202                      | 4.54%  |
| NGSL band 4       | 222                   | 2.66%  | 198                   | 3.26%  | 388                     | 3.21%  | 808                        | 3.05%  |
| NGSL band 5       | 96                    | 1.15%  | 96                    | 1.58%  | 173                     | 1.43%  | 365                        | 1.38%  |
| NAWL              | 83                    | 1.00%  | 82                    | 1.35%  | 310                     | 2.57%  | 475                        | 1.79%  |
| Off-list words    | 131                   | 1.57%  | 221                   | 3.64%  | 484                     | 4.01%  | 836                        | 3.16%  |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>8,341</b>          |        | <b>6,076</b>          |        | <b>12,071</b>           |        | <b>26,488</b>              |        |

1. The target vocabulary band for each level is indicated with italic font.

2. Cumulative percentages in bold font have reached the 95% coverage threshold for minimal comprehension.

## **Discussion**

This paper has presented data drawn from across the first three semesters of the SILA curriculum in an attempt to provide a broad-scale picture of the role of vocabulary in the liberal arts program and its importance for overall language acquisition. Evidence of positive development in vocabulary knowledge and of a principled approach to materials and test design suggests the program is well- founded and provides effective support for learners, but there remains considerable room for improvement.

The objectives for vocabulary learning could be described as challenging yet appropriate for this particular context. It was shown that on entry to MIC, many learners have large gaps in knowledge of high-frequency vocabulary, but that in most cases, considerable progress is made towards rectifying this situation over the first three semesters. This positive outlook, however, should be tempered with a note of caution: results suggest that those learners of lowest proficiency still cannot be claimed to have developed core vocabularies by the time they depart for their Study Abroad experience in the fourth semester. In recent years, less than 10% of any given cohort has failed to achieve the score of 500 on the TOEIC test required to enter third-year courses, however, so it might reasonably be claimed that students are adapting successfully to the more stringent standards the college has implemented.

Evidence has also been put forward to underline the value of vocabulary knowledge in reaching higher levels of language proficiency and by extension, higher TOEIC scores. Vocabulary scores as measured by the NGSL test were shown to be strongly associated with the skill of reading in particular. However, another note of caution is urged here. The use of standardised tests for high-stakes purposes such as awarding university credit is common in Japan, but there are concerns over the appropriateness of such instruments to assess the stated goals of university courses (In'nami & Koizumi, 2017). Credit is not awarded at MIC based on TOEIC scores, but the test still retains a high-stakes function by acting as the barrier to third- and fourth-year courses. Having a test function in this manner is justifiable on the grounds that the goal itself is certainly achievable for learners within the time available and that it acts as a motivating force for learners to reach their potential. What is less clear, however, is whether the language assessed by TOEIC is reflective of SILA course content. Finding a viable alternative to TOEIC may be a challenge, but there would be potential benefits to learners if the language of the test they are judged by were to better reflect the language of academic discourse.

Finally, lexical frequency profiling was used to provide evidence of the vocabulary demands of various tasks learners experience in SILA courses. The generalizability of these findings might be questioned given the variety of course offerings and learning experiences at MIC, but it is hoped that this approach might be expanded to broaden our understanding of the curriculum in the coming years. The findings thus far do stress the need to consider vocabulary learning to be a priority in the team-taught classes as well as the regular language program courses; CLIL-type learning experiences are rich in learning potential and highly motivating for learners, but it is clear that they are also lexically demanding. It was also noticeable that the varying types of input offered different levels of lexical challenge to learners. Teacher talk made greatest use of high frequency words, while video and written materials were considerably more demanding. Teacher talk also comprised the formed the majority of

classroom exposure, so it is clearly something that should be examined carefully. It is worth pointing out here that a study by Vidal (2011) found that for low-level learners, listening was found to be a less beneficial activity than reading for acquiring vocabulary incidentally (i.e., unintentionally, while focussed on another goal), so there may be value in examining how teacher talk can be supported with written materials in some fashion.

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## **Linguistic Features and their Relation to Theme in Frost's "The Road Not Taken"**

Brendan Rodda

Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" remains an enigmatic poem despite its broad appeal. Frost himself acknowledged that it was a "tricky poem – very tricky" (cited in Kearns, 1994, p.73). That trickiness has engendered two main camps of interpretation, each with a wildly different view from the other. The first camp, the more popular one, views the poem as a celebration of individualism (see discussion in Orr, 2015). The other camp, a more scholarly group, views it as a satire that cleverly exposes the human tendency for self-deception (e.g. Lentricchia, 1994; Robinson, 2016). Consequently, a very unusual situation exists – a literary work is highly valued by two groups, but for reasons that are almost diametrically opposite. How did this situation come to exist? Is there any way of providing a firm base of support for one interpretation? Could there even be, as Orr (2015) posits, a meshing of the two? Might there be another legitimate reading of the poem? In an attempt to answer those questions, this paper examines the poem through the lens of linguistics.

The usefulness of linguistic analysis for literary criticism might not be immediately obvious. However, literature is, of course, a linguistic art form and it therefore uses the linguistic features of lexico-grammar and cohesion to create most of the meaning that it imparts. Seen in this light, it is reasonable to expect that a linguistic analysis will reveal interesting information about the meaning of a text, including some information that might otherwise elude our conscious attention. Although this kind of approach remains on the periphery of the study of literature, there are many examples of it furthering our understanding of literary texts (e.g. Birch & O'Toole, 1987; Carter & Stockwell, 2008).

The analysis in this paper applies Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG), which is often used by linguists to conduct text analysis. Several features of SFG make it "possible to say sensible and useful things about any text" (Halliday, 1994, p.xv). Chief among these features is the semantic inclination of the grammar in SFG, with "grammatical categories explained as the realization of semantic patterns" (p.xvii). Text analysis that uses SFG therefore proceeds relatively easily from identification of forms to interpretation of meaning.

The analysis here makes use of the concept of foregrounding, which was developed by Mukarovsky and other linguists of the Prague School. Foregrounding is the use of language in a way that contrasts with ordinary use thereby causing that language to stand out to some degree. Foregrounded language contrasts with either ordinary use in the context of the language culture as a whole or with typical use in the text itself. Although foregrounding also occurs in everyday language situations, Mukarovsky (1964, p.21) views it as a special feature of literature because he believes it plays an integral role in the cohesion of literary texts, creating the unity in each work of literary art. In such cases, it tends to occur across multiple aspects of the language. Importantly, however, these various kinds of foregrounding exhibit consistency, both in terms of location in the text and in terms of meaning. This consistency creates a pattern through which the text brings to the fore certain meanings. For this reason, Hasan (1985, p.98) asserts that literature has two levels of semiosis: the first level matches that of

normal language use and the second is expressed by consistent foregrounding. Hasan claims that this latter form of semiosis is unique to literature and that it conveys the most significant meaning of a text – its theme.

The first step in this study is a linguistic analysis of the poem. That consists of simple division of the poem into clauses followed by detailed analysis of each clause in terms of the three metafunctions of SFG: the textual, ideational and interpersonal. Following the linguistic analysis, there is discussion of the points that have emerged and how they might contribute to theme of the poem.

### **Clause Division**

Table 1 shows the original text on the left and the division by clause on the right. The double parentheses indicate embedded clauses – that is, clauses that are not operating as normal clauses, but instead modifying nouns or operating as nouns. The most remarkable point here is that the first sentence of the poem is unusually long, containing 13 clauses, and is thus foregrounded.

**Table 1**

| Original text  | Clause by clause   |
|--|--|
| <p>Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,<br/>And sorry I could not travel both<br/>And be one traveler, long I stood<br/>And looked down one as far as I could<br/>To where it bent in the undergrowth;</p>         | 1. Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  |
|  | 2. and sorry   |
|  | 3. I could not travel both   |
|  | 4. and be one traveler,  |
| <p>Then took the other, as just as fair,<br/>And having perhaps the better claim,<br/>Because it was grassy and wanted wear;<br/>Though as for that the passing there<br/>Had worn them really about the same,</p> | 5. long I stood  |
|  | 6. and looked down one [[as far as I could]]<br>to [[where it bent in the undergrowth]]; |
| <p>And both that morning equally lay<br/>In leaves no step had trodden black.<br/>Oh, I kept the first for another day!<br/>Yet knowing how way leads on to way,<br/>I doubted if I should ever come back.</p>     | 7. then took the other,  |
|  | 8. as just as fair,  |
|  | 9. and having perhaps the better claim,  |
|  | 10. because it was grassy  |
| <p>I shall be telling this with a sigh<br/>Somewhere ages and ages hence:<br/>Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—<br/>I took the one less traveled by,<br/>And that has made all the difference.</p>              | 11. and wanted wear;   |
|  | 12. though as for that the passing there had worn them really about the same             |
|  | 13. and both that morning equally lay in leaves [[no step had trodden black]].           |
|  | 14. Oh, I kept the first for another day!  |
|  | 15. Yet knowing [[how way leads on to way]],   |
|  | 16. I doubted [[if I should ever come back]].  |
|  | 17. I shall be telling this with a sigh<br>somewhere ages and ages hence:                |
|  | 18. two roads diverged in a wood,  |
|  | 19. and I—I took the one [[less traveled by]],   |
|  | 20. and that has made all the difference.  |

## Textual Metafunction

The textual metafunction relates to the focus or focuses of each clause in a text. In SFG, these focuses are called themes (not to be confused with theme in literature) and are categorized as topical, textual or interpersonal. Themes appear at the beginning of the clause and thereby attract more attention. Table 2 shows the thematic analysis of each clause in the poem.

**Table 2**

| Clause | Textual theme | Topical Theme | Clause | Textual Theme | Topical Theme |
|--------|---------------|---------------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| 1      |               | two roads     | 11     | and           |               |
| 2      | and           |               | 12     | though        | as for that   |
| 3      |               | I             | 13     | and           | both          |
| 4      | and           |               | 14     | oh            | I             |
| 5      |               | long          | 15     | yet           |               |
| 6      | and           |               | 16     |               | I             |
| 7      | then          |               | 17     |               | I             |
| 8      | as            |               | 18     |               | two roads     |
| 9      | and           |               | 19     | and           | I - I         |
| 10     | because       | it            | 20     | and           | that          |

Only textual and topical themes occur in this poem. By far the most common textual theme here is *and*. The contrastive textual themes of clauses 12 and 15 – *though* and *yet* respectively – are thus foregrounded. Clause 14 also has a foregrounded textual theme, *oh*.

The topical themes refer mostly to one road, both roads or the narrator, with one or both roads more prominent up to clause 13 and the narrator more prominent thereafter. There is foregrounding in clause 5 in the use of the adverb *long* as topical theme, drawing attention to the length of the process of looking. The topical theme of clause 12 is doubly foregrounded – firstly because it is a prepositional phrase rather than the typical choice of nominal group and secondly because the phrase *as for that* overtly signals its function as topic in a way that is relatively unusual. The impact of this overt signal is even stronger in this context because it follows the ellipsis of topical themes in many of the preceding clauses. That is, in the first half of the poem, Frost presents many clauses without a topical theme, and then suddenly presents a clause where the topical theme is linguistically underlined. The topical theme of clause 19 – *I – I* – is foregrounded for repetition, drawing attention to the narrator. Finally, the topical theme of clause 20 – *that* – is interesting because it is not completely clear what the reference of *that* is. Does it refer to the road less travelled, the act of taking that road or possibly the fact that the narrator took that road? The probability that it is one of the latter two rises when we consider the use of pronouns in the poem. On the two

occasions earlier in the poem when Frost refers to one of the roads with a pronoun, he uses *it*. The only other time when he uses *that* as a pronoun, in clause 12, it refers to an abstraction – the grassiness of the road and its wanting wear.

### Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction is concerned with the speaker or writer's use of language to represent experience or a view of reality. The basic unit is the clause and the core of the clause is a process that is conveyed by the verbal group.

In SFG, each process falls into one of several categories. This poem consists of a mix. The most common kind is material processes of action, which appear in eight clauses spread relatively evenly through the poem. Relational processes of being appear in three clauses and undergo ellipsis in two other clauses; all of these are in the first half of the poem. There are three mental processes and one verbal process, all of which appear in the second half of the poem. There are also behavioural processes in clauses 5, 6 and 13. Given the mix of processes, none stands out as unusual in the context. It is interesting, however, that the relational processes only appear in the first half and the mental and verbal processes only appear in the second half. Another point of interest is that the final three clauses all contain material processes. Nowhere else in the poem are there three consecutive material processes.

In addition to processes, the ideational metafunction is concerned with the participants (nominal groups) and circumstances (prepositional phrases and adverbial groups) of the clause. The main participants in the poem are the roads and the narrator. There are, however, several abstract participants: *the better claim* (clause 9), *the passing there* (12), *how way leads on to way* (15), *if I should ever come back* (16), *all the difference* (20) and probably *that* (20). Thus, there is foregrounding of clause 20 as the only clause with two abstract participants.

When we consider the interaction between participants and processes, it is interesting to note that the roads are often actors of material processes or sensors of mental processes, typically roles that animate participants take. In the first half of the poem, up to clause 10, the roads take such roles twice. The narrator also takes such roles twice in the first half, but the first process *could not travel* is negative and the second *took* involves ellipsis of the narrator, thereby diminishing somewhat the connection between the participant and process. There are also two behavioural processes with the narrator as behavior – *stood* and *looked* – but such processes are more passive than material or mental processes. In the second half, the narrator takes more dynamic roles as actor of affirmative material, mental and verbal processes; while the roads are actor of only one material process, *diverged*.

Transitivity is a property of the clause that occurs when the process extends from one participant to another. Transitive clauses are much more common in the second half than the first half, partly because there are many relational and behavioural processes in the first half. The narrator is the agent of most transitive clauses. However, in clause 11, the road is agent; in clause 12, *the passing there* is agent; and in clause 20, *that* is agent.

The most common circumstantial elements in the poem refer to space and time. In addition to these, there are two circumstance elements of comparison (clauses 8 and 12) and one each of matter (12), purpose (14) and accompaniment (17). Clause 12, with

two unusual circumstantial elements, is foregrounded in terms of circumstances. In general, prepositional phrases and adverbs are more common from clause 12 onwards, so that part of the poem describes circumstances more fully.

### Interpersonal Metafunction

This metafunction includes the elements of the clause that relate to language as social interaction. The main area of analysis in this respect is the mood block, made up of the subject and the finite. The most interesting facet of the interpersonal metafunction in this text is verb tense, one of the functions of the finite. Almost all clauses are past tense. The first exception to this is past perfect tense of clause 12, *had worn*. Clause 17 is future continuous, *shall be telling*. The only other exception is the present perfect tense of clause 20, *has made*.

There are four non-finite clauses in the poem: clauses 2, 8, 9 and 15. Note that most of these occur in the first half of the poem.

### Discussion

The grammatical analysis identified very little foregrounding in the first 11 clauses of the poem. A case might be made for the behavioural processes of clauses 5 and 6 or the marked non-finite nature of clauses 2, 8 and 9. However, neither behavioural processes nor non-finite clauses are especially unusual in the poem or in general language use, so they do not constitute strong foregrounding. The only distinctly foregrounded elements in this part of the poem are the conjunction of many clauses into one sentence and the circumstance as topical theme of clause 4 – *long*. The comparative circumstantial element of clause 8, *just as fair* is somewhat foregrounded.

Clause 12 is the most consistently foregrounded clause of the poem and, in fact, contains more foregrounding than all previous clauses together. It has a contrastive textual theme, past perfect tense and two unusual circumstance elements, including one that functions as a marked topical theme. Linguistically, these features represent an abrupt change in the poem. Most of the clauses that follow have some foregrounding, so it can be said that the second half of the poem is continually presenting unusual linguistic elements. On this basis, it is reasonable to suggest that there are two sections of the poem: the first containing clauses 1 to 11 and the second containing clauses 12 to 20. Reviewing the analysis with this demarcation in mind, it becomes clear that there are other differences between the language of the two sections somewhat separate from the issue of foregrounding. The table below presents the differences that have emerged in the analysis.

**Table 3**

| <b>First Section: Clauses 1-11</b>   | <b>Second Section: Clauses 12-20</b>                        |
|--|---|
| Many clauses are connected –only loosely in some cases - in one very long sentence       | A variety of sentence lengths, all within normal bounds     |
| Many additive conjunctions (e.g. <i>and</i> , <i>then</i> ); no contrastive conjunctions | Two contrastive conjunctions ( <i>though</i> , <i>yet</i> ) |
| The roads are common topical themes  | Narrator is the most common topical theme                   |
| Contains several relational processes  | No relational processes                                     |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| One abstract participant  | Five abstract participants   |
| The roads are agents of two dynamic and grammatically positive processes ( <i>diverged</i> , <i>wanted</i> ); the narrator is agent of only one ( <i>took</i> ) | Narrator is agent of five dynamic and grammatically positive processes ( <i>kept</i> , <i>knowing</i> , <i>doubted</i> , <i>telling</i> , <i>took</i> ); the roads one ( <i>diverged</i> ) |
| Narrator as agent undergoes ellipsis on two out of four occasions   | Narrator does not undergo ellipsis   |
| Three transitive clauses  | Seven transitive clauses   |
| Five circumstantial elements  | Nine circumstantial elements   |
| Past tense  | Range of tenses  |
| Three non-finite clauses  | One non-finite clause  |

Summing up the difference between the two sections, it can be said that the first section focuses more on the roads than it does the narrator and furthermore that it presents the roads in somewhat dynamic roles. In contrast, the narrator is presented as a passive participant – *long I stood and looked* – or is negated – *I could not travel* – or through ellipsis is rendered absent, linguistically and perhaps metaphorically. The overall sense here is that the timid narrator has been overwhelmed by the choice facing him. In the second section, the narrator has undergone something of a transformation of character. Now, dynamism and decisiveness have replaced the timidity; a strong sense of self has replaced the absence. It appears to be the highly foregrounded clause 12 at the start of the second section that precipitates this transformation.

Hasan (1985, p.98) argues that foregrounding imparts theme, so what is it in clause 12 that is so important for the theme of the poem? Here is the clause in full:

*...though as for that the passing there had worn them really about the same...*

The clause contradicts the information in the previous three clauses which mention that the second road is grassier and more in need of use than the first road. Those who view the poem as a celebration of individuality and nonconformity (see discussion in Orr, 2015) tend to overlook this clause because it suggests that the narrator is not in fact making an unusual choice. Moreover, it seems to undermine the reasons for his choice. Those who view it as a satire of self-deception (e.g. Lentricchia, 1994; Robinson, 2016) point to the clause as evidence that the narrator once knew that *the road less traveled by* was in fact as popular among travelers as the first road and that it therefore could not have made much difference. While that latter interpretation does tie the clause to the theme – as interpreted by the satire camp – in a fairly satisfying manner, it does not explain why the clause brings about such change in the character of the narrator. Why would a self-deceptive narrator's acknowledgement that the roads are similar lead to a more dynamic, decisive and stronger character who nonetheless continues to practice self-deception?

As mentioned above, the linguistic analysis suggests that clause 12 precipitates a positive and lasting change in the narrator. Can the clause be interpreted in a way that fits with that change? One possibility is the following interpretation. At the beginning, the narrator is confused and enervated by the need to make a choice between the two roads. He is fixated on the roads, which take on, in his mind, something akin to an animate nature. After some vacillation, he evaluates the claims of the two roads and decides that the second one warrants his travel more than the first, only then to realize that his evaluation was wrong and that there is almost no difference between them after

all. At this point – that is, clause 12 – we might think that that realization would lead to further confusion and enervation, yet the opposite is the case. It is as if he comes to realize that the roads themselves do not carry the significance that he ascribed to them; that he has been too intent on choosing the right road, when the crucial point is rather that he makes a decision and takes action on it. That is, he comes to value decisiveness and action. As a result, he becomes more dynamic, more involved in his own experience and more engaged with the world. Ultimately, he becomes more complete as a person; he more fully achieves his potential.

That interpretation accounts for many of the differences in language between the first and second sections of the poem. For example, it explains why the roads are depicted less frequently and less dynamically in the second section. In fact, in the first clause after the highly foregrounded clause 12, the roads appear as topical theme – *both* – but the process is now a decidedly undynamic, behavioural one, *lay*. The narrator's new-found dynamism accounts for his agency of material and mental processes in the second section; his involvement with his own experience accounts for the greater presence of the narrator in the language of the second section; his engagement with the world accounts for the increase in transitivity and circumstantial elements; his fuller realization of potential accounts for the fact that here he is the agent of processes that represent a broader spectrum of human experience - taking action, thinking and communicating.

This brings us to the final clause of the poem, clause 20. It was also foregrounded in several ways: for its present perfect tense and high level of abstraction and as the last of three consecutive material processes. The abstraction is especially interesting in regard to the interpretation offered here. The actor *that*, as explained in the textual metafunction analysis, probably refers not to the road itself but to either the taking of that road or the fact that the narrator took the road. Both of the main camps of interpretation seem to presume that the referent is the former; that is, that taking that road is what the narrator claims *makes the difference*. However, the interpretation offered here suggests that the referent is instead the fact that the narrator took the road; that is to say, the narrator is emphasized. It is the narrator's decisiveness and action that *have made all the difference* and the road itself is not especially significant. This reading of clause 20 is supported by the foregrounded agent – *I-I* – of the previous clause, to which clause 20 refers. Here, there is repetition of the narrator as agent, in stark contrast to the ellipsis of narrator that occurred in the first section. This repetition also emphasizes the narrator.

In this linguistic view of the poem, both of the main interpretations of “The Road Not Taken” appear to have drawbacks. Reading it as a satire on self-deception cannot explain the positive changes that the narrator seems to undergo in the second section of the poem. Reading it as a celebration of individuality and nonconformity requires the reader to overlook the consistently foregrounded clause 12. Ultimately, however, the intuition that the theme of the poem is uplifting finds strong support in this linguistic analysis.

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## **Individualized Reading Development Outside of Class: A Review of [readtheory.org](http://readtheory.org)**

Cathrine-Mette (Trine) Mork

At Miyazaki International College (MIC), students have to make quick gains in English language ability in order to reach levels allowing them to succeed in upper division content courses taught exclusively in English. This required fast growth continually challenges faculty as well as students. The combination of the general starting level of freshman students and the limited number of language class contact hours in students' first two years in MIC's liberal arts program means that students must make considerable efforts outside of class. Thankfully, there are ample web-based learning tools already on the market with more proliferating regularly, providing more and better tools to assist language learners. To maximize student growth and development, it's crucial that EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching faculty keep abreast of advances in learning tools to best help students develop their skills.

MIC language teaching faculty already have an arsenal of tools, methods, and activities — both analogue and digital — that they use to maximize coursework results outside of class time. Instructors are open to finding more effective methodologies for improving student learning, and this includes technology. When particularly good technology tools are discovered, we incorporate them into the language program. [Praxised.com](http://Praxised.com) and [Xreading.com](http://Xreading.com) are examples of two web-based learning systems that have been adopted institutionally for the reading courses in our language program. Students use [Praxised](http://Praxised.com) for self-study to help develop vocabulary skills, and they use [Xreading](http://Xreading.com) for extensive reading practice with online versions of graded readers (with optional printed materials).

It is not surprising that the more one reads, the better one becomes at reading. For EFL learners, extensive reading increases vocabulary (Lee & Mallinder, 2011; Bell, 1998) and reading speed (Bell, 2001). Research shows a positive relationship between reading quantity and achievement gains (Warwick & Mangubhai, 1983). Extensive reading is one of several methods used in MIC reading courses to promote more reading. It often takes the form of graded readers, and these are used (recently in web-based format) at our institution. Extensive readings are usually pitched at a level below learner reading ability, since the goal is to read a lot. Another element to extensive reading is that learners choose what to read.

In the Read Theory platform presented below, however, students do not choose what they read and because the reading are not directed at non-native speakers, they are not easy. Even though the passages from the system might be higher in difficulty than those of graded readers, they can be viewed as a more narrowly-defined form of extensive reading because students still have agency. They can read as much as they can/want (after achieving teacher-set goals, if set) and at pace and time they decide. Although not below their level, assuming the system works as it claims, learners will not read at a level far beyond their reach. Topping et. al. (2017) claim that even higher gains in reaching ability can be attained if the quality of reading is added as a factor, especially if learners are older and proper teacher intervention guides independent learning. In the case of Read Theory, rather than a teacher intervening, a form of

automatic guidance is provided through comprehension checks, automatic assessment, and continuously adjusted placement based on performance.

### **What Read Theory is and how it works**

I discovered the Read Theory reading practice platform early in 2016 and immediately saw its potential as a useful tool for the reading courses of MIC's language program for first- and second-year students. Read Theory ([readtheory.org](http://readtheory.org)) is a free online reading practice platform that supplies students with an extensive library of passages targeting individual levels. Rather than charge learners or instructors for use, the system is monetized through optional purchases of its content in PDF format. In the system, learners are assessed automatically through a series of multiple-choice questions following each passage. There are optional written responses, but those require instructor intervention for assessment, be it formative or summative. I trialed the software in first-year reading courses that year. After getting experience with the system and positive feedback from the students who used it, I shared my experience with other MIC teachers, many of whom have adopted its use for their reading courses.

Instructors can create a class account and student accounts, or have students create their own account and "join a teacher's class", so to speak. They do this by inviting their teacher(s) to follow them via email from inside the system. Students new to the system then take an initial placement test (taking about 40 minutes for freshmen MIC students), which can be done during or outside class time. The issue of privacy was raised in informal faculty discussion about the system in 2016, as the system is free (the assumption is that when system use is paid for, private data is more secure). Since Read Theory now requires students to invite teachers to view their accounts, the students are now the ultimate decision makers with regard to who has access to their personal data. Students can also change their login data such that they cannot be identified should they so choose. Viewed from this perspective, worry over privacy concerns should be placated.

The system uses algorithms and "Lexile" level information to place students at an appropriate starting point. According to Read Theory, the Lexile<sup>®</sup> Framework for Reading is "a scientific approach to measuring both reading ability and the text complexity of reading materials on the same developmental scale." It is a non-prescriptive tool that matches readers and text ([lexile.com](http://lexile.com)). Readers move up (or down) in level as they work through Read Theory. Answers and detailed explanations are made available to learners upon completion of each section. The platform is designed for American K12 (grades 1 through 12) readers, adhering to national benchmarks specified by the Common Core State Standards ([CCSS - corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org)).

After Read Theory matches learners with resources at appropriate challenge levels via its Lexile Framework, students read passages at their own pace and complete several multiple-choice questions and (optional) writing segments. The passages in Read Theory vary in length and difficulty according to level, as one might expect. In adherence with the CCSS, the questions on the platform address key ideas and details, integration of knowledge, and the craft and structure of the passages. Records of quizzes taken are available in graphs. Quizzes are broken down by grade level in relation to student pretest grade level scores (initial level placement).

## **Why Read Theory was trialed**

Despite the different user target, Read Theory was thought to be appropriate for freshman reading courses at MIC. Much of the reading materials used in our freshman English classes are either constructed with the L2 (second language learner) reader in mind (like our in-house, themed intensive readings and accompanying worksheets), or selected based on their accessibility to L2 learners (such as graded readers, used for extensive reading practice). A quantitative study by Guo (2012) revealed that using authentic materials in extensive reading for non-native speakers develops vocabulary (but not grammar) and increases motivation and overall knowledge and English ability. A second reason, then, for adopting Read Theory (the first being the cost), was to provide students with authentic examples of readings that were also streamed according to level, based on cognitive development level (correlating with age, usually) as opposed to second language ability.

A related reason I thought the system to be potentially valuable to MIC students was the type of questions that typically ensue in a Read Theory passage. At the freshmen level, many of MIC's materials in reading class necessarily contain work on basic language skills and lower order thinking skills. The Read Theory system aims to develop an understanding of the scope, structure, intention, and vocabulary of the reading passages. But rather than limit the focus to basic comprehension and language elements of these passages, many of the questions are designed to test inductive reasoning, problem solving, and analytical skills, even at the lower levels in the system. Since a focus on the development of higher-order thinking skills that enable learners to analyze, synthesize, evaluate and create is at the heart of MIC's liberal arts program mission, Read Theory's stress on critical thinking skills development was thought to be supportive of this objective.

The philosophy of active learning is also at the core of the MIC program, which asserts that academic capability is in part achieved through active, explorative engagement in reading as part of the process of problem solving. Read Theory was designed to be engaging for students. The system is behaviorist in its approach by offering completion badges as rewards to students as they progress through the system. The system's inclusion of game mechanics (Kapp, 2012) engages and motivates learners to be more active in their learning.

In addition to being extrinsically motivating, the reading passages and follow-through questions are scaffolded into small chunks that can be completed in short time frames so that students do not easily get frustrated. According to Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, to increase the effectiveness of instruction, intrinsic load (the inherent difficulty of the subject matter) plus extraneous load (non-relevant distracting elements) plus germane load (elements that help with the processing of information) should all add up to no more than one's working memory capacity (Gyan, 2013). The instructional design of the Read Theory system is in line with this theory.

Since Read Theory is designed to be fun and easy to use, it was also hoped that students might use the tool on their own even if not required for grades as a form of self-directed learning. The system is also teacher-friendly. Through their class accounts instructors can observe coherently arranged data in graphs and tables of student activity at a glance at the class level or at the individual level. Extensive reports show student levels and progress.

Another important rationale for choosing this platform as a form of out-of-class reading practice was the ability of the system to individualize (though unfortunately not so much to personalize<sup>3</sup>); to assign readings appropriate to individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as its ability to allow students to progress through levels at their own pace. Work done in class is usually taught at the average level and pace of the students. Students below average level benefit from structured work targeted at their own level, allowing them to catch up, and students who are above average benefit from the same as they are challenged and motivated to excel, making up for any boredom they could be experiencing with less challenging in-class materials.

A final reason for employing Read Theory in MIC's reading classes is that the structure of typical Read Theory sessions resembles that of MIC's final exams for reading courses. The MIC exam consists of small passages followed by multiple choice questions addressing comprehension of text meaning, syntax, and vocabulary, as well as ability to make inferences, generalize, and predict, for example. It was hoped that the system would familiarize students with the exam format.

### **How Read Theory was used**

At MIC there are three reading courses taught over the first three semesters (Reading 1, Reading 2, and Reading 3), and each of these courses is streamed into three levels. Though taught at different levels, course content and requirements are almost identical.

Read Theory was first used in 2016 for a low-level Reading 1 and a mid-level Reading 2 course. I allotted a number of Read Theory passages and accompanying quizzes to be completed by four deadlines spaced out in the semester. Second semester students were assigned a higher total number of passages to complete. To ensure that students participated, Read Theory work counted for 5% of the final grade in the first semester course and 10% of the fall course grade. I graded students only on completion of work, not on progress through the system or level attained. The 2016 first semester students that used Read Theory did not participate in the Read Theory questionnaire explained below.

All reading instructors adopted Read Theory for their spring 2017 Reading 1 classes. As I had done previously, teachers set reading four deadlines per semester with the same quantity objectives of ten reading passages per month (40 in total). Instructors weighed Read Theory efforts at 10% of students' final grade. There was only one difference with regard to how teachers employed Read Theory: One teacher required students to pass the accompanying quiz for each passage for it to be counted toward the Read Theory grade. Other teachers only counted the total number of quizzes that were attempted.

### **Student perceptions**

Students in the mid-level class in the fall 2016 semester and students in all three levels of the spring 2017 semester were invited to complete questionnaires addressing

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<sup>3</sup> Wallach (2014) defines individualized learning as instruction tailored to students' strengths and weaknesses and personalized learning as an approach allowing and encouraging students to learn in a way that suits their unique preferences and abilities.

their perceptions at the end of each semester via a survey created with qualtrics.com. Two questionnaires were conducted in class. Students in the other two classes were requested to participate via email. Out of a possible 85 students, 73 completed the questionnaire. I taught two of these courses, and two other faculty members taught the other two. No student completed the questionnaire more than once, and results were aggregated.

In a study by Romeo (2016), almost 80% of learners surveyed rated their overall satisfaction with Read Theory as 8/10 or higher. Nearly 30% of all respondents rated their satisfaction level as 10/10. Results from the Read Theory questionnaires conducted at MIC similarly yielded positive levels of satisfaction. Less than 10% of students surveyed thought that Read Theory was not so enjoyable or interesting. Less than 6% felt the system did not make for good practice and was not helpful to their reading progress. The assignment completion rate was positive as well. 70% of all students reported having completed the prescribed course requirements on Read Theory, with just under 15% falling a little short. Fewer than 7% failed. Optional comments were solicited from students regarding their effort of the platform. The overview below shows that most students are extrinsically motivated to do the Read Theory assignments.

**Rationale for completing the number of Read Theory quizzes reported (paraphrased):**

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <i>I did it because it was fun/enjoyable/interesting.</i>       | 13 comments |
| <i>I did it because I want to improve my reading skills.</i>    | 10 comments |
| <i>I did it because it was homework/ I wanted a good grade.</i> | 39 comments |
| <i>I did it because the passages were short/</i>                |             |
| <i>It was easier than doing the other assignments.</i>          | 8 comments  |
| <i>I was just lazy.</i>   | 3 comments  |

55% of students reported being active on Read Theory several times a week, and another 33% reported using the system several times a month. Only 1% of students used the system daily and 4% less frequently than monthly. When prompted to optionally give reasons for their frequency use, students offered many varied reasons, but the ones below were recurring and telling. A few students (as shown in the second comment) did not appear to like having to plan their use of time:

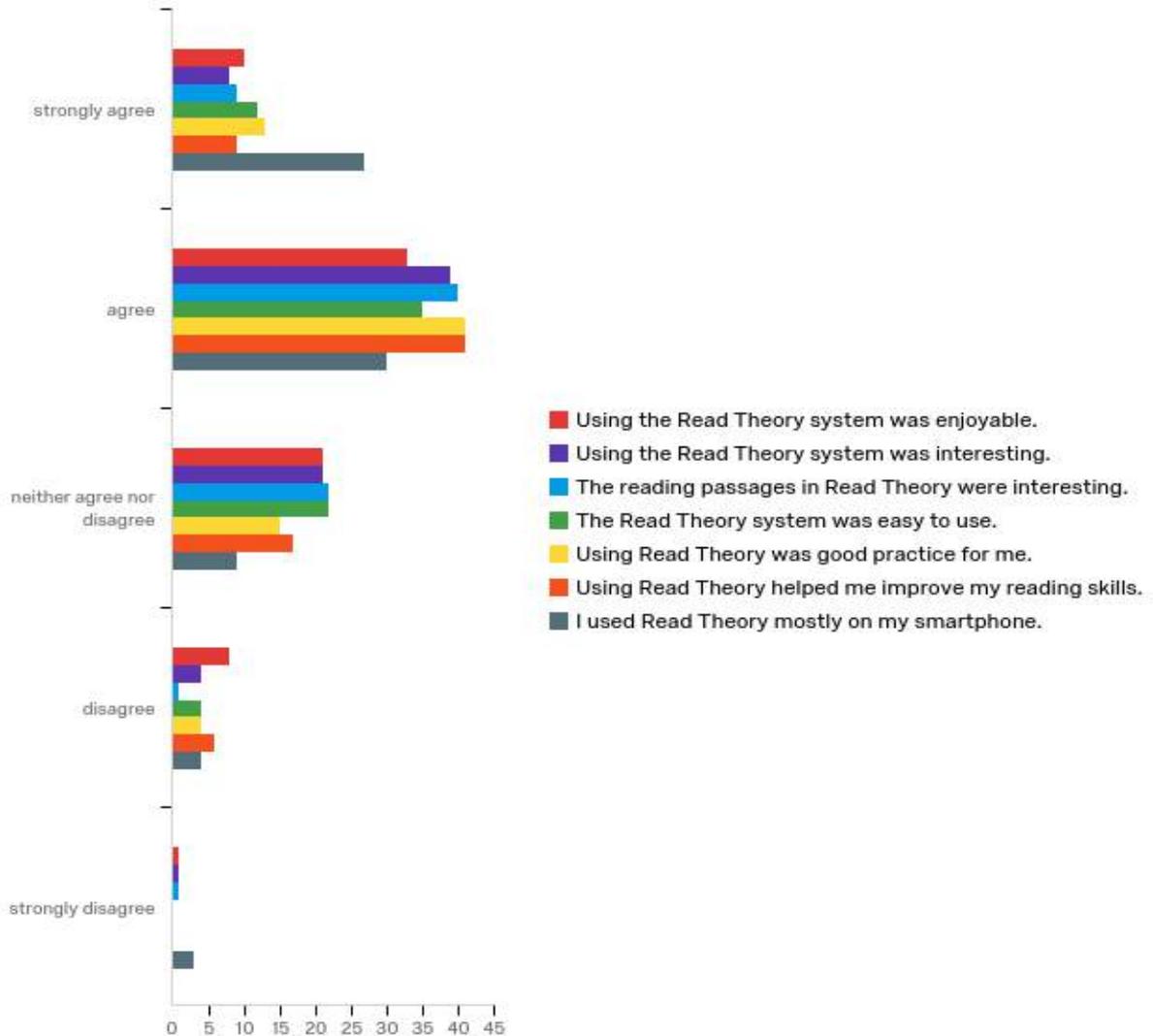
**Rationale for reported inconsistency of Read Theory use (paraphrased):**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>I had a lot of other homework which often took precedent.</i>           | 6 comments |
| <i>I wanted the teacher to give us daily or weekly goals, not monthly.</i> | 3 comments |
| <i>I just procrastinated.</i>  | 6 comments |
| <i>I got lazy once I reached my goal.</i>                                  | 3 comments |

The set of bar graphs in figure 1 below shows the extent to which students agreed with the statements shown at right to the bars. Across all questions, at least 60% of students surveyed agreed that Read Theory was enjoyable, interesting (in terms of both content and use), easy to use, and a good form of reading practice. More than 60%

also had the perception that the system helped improve their reading skills. Unsurprisingly, over 75% of respondents used Read Theory on their smart phones, so it was helpful to students that the platform is mobile responsive, although there is not yet a specific app for it.

Figure 1. Degree to which students agree with statements about Read Theory.



**Relevant Feedback (optional) regarding the Read Theory system in general:**

- “Practicing in line with my level.”*
- “I should do it on the PC.”*
- “I think that I could improve my reading skill.”*
- “Read theory was good for me. I got good reading skill.”*
- “I improved reading skills by read theory.”*
- “I improved reading skill to do this.”*
- “As the questions are difficult, my reading skills also revel up.”*
- “I felt this is easy or difficult, so this is good study tool.”*

*“There were many difficult words in Read Theory, so I could learn it.”*

*“We can learn new vocabulary from ReadTheory.”*

*“It is short story. It's easy to do during short time. Also, it help my reading speed to improve.”*

*“It is easy for me to use.”*

*“I am not goot at reading english, but this system has breaf sentence. So it is good for me.”*

*“Read Theory cannot pass that we can get more 50 percent. So, it was bother to me.”*

*“I want to know how many words did I read.”*

*“Read theory is good tool, but I don't know about relation with my English skill.”*

*“I think that teacher did have to control amount of boderline about reading.*

*Read theory and Xreading are both needed too much time in order to get score. Probably, all students get tired and uncomfortable in terms of motivation.”*

Through more questions, it was found that the progress data students received from their teacher or from the Read Theory system was motivating. Students reported that getting badges on the Read Theory system was similarly motivating. Only three students who completed the survey indicated that they would not use the system again if they did not have to. Despite the system being free to use, 34% of students were indifferent to making use of it in the future, but the remaining 63% reported that they planned to make use of the system even after the reading course was over. It would be interesting to follow up with that 63% to see if they are still using it.

### **Progress Reports**

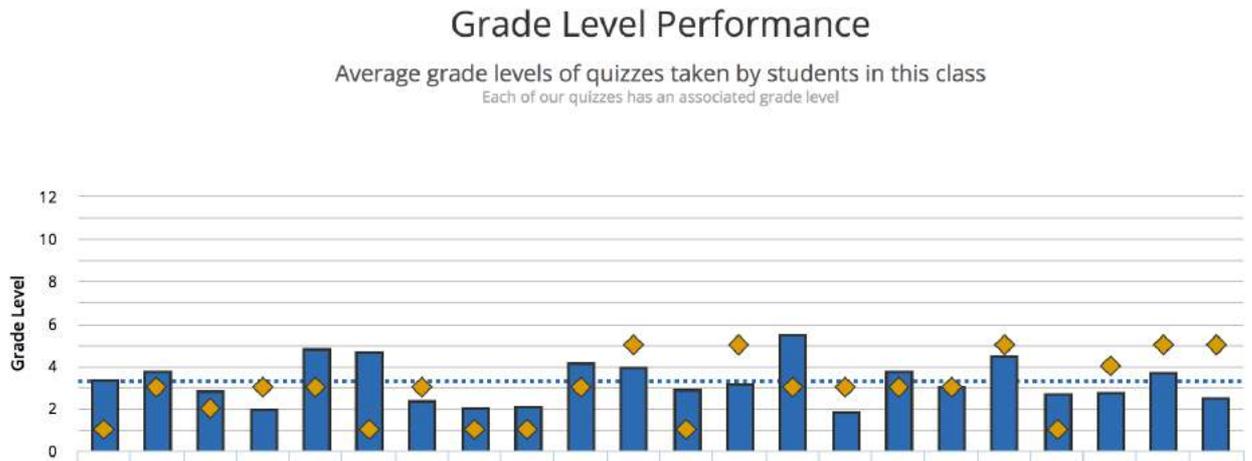
I initially wanted to aggregate data from all students in the four courses that had used the system and had been surveyed, but this proved impossible. I was not able to access the data from the two courses I taught because I am currently teaching another course making use of Read Theory and am now only following those students. I could have elected to continue following one of those classes but did not foresee that I would require the data. Additionally, sometime early in 2017 the Read Theory system platform was revamped such that students must invite teachers to view their accounts. Teachers who had been using Read Theory previously would have to have re-invited students to join pre-2017 classes, and as those students were no longer studying with me, I deemed it an unnecessary hassle to both students and myself.

Instead, I reasoned that looking at just the one class I had easy access to might provide a representative snapshot of what student gains, if any, were being recorded and made visible in the back end of the Read Theory system. This is because this particular class had the most students and consisted of students streamed into the mid-level. The instructor of this course gave me permission to look at her Read Theory class account data. This is the same class in which the instructor required her students to pass the quizzes for each reading passage to earn credit.

The graphs in figures 2, 3, and 4 are screenshots of whole class data from this particular class. Each bar represents a student, and in this screenshot on Grade Level Performance the yellow diamonds show the pretest grade (initial placement) results. It is clear that initial placement may not have always accurately determined the most

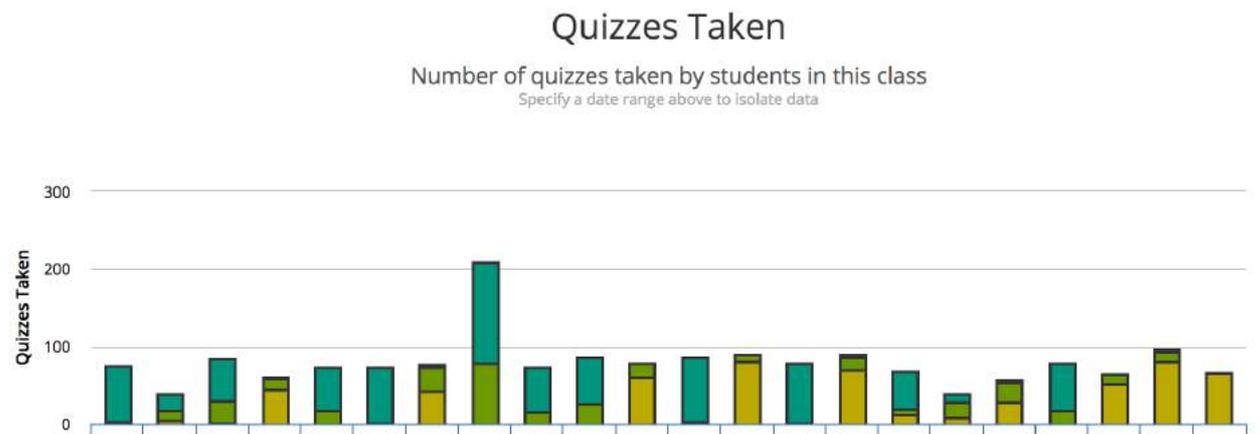
appropriate initial starting point, as shown by the placement of the diamonds above the level many students did the majority of their work on Read Theory.

Figure 2. Average Read Theory grade levels of quizzes taken by students.



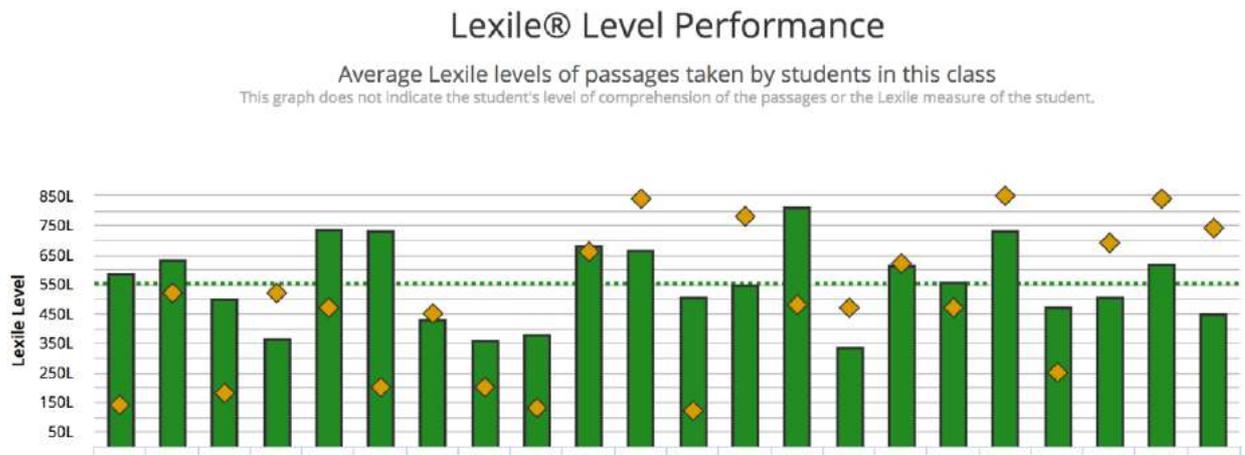
In figure 3 below, the mustard yellow color at the bottom of each bar represents the amount of quizzes taken below pretest level, the light army green color at pretest level, and the darker kelly green at the top of each bar above pretest level. The standout here is that the student who progressed furthest in the platform completed the greatest amount of work above her/his initial level.

Figure 3. Number of Read Theory quizzes taken by students.



In figure 4, which shows Lexile level performance, the yellow triangle shows each student's pretest Lexile level, whereas the bars indicate each student's average performance for the course. Half (11) of the 22 students appear to have improved their Lexile scores, three show little or no change, and eight students appear to have actually decreased in level.

Figure 4. Lexile levels of passages taken by students.



It is difficult to ascertain if any overall progress was made with these students from the above figures alone. Thankfully, Read Theory provides overall statistics. The class pretest average was Grade 2.91 and 482L (Lexile level), and the class program average was Grade 3.31 and 556L. Overall performance improvements appear to have been made, though it is not clear if these improvements represent a significant improvement.

The next set of screenshots from the system deal with the lowest performer in this class. From just a glance at both grade level progression and Lexile performance (figures 5 and 6), it seems that not a great deal of progress, if any, was made. However, the statistics for this student do show slight improvements: The pretest average grade was Grade 3 and Lexile level 470L. The program average for this student was Grade 3.07 and 557L.

Figure 5. Grade level progression for each quiz taken by the lowest performer.

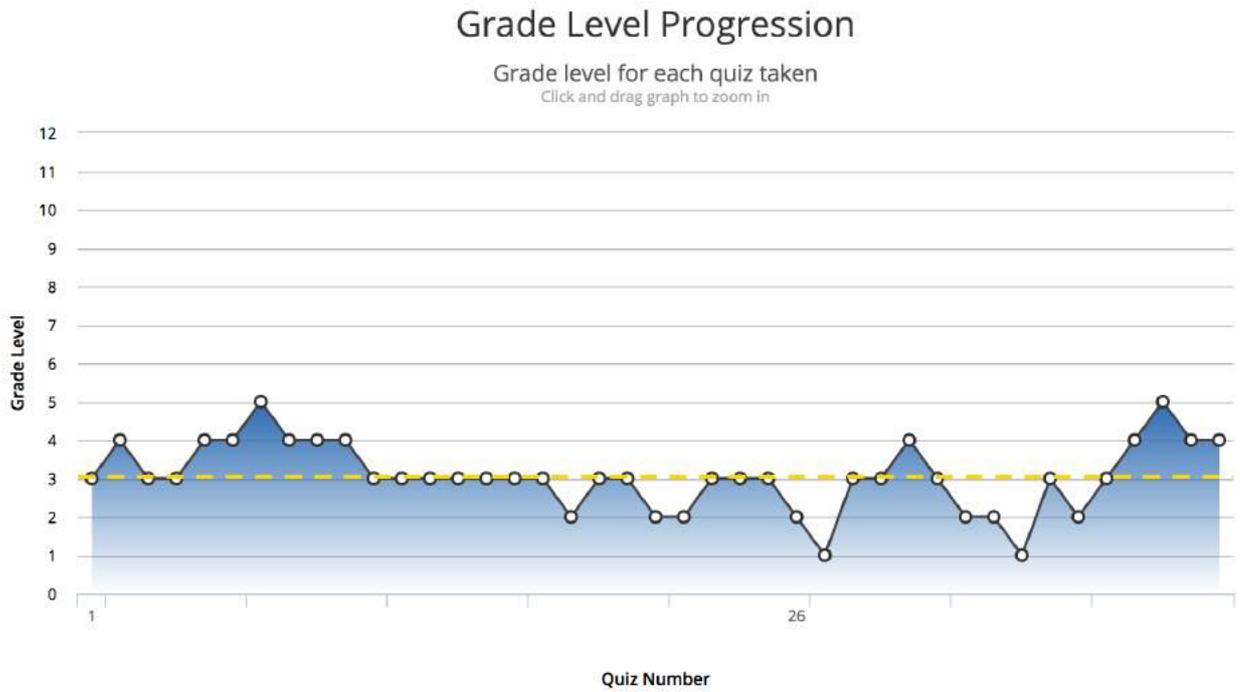
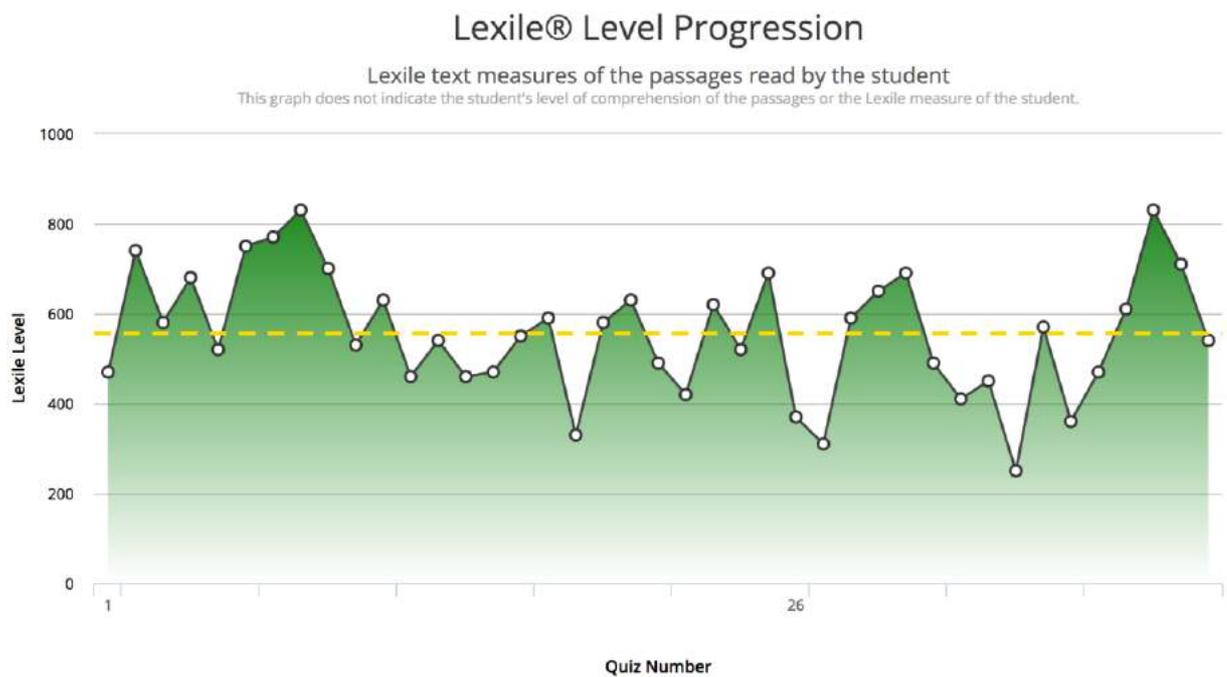


Figure 6. Lexile level progression of the lowest performer.



The final set of screenshots below (figures 7 and 8) deal with the top performer in this class. Statistics from the system showed this student as having pretest scores of Grade 1 and 200L (for Lexile level) and a program average of Grade 2.05 and 326L. Again, whether or not these gains are significant is not clear, but the student did jump a whole grade (There are 12 grades in the system, reflecting the K12 system). With just a glance at both Grade Level Progression and Lexile Performance, though peaks and troughs were evident, it is obvious that progress was made. However, had this student not progressed as far (read as much and passed as many quizzes), such progress would not have been demonstrative.

Figure 7. Grade level progression of the top performer.

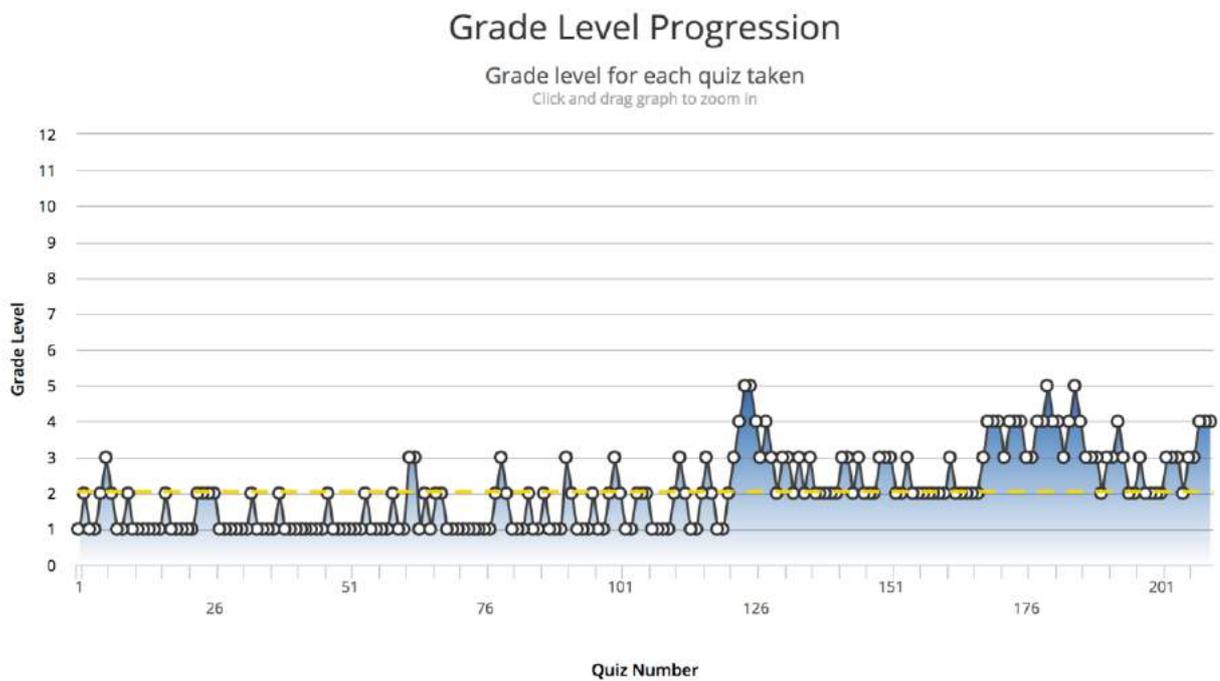
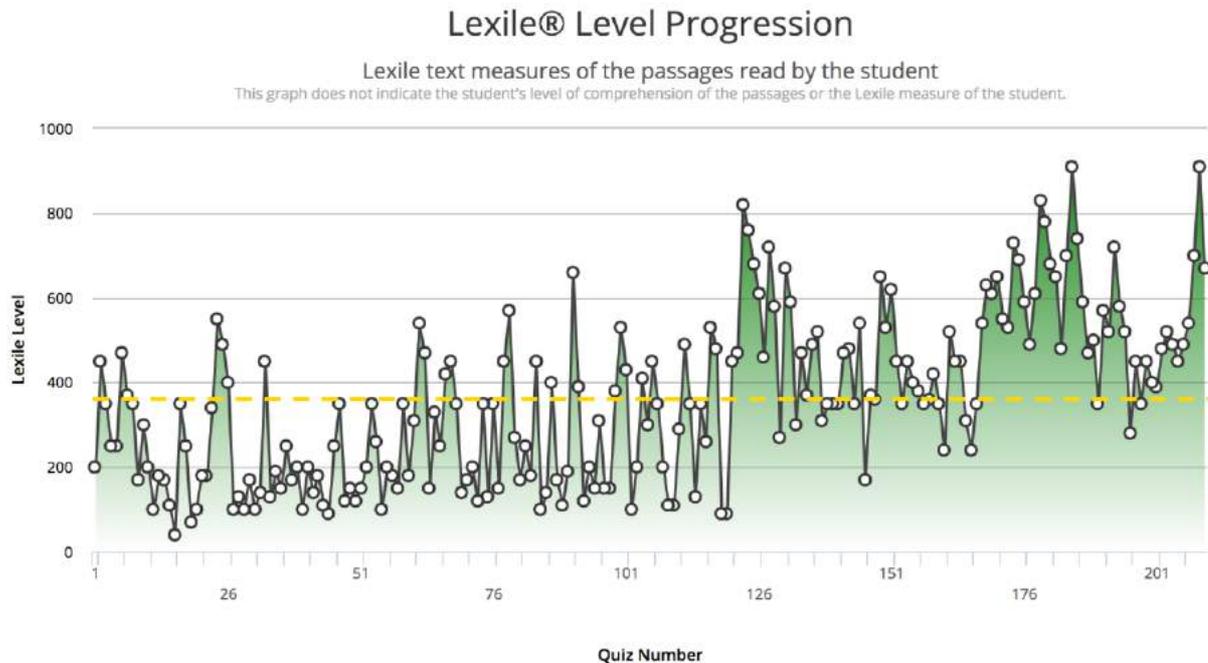


Figure 8. Lexile level progression of the top performer.



I observed two revealing consistencies from these outlier students:

- 1) The high achiever read the most, made the most gains, and also happened to move up a level in the subsequent semester of the MIC language program (a move not based on Read Theory progress). This student was not rated by Read Theory as highest in reading level, however.
- 2) The low achiever read the least, made the fewest gains, and also happened to move down a level in the subsequent semester of the MIC language program (a move not based on Read Theory progress). This student was not rated by Read Theory as lowest in reading level.

## Conclusions

Overall the Read Theory platform was rated highly by students. Other instructors who used the system were not formally questioned, but in casual conversation at least two others (one using the system for the first time in the current semester) agreed with my perception that the platform is both informative of student efforts and easy to use. Read Theory offers personalized and engaging reading practice that challenges students to think, and this practice can be completed at students' own pace at times convenient to them. It is mobile-friendly and therefore highly accessible. The system also offers some insight as to what students might expect on MIC end-of-

semester reading exams. Read Theory system creators claim that their reading content is extensive and continually expanded.

On the negative side, although Read Theory supplies easy-to-understand graphs and charts to help instructors visualize student progress, I could see that initial placement testing was sometimes inaccurate, placing students at a higher level than their overall performance in the system would indicate. Student levels did improve overall in the class that was investigated, but it is not clear if these gains within the system are statistically significant. Instructor effectiveness, student efforts in class, and work students were doing on other platforms may have impacted the degree to which gains on Read Theory were made.

Looking just at the data from the student who made the most gains in the sampled class, one might conclude that students may have to use the system more often and/or over a longer period to see more progress. I am the instructor who initially decided the amount of reading to assign on the platform. I based my decision to have students complete at least 40 passages on several factors after the first semester trial (not included in this study): my estimate of the time it would take them to complete readings and accompanying quizzes (especially vis a vis all of the other homework assignments they were required to do in the course) and my perceptions of how students would perceive the difficulty of the passages. If the results of the high-performing student in this class are representative of what students could have achieved had they simply done more, perhaps students should have been assigned more passages to complete by each deadline.

The language program at MIC currently pays for two online systems for reading work at MIC. Whether Read Theory should be formally adopted program-wide will depend on a) if more evidence of measurable gains, especially over a longer period of use, can be supplied and b) if any perceived additional workload on students (and faculty) is deemed acceptable by instructors. Currently no teachers are using Read Theory in the Reading 3 course. If we were to have students work in the system over the three semesters of the reading program, we would have some longitudinal data that could prove or disprove the value of the platform. Despite being followed by different teachers at different times, any follower of a particular student has access to their progress since they started working in the system. I would also suggest students be assigned more reading on the platform in general, if possible. Additionally, I recommend that students be required to pass the quiz associated with each passage in order for them to gain credit for having read it.

Another possible future path of inquiry would be to survey students to find out if they thought Read Theory helped them in their preparation for the final exams for Reading 1, 2, and 3. Whether Read Theory has in fact helped students prepare students for final exams was not investigated in this study. It would be more challenging but interesting to scientifically measure any relation between Read Theory work and exam scores. However, Read Theory will need to have been used consistently by students, and we would need a control group - all the more difficult for MIC due to its small student population.

Based only on student feedback, a preliminary assessment of results, and my personal assessment of the system content and functionality, I feel that the trial integration of the Read Theory platform into our reading courses was a success. I am

hopeful that language faculty will consider it a permanent tool for use in the language program.

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## The Pedagogical Fantastic: Active Learning Through and In Fantasy Literature

Katherine E. Bishop

'Fun' has often been underestimated and its partner-in-crime, 'play,' has frequently been given a bad name--particularly when it comes to education. Both have been underexamined in studies of history, of how things became as they are because dramatic discontinuities and patterns of social order tend to capture our attention more thoroughly. But, as Steven Johnson highlights in his study of the role of delight in the construction of the modern world, while we rightly point to necessity as 'the mother of invention,' "if you do a paternity test on many of the modern world's most important ideas or institutions, you will find, invariably, that leisure and play were involved in the conception as well" (10). The ludic is a realm wherein the normal rules of life and culture are suspended and "people are free to explore the spontaneous, unpredictable, and immensely creative work of play" (13). Overall, it's fair to say that play makes the ordinary extraordinary. Fantasy literature promotes a sort of play, which Ian Bogost, author of *Play Anything: The Pleasure of Limits, the Uses of Boredom, and the Secret of Games* (2016), defines as "this process of operating the world, of manipulating things" (Beck). This process pushes one to find novelty in the ideationally-saturated familiar. So does fun, particularly if one attends to Bogost's definition: "finding novelty in the suffocating familiarity of ordinary life" (Beck). Both can lead to mastery, innovation, and empowerment. With that novelty, that new perspective, comes a new sense of relationship. As we re-envision things, we become invested. This is as true at tertiary educational levels as it is in the annals of history. Focusing on the generative aspects of play, in what follows I will examine how fantasy literature encourages rather than assumes engagement with literary and real worlds through gamification models and will discuss how game-based learning and fantasy literature enhance multimodal literacy and educational empowerment in the classroom and beyond.

One of the challenges to teaching literature is convincing our students (and administrators) that what we are teaching is necessary and that its importance spills beyond the pages of individual texts. And, of course, it is. In teaching literature, we are teaching culture, history, philosophy, empathy, and so on. We are teaching original thinking and communication and writing and argumentation and grammar and the importance of form and the vitality of style. We are teaching language (yes, even to native speakers), comprehension, synthesis, and interpretation. In all these things we are teaching *literacy*: that is, not just teaching *about* literature but teaching students *how* to critically read, how to build strategies for reading texts, and how to accrue means for creating what Constructivist pedagogue Edith Ackermann calls the "art of learning or 'learning to learn'" (1). We are teaching students to make texts as they read, and, by way of their refined ideas, we are teaching students to make the world their own. To do this well requires active learning in one form or another. Active learning, as Michael Prince defines it, "requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing" (1). Active learning approaches, that is, those that cause students to engage in the learning process, are effective for any number of reasons. Students retain more, and moreover, can synthesize more adroitly, when they are deeply involved in their own learning processes.

Our students respond well to active learning strategies. Most of the time. Once they get past the hump of self-consciousness and can be convinced of the value of doing so, they light up when doing role-plays and shine when encouraged to add some of themselves and their passions to their work—even in their approaches to note taking. They take to inhabiting the text. Despite the vast swathes of data backing up the efficacy of active learning strategies in acquisition, mastery, and invention related to material; despite most students' eventual recognition of the efficacy of active learning tools; it is quite one thing for us as educators to encourage students to activate their educational perspectives and another for them to seek active learning opportunities on their own. Even when students realize the benefits of active learning in the classroom and begin to craft strategies within institutional walls, transposing the benefits to the outside world is often an abstract hurdle that isn't so easily overcome.

That's where fantasy literature comes in. Active learning can be approached through other types of literature, of course (my classes and I do it all the time); however, several generic elements of fantasy literature make it a natural fit for teaching in and through active learning. Too frequently, fantasy literature is dismissed as literature-with-a-lowercase-l rather than Literature, as fit for fun but not for the classroom. But it's a valuable classroom resource for many reasons. For one, education, particularly active learning, is the unsung hero of many modern fantasy novels, providing unique pedagogical imperatives for educators and students. It forms a bridge between the contained worlds of 'school' and 'life,' often literally and metatextually. Fantasy literature tends to recast reality through wonder and gamifies learning in educational settings, modeling collaborative, cooperative, and problem-based learning. This modeling then is transmitted to the reader's world: magical. Magic in fantasy is frequently derived from within. Learning to harness one's own magic as in fantasy literature emphasizes one's *internal* power, the kind that L. Frank Baum's Dorothy had in her the whole time she was in Oz and just had to click her own heels to find. It often comes naturally as an innate talent, though a talent requiring training to control and growth to use well and wisely. Moreover, it's fun. And there's a value to fun that is commonly lost in modern approaches to education, much to the detriment of all.

From Ursula K. LeGuin's seminal *Earthsea* cycle to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* trilogy, Patrick Rothfuss's (in-progress) *Kingkiller Chronicles*, Terry Pratchett's *Unseen University* stories, and beyond, in modern fantasy texts, school has become a canonical setting and pedagogy a central trope. Moreover, modern fantasy texts are rife with students and their teachers battling together on and in pedagogical planes. Learning is literally a matter of life or death in these texts. But it's also a kind of a game. Within the worlds of these novels the dangers are real enough, but for the reader, facing them is ludic: how can they the reader use what the focal characters have been learning in their school setting, and thus what they the reader have also been learning, to defeat the antagonist(s)? At the very least, the reader can see the characters modeling the application of what they learn as they level up, defeating increasingly more difficult challenges as their skill trees grow.

This trend in the fantastic toward academic settings and learning-empowered champions has been accompanied by a cultural and pedagogical rise of gamification and game-based learning. Gamification is the application of game mechanics and dynamics such as badges, avatars, and leveling to non-game contexts, such as the classroom, to solve problems, connect to users, and promote desired behaviors. Crucial to its

pedagogical value, according to Rowan Tulloch, “gamification does not assume engagement and interest, but instead seeks to generate it” (327). Conversely, game-based learning uses tools from gaming to crack open the subject at hand and to help the user to see the topic or issue in a new light, creating complementary ways of thinking about a problem or topic. So whereas acquiring points toward the House Cup, in *Harry Potter*, is gamification, Harry and his friends’ running the gauntlet to save the Philosopher’s Stone at the end of book one is more game-based learning. They literally have to play their way through the dungeon and solve puzzles using magical lessons learned in school to reach the end. Through gamification and game-based learning, modern pedagogically-based fantasy literature such as *Harry Potter* emphasizes crucial skills including independent educational empowerment as well as the necessity of continuing the quest beyond the paper world of the classroom.

The educational settings in what I’m calling pedagogical fantasy add to the ludic imperatives of the genre, even if somewhat paradoxically. To play, we must first learn the rules. Fantasy texts often feature schools adrift from those of real life for the majority of students, from boarding schools to universities. Rowling’s Hogwarts, Grossman’s Brakebills, Le Guin’s seminal Roke Island school, and Rothfuss’s University are all liminal spaces—schools, certainly, but never in the heart of town. They are divorced from the world around them—just as the students and faculty are separated from their families. Casting students as players within mostly closed systems is a useful plot device, of course, and cuts down on everyday interferences but this isolation also emphasizes the gameworldliness of the text. The school setting acts as a game board corollary in which the students must move, level up, collect items such as owls, and face increasing challenges, applying what they’ve learned to their environment to progress. In Rothfuss’s *Kingkiller Chronicles*, the majority of Kvothe’s education comes from his early years and initial promise but requires the discipline of the University to hone and refine his skills with rule-based Functional Magic.

Similarly, in the world of Grossman’s *The Magicians*, those outside of the codified and rarified world of Brakebills who form their own schools can and do learn magic and form communities, but in a rag-tag, duct-taped together, frankly dangerous sort of way. This concentration on institutional learning has more to do with encouraging a structured methodology than a reinforcement of class-based hierarchies, I think: while games can be played without a rulebook, the structured experience created by shaping one’s approach with an instruction manual often provides a fuller and more satisfying experience than an ad hoc approach can. But, conversely, so, too, does riffing off of the rules once one groks them. In fact, to succeed in their narratives, characters such as Rowling’s Hermione and Rothfuss’s Kvothe must learn to adapt, solve problems, and collaborate on their own once they have mastered their courses. Likewise, while Grossman’s Quentin learns and improves his magic at Brakebills, his education requires tasks beyond the walls of the school, sanctioned by the administration though they are. Key growth occurs in the school’s faculty-free clubhouses and an off-campus study abroad venture as a migrating goose.

This is not uncommon; the school setting nearly always shatters or fades away in modern fantasy literature. In the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Hermione, Harry, and Ron bypass the giant three-headed canine who is guarding a trapdoor that leads to the series of traps and puzzles protecting the eponymous philosopher’s stone. To bypass the protective gauntlet, the three friends

need to take what they've learned in classes and through books and use it to succeed, often in games made large and with real consequences. When the trio fall down the trapdoor into a constricting vine, Hermione intones, "'Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare... what did Professor Sprout say?—it likes the dark and the damp—' recalling information from her class to allow the trio to escape yet another predicament (278). Harry quips, "'Lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione,'" underscoring the import of her pedagogical prowess (278). But it's not just Hermione saving the day—Harry's aptitude for playing Quidditch solves one room and Ron's dedicated practice guides the group through a brutal game of chess are also necessary to reaching the boss battle: Voldemort. It's almost as if the professors at Hogwarts set up the gauntlet specifically for Harry, Ron, and Hermione, playing to their strengths, providing a simulated real-world experience in order to emphasize the importance of applying what they've been learning in a non-classroom setting on their own as internally-motivated actants. They must rely on one another and then on themselves, each taking charge in one trial—there is no internet to query, no professor to provide a walkthrough. The stakes are real and require independent, critical thinking, and active engagement. Just like in the real world (for the most part), there are no grades in the gauntlet, just do or die, pass or fail, save the day or don't.

The imperative toward active learning at the crux of so much of modern fantasy literature stems from the forward propulsion of the plot, infuses the settings, and drives character interactions. It was his Tookish side's propensity for 'fun' that propelled Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins on his adventure with the dwarves in *The Hobbit*: Baggins's legendary ability to find the wonder in the quotidian, from the golden yolk of an egg to the heliotropic eye of a daisy, allows him to best the crepuscular Gollum in a game of riddles, defeat the allegorical dragon of greed, and return home again, a wiser hobbit. This gameliness mirrors active learning strategies in that they activate students and empower them to take on baddies alongside their exams. While our students' (and our own) real-world challenges are never as literally apocalyptic as facing off with Voldemort, they might feel that way. But, of course, when we must face our own nemeses (and we do), a few classic strategies gleaned from gaming can help—tenacity, naturally, is needed, for instance. How many times, for example, did you have to face off against the koopa in Super Mario Brothers before you beat it? Apart from revising documents, real life rarely hands you a repeated scenario to try again at. But you get iterations. This 'leveling up' is also crucial in and of itself. So often we become frustrated by the vast expanse ahead of us when it comes to learning something new. We want to be able to perform well immediately. And, of course, we cannot. Learning is a process, as fantasy literature reminds us constantly. Harry Potter's first real battle was against a mountain troll loose in the halls of Hogwarts. Defeating it took fair measures of stupidity, bravery, and grit, but not so much magic, thankfully, considering all he had up his sleeve were a few training-wheels spells. Imagine if eleven-year-old, level one Harry Potter had faced Voldemort at his level seven final boss form? Game over. Throughout the books, Harry, like other fantasy protagonists, needs to call upon more complex information to succeed; the challenges he faces always feel dire but are never above his current level. This scaffolding reminds readers of the importance of challenges faced at every step of the learning process. The scaffolded tasks facing the student protagonists in modern fantasy texts show them trying again, trying bigger,

bolder, and better—their larger goals are at the forefront, guiding their paths and inspiring them to keep pressing on, even if and when they fail.

The acquisition of magical literacy is both lifesaving for young adepts and pleasurable for readers; learning to chart and adjust to situational rules is essential to conquering conflicts and plots. Having these directives come from fictional peers with whom the student reader identifies and adventures along with can be revelatory—in much the same way that hearing a compliment from a stranger often has more gravitas than hearing it from one's mother. Active learning is certainly established within modern education, in Japan and beyond, as a classroom strategy, but focusing on how it functions within literature can fruitfully enhance students' involvement with the texts as well as the strategies for learning and for re-viewing the world via play to see it anew, with fresh, innovative, eyes. This is particularly vital here in Japan where, as Myles Chilton details in *English Beyond the Center*, language and literature learning so often go hand in hand but get blocked by a sensed need to be 'right' and find 'the perfect answer,' often while feeling adrift in a secondary language and culture. So many students hang back from fluency, both in language and in literary criticism because they are afraid of being 'wrong,' doubly so since they are approaching these things from the outside—yet so often, so too, do the heroes of fantasy literature: Harry, Hermione, Ron and Hagrid; Bilbo; Kvothe; Ged; Quentin; and others come from the periphery and change the center. The play-centric aspects of fantasy literature allow students, especially EFL students, to see that one, the language of magic, just like any language, takes time to develop; two, that to develop magic, like anything, into mastery, one must make mistakes but more importantly must persevere; and three, that language and literature in particular can open gateways to ownership, decolonizing and decentering disciplines. This is an especially key takeaway in this increasingly globalized yet also increasingly isolationist world: English isn't just spoken one way, even in England or the United States (*especially* not in England or the United States). Modern fantasy literature models playful, game-based learning strategies, while emphasizing ways that active learning and play add color and wonder and magic to a reality that often feels broken, as ludologist Jane McGonigal puts it in *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (2011). Fantasy literature reminds us to keep trying. It reminds us that learning can be fun. It reminds us to play, to construct ourselves, our environments, our own ways of being and doing and interacting within this world and any others we come across (in literature and beyond). Life literacy level up.

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# Teaching Basic Counseling Psychology Concepts: A Lesson Module on Bullying through the Theatre of the Oppressed

Aya Kasai

## Abstract

This case study describes the development of a lesson module on bullying using exercises from the Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of theatre designed to help communities confront adverse social realities and explore solutions to their problems. There is an increasing pressure on school teachers in Japan to address the issue of bullying. To educate future teachers to detect and prevent bullying, it is necessary to understand the mechanisms that sustain it. This lesson module was used with one section of a counseling psychology class offered as part of a collegiate teacher-training course. Students' responses indicate the Theatre of the Oppressed can stimulate an exploration of and insight into some of the mechanisms of bullying.

## Introduction

In 2011, a student from Otsu, Japan committed suicide because of the bullying he suffered in school. The case received national media attention and public criticism surged following reports of the school's inadequate attempts to address the issue. In response, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereafter MEXT) instructed schools nationwide to report even "minor" cases of bullying. This mandate resulted in a sudden and massive increase in the number of reported cases ("Laws Alone Won't Stop Bullying" 2017), which jumped from 70,231 in 2011 to 198,109 in 2012 (MEXT, 2015, p. 4). In 2013, the government passed a law addressing the issue of bullying in school. In addition to the law, recent MEXT policy (MEXT, 2017) aimed at the prevention of bullying suggests each school have its own comprehensive measures to intervene in and put a stop to bullying. This is far easier said than done. Given that current and prospective teachers are now expected to deal with bullying in school, and considering the limited effectiveness of current training programs, this study aimed to address the issue by asking a novel question: How can we help prepare future teachers to deal with bullying?

## Theatre of the Oppressed

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Brazilian artist and activist Augusto Boal worked with Sao Paulo's influential Arena Theatre to bring ideas from Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed to the stage (Gonzalez, 2005). Boal toured with the Arena Theatre group, specifically booking performances in communities where people were silenced by poverty and oppression. He developed the Theatre of the Oppressed (hereafter TO) as an act of dialogue and social change by inviting audiences to co-create performances that embody problems and issues in their own communities. Boal broke the barrier between "actor" and "audience" by retheorizing the role of the audience member as that of the *spectator*, one that thrusts mere spectators into the active, participatory

dramatization of their own social realities on the stage (1985). He believed that *spectators* would feel more prepared to create their own, more desirable futures by first dramatizing and working through the problems they face in a theatrical setting (Boal, 2002).

For Boal, TO serves as a modality to explore, show, analyze, and transform the social conditions audience-participants face in daily life. TO performances often comprise three movements: they begin with warm-up games and exercises; these are followed by Image Theatre in which still images are used to explore abstract concepts such as emotions and relationships; finally, in Forum Theatre, the problem situation is brought to life and the spectators participate in the drama in order to understand and analyze their situation as well as to explore solutions.

### **Applications for Helping Occupations and Educators**

Educators and professionals in other helping fields have found a variety of uses for the Theatre of the Oppressed. TO was successfully employed in a medical school program to facilitate learning in the domains of philosophy and ethics. It helped address the development of students' personal characteristics, aiding in the exploration of traits required for medical professions including personal integrity, a sense of responsibility, dependability, and the ability to relate to and show concern for other individuals (Gupta, Agrawal, Singh & Singh, 2013). In the context of mental health, the research also suggests the cumulative effects of TO including individual growth as well as improvements in caring, empathy, and communication. In the field of education, Midah (2013) found TO while searching for "*a method that did not require literacy as a prerequisite and that went beyond the mere conversation about social justice*" (p. 6) and created a step by step guide that can be used by educators to introduce TO in classrooms and in other community settings to address oppression and social justice issues. Dennis (2009) used TO as a research tool for a long-term critical ethnography study that worked with high school teachers dealing with the bullying of newcomer students in their communities. At first the teachers did not see themselves as part of the problem, but exploration using TO methods led to new insights related to context and student experiences, findings that suggested—as does the current study—that teachers can unknowingly contribute to bullying in schools.

### **Drama as a Modality in Counseling Classes at Miyazaki International College (MIC)**

The above examples are pertinent to the educational goals and challenges at Miyazaki International College's School of International Liberal Arts. Many of the students in our counseling classes are studying to become English teachers in Japanese junior high schools and high schools. Although English is a second language for a majority of the students, most of our courses, including the counseling class at the center of this study, are taught in English. As students' language abilities are developing at various levels, I have found it useful to incorporate creative arts modalities such as drama and movement for which language is not always a prerequisite. Students can get involved first and let reflective words and sentences emerge from their experience. They often search for the words to describe what they are sensing and feeling, and if they do not have the

requisite vocabulary, they look it up in the dictionary or ask questions. This broadens the possibilities for insights and learning. Our students are also beginning to think in English, though they sometimes feel that their thoughts are in turn limited by their vocabulary. However—and I find this to be true of my own experience as an English learner—when students incorporate physical experiences, they are better able to think with their bodies, senses, and emotions. Indeed, embodied learning may help make critical thinking, analyzing, and conceptualizing in a second language more natural and enjoyable.

### **Development of the Lesson Module**

This section describes the development of the lesson module including: 1. Problem identification; 2. Warm-up; 3. Leader and follower exercise; 4. Closing the lesson. It was written based on the author's class notes. Consent was obtained from students to use our lesson as a case for this study.

#### *Problem identification*

Boal believed theater was most liberating when, instead of imposing a theme, he let the participants choose one for themselves. I followed this protocol by asking students to find a current school counseling-related issue that concerned them on the internet, in books, newspapers, magazines, or journals. In a class of ten students, more than half brought in news articles related to bullying—thus, our theme was decided. This is not to dismiss other themes, even those suggested by just one student, that included teacher overwork, school withdrawal, and child abuse. The class agreed to address these themes at other times.

After I learned that bullying was a major concern for this group of future educators, I shared some of the information about bullying noted in the background of this paper. I asked them what they were most concerned about regarding bullying. As I got to know the students, I discovered that many of them experienced bullying at some point in their school life—whether as a victim, perpetrator, spectator, or bystander—and that many of them do not feel confident in their ability to stop bullying when they become teachers.

We decided to focus on an article that one of the students brought to class: a case of bullying which led to suicide. In 1985, a 10th-grade student committed suicide in a shopping center toilet (Toyoda, 2009). He wrote on his suicide note that he was killing himself because of bullying at school. I asked the students what thoughts, feelings, and questions came up when they read about this case. Students wondered: Why do people bully? Why does bullying escalate to such a point? Why couldn't it be stopped? We began our exploration of the theme and the case with these questions in mind.

#### *Warm-up*

The group of students had developed collaborative working relationships with each other before joining the class. Within our small liberal arts college of about 300 students, these 10 students had often taken classes together that are required for teacher certification. The group was also playful and creative by nature. Originally, because the class started at 9:00 on Monday morning, I began by doing some short expressive arts

warm-ups to invigorate the group. The students seemed to enjoy the simple warm up games so much that I decided TO and other dramatic methods could be a good match. I continued to introduce different kinds of TO and expressive arts-inspired warm-ups. Later, students took turns facilitating the warm-up exercises. Within a few sessions, they became quite used to the exercises described below, which laid the foundation for more challenging exercises.

**Name and movement:** The group stands in a large circle. One person at a time says their name while adding a movement. Others then mirror the movement. The facilitator emphasizes that there is no right or wrong way to do it. Anything is okay. Even stillness or subtle movement is accepted, appreciated, and mirrored back.

**Sound and movement:** The group stands in a large circle. One person at a time uses sound and movement to express how they feel in the moment. Everyone mirrors their sound and action. Again, there is no right or wrong. Sometimes, a person who is unsure will say, "Oh, no! What should I do!?" Even this type of hesitation is accepted and mirrored back by the group. Japanese speakers often make a prolonged "eh" sound to indicate uncertainty, which, in turn, the group would mirror back. This allows even shy, resistant, and inhibited people to participate and feel that their presence is appreciated. When the group gets used to the exercise, they become more playful and creative in communicating how they are feeling in the moment.

**Human sculpture:** Participants are divided into small groups of threes and fours. One person in each group is a sculptor and others in the group act as human clay. The facilitator asks the sculptors to create one sculpture that includes 2 or 3 different feelings, thoughts, or questions about a theme (i.e., about becoming a teacher). Each sculptor molds their groupmates into a living sculpture by showing them which positions to hold or verbally directing them into place. They may also move their clay-people's limbs manually (with groupmate permission), or, when touch is to be avoided, by manipulating invisible strings attached to groupmates' joints. For the purpose of practicing English, verbal direction may be the best choice (though it often requires more time). Typically, I will structure the exercise based on how much time I want the students to spend on it. When the sculptures are completed, the sculptors are asked to step back and walk around to view other sculptures. Then, as a group, we go around the room looking at one sculpture at a time while each artist gives a talk about his/her image. We repeat the same process, making sure that everyone had a turn being a sculptor. The human sculpture exercise can be modified and adopted to explore thoughts, feelings, and questions for a wide variety of themes.

#### *Leader and follower exercise*

Boal (2002) categorized the TO exercises into five steps or categories: aiming to connect feeling and sensation; aiming to connect listening and hearing; aiming for multisensory experience; aiming to connect seeing and looking; awakening multisensory memory. The leader and follower exercise, originally named the "Columbian hypnosis" (Boal, 2002, p. 51), is introduced as one of a series of exercises in the first category called "Feeling What We Touch." Many activities in this category use tactile sensitivity to help participants break out of habitual patterns of muscle movement and restructure their muscular relations.

In the leader and follower exercise, one person acts as a leader and holds his/her palm forward toward a partner. The partner acts as a follower and keeps their face 30 to

40 cm away from the palm of their leader. Typically, the leader moves their palm and the follower follows. The exercise has taken on something of a life of its own, and different versions of the leader and follower exercise are being used by facilitators and educators around the world as a tool to explore themes such as dominance and power.

While sharing their research articles, the students mentioned that they were not sure if they could put a stop to bullying. As a result, I intended to run the leader and follower exercise by having students practice saying “stop” to an unhealthy situation. I assumed that these unhealthy situations would be obvious as leaders moved their partners through space. However, the exercise brought to life one interesting side of bullying where the participants did not recognize it as such.

After having a good laugh with a series of warm-ups, we formed a large standing circle and I asked for a volunteer to demonstrate the leader and follower exercise with me. I played the role of the leader and put my palm forward. I asked my partner, a student, to follow my palm with his face. I asked other students standing in the circle around us to say “stop” to end the activity when anyone felt that bullying was taking place.

I started moving my hand slowly at first and the follower followed. No one said anything. Then I started moving my hand faster and in a more erratic way that became very difficult for the follower to follow. Everyone giggled. Still no one said anything. I only stopped after the follower nearly ran out of breath.

I said to the group, “Hey, what happened? No one stopped me!” One student said, “Well, it didn’t seem like the follower was suffering.” Another student said, “He was smiling and giggling the whole time.” Students did not recognize what was going on as bullying; they were just waiting for the “real” bullying to happen. I then asked the follower, “What was going on for you?” He said, “It felt kind of funny at first but then it became really hard to follow. I was suffering inside. I was really waiting for someone to stop it!” Then some students seemed to have a moment of realization. One of the students said spontaneously, “Now I get it!”

Next, I asked the students to think about how the exercise highlighted aspects of bullying by talking in small groups. After discussing with their peers, the students described how they had unintentionally participated in the bullying as bystanders. At first, we wondered if this was a replication of the bystander’s effect (Darley and Latané, 1968), where a sense of responsibility to act gets diluted in the presence of others, compromising rescue times as a result. Perhaps to some extent, we allowed, but the most puzzling and disturbing finding for the group was the fact that it was hard for them to recognize that what was going on was indeed bullying even when they were looking very hard for it. What’s more, the students who were most eager to say “stop” also thought it was funny and did not notice the follower’s inner suffering. Clearly, this result could not be solely attributed to the bystander’s effect. Students understood their experience of our leader and follower exercise to reflect and embody one of the mechanisms of bullying. Some students were then able to connect this experience to the article and discuss it as a contributing factor in the junior high-school case where the “funeral-game” that pushed the bullied student over the edge had been conducted as a “fun-play” or a “joke”, or perceived as such by students and teachers, just as our leader and follower activity felt like a continuation of the fun warm-up games we had been playing before the exercise.

#### 4. Integration with theory: *Nori* as a foundation of bullying in school environments

Naito and Yoneyama (2009) explain that *nori*, “the unpredictable collective mood of the group at a particular point in time” (p. 323), serves as the foundation of bullying and frequently appears in the context of school environments. Naito (2017) further explains that in a junior high school setting where students and teachers are forced to “get along” in a closed environment, students may try to survive a type of “forced group” life by creating an on-going *nori* in the classroom. This *nori* can create a kind of high or “a feeling of omnipotence” (p. 93) and plays a primary role in group dynamics.

The authors point out that researchers often seek the cause of bullying by examining the personal attributes of bullies and their victims, including their family and social backgrounds, as well as factors such as negative relations with their parents, cold emotional climates at home, and exposure to violence and racial discrimination. In each case, bullying has been attributed to factors external to school life. However, a review of current literature and actual cases shows that school factors such as learning practices, teacher-student relationships, behavior and classroom management, and organization are all factors that contribute to bullying in Japanese schools (Naito, 2017; Yoneyama & Naito, 2009). Just as bullying can easily become institutionalized in a closed-group environment such as a prison, the military, or a religious commune, when specific conditions are met in schools, even non-problem students have a potential to become perpetrators (Naito, 2017).

In our class, we were trying to survive the first part of the mandatory early morning class through uplifting warm-up games. A problematic *nori* may have asserted its ability to set the group mood in the moment, sabotaging students’ ability to recognize the bullying that was taking place. Our leader and the follower exercise highlighted the pervasive social power of *nori*, and our reflection thereupon helped students gain insight into why bullying may not be recognized—let alone stopped—in the classroom.

After our discussion we continued to experiment with different versions of the same exercise. Students first practiced saying “stop!” They then took turns being the leader and the follower in the center of the circle and tried to see how the relationship between the roles could be changed. They discovered that the follower, at least in this carefully managed exercise, could end the bullying by saying “stop” or simply not responding to the leader.

Students would have discovered more strategies with further research and exploration such as the follower physically stopping the leader’s hand, the follower pulling in one of the spectators so they are not alone, the follower calling out “help,” the spectators coming in to create a small circle around the follower for protection, the spectators guiding the leader and the follower apart, and the spectators befriending both of them to deflect the situation. There are infinite creative ways to resist and stop this type of violation, and students can be encouraged to think about how actions they take in the exercise may translate into practical strategies for the prevention of bullying in their own classrooms in the future.

#### 5. Closing the lesson

To close the TO exercise and to integrate, I had students work in pairs with both of them holding a hand out and following each other. They were asked to move with each other by responding to words such as “conflict,” “negotiation,” “collaboration,” and then finally “caring.” The movement of each pair looked very much like improvisational dance.

If the time allows it, reflective writing will help with further integration of their learnings.

## Conclusion

In the law, bullying is defined as a psychological and physical act (even when perpetrated over the internet) by a child affecting another child where the affected child feels physical and psychological distress (MEXT, 2017, p. 4). However, MEXT also warns that a child may deny being affected or feeling distressed, stressing the importance of observing potential victims’ affect and overall behaviors. The basic policy for bullying prevention demands that teachers take responsibility for early detection and intervention. “Teachers must be aware of the fact that much bullying happens in forms that may be difficult for adults to notice or recognize as bullying, for example, as disguised in play or as a joke” (MEXT, 2017, p. 29) [Translation by author]. Exploration with TO exercises in our lesson stimulated our embodied insights into and awareness of the underlying mechanisms of bullying. With an embodied awareness and a repertoire of creative solutions, I hope these students will be able to successfully head off bullying in their schools and help educate their colleagues to do the same.

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