

ELTT course 10: *Writing Up Qualitative Research*

Independent Study notes (for students using the IS version of ELTT 10)

Unit 1 – Structure and Introduction

Task 1.1 Mason does not mention quantitative research explicitly.

She makes positive comments on what qualitative studies allow researchers to do; by implication she is saying that quantitative research cannot do those things. Her basic point is captured in the list of aspects - richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity – that qualitative research aims for; in contrast, (she says) quantitative research finds them an embarrassment and an inconvenience.

(The final part of Task 1.1 is an open question).

Task 1.2 It is an unfolding story because, Holliday's words, it is "an interactive process in which [the writer] tries to untangle and make reflexive sense of her own presence and role in the research".

(Parts 2-4 of Task 1.2 = open questions)

Task 1.3 There is evidence that the three non-science fields use both "we" and "I", while the three science fields do not use "I".

Reasons? - Apart from any beliefs/attitudes that science is more 'neutral' and 'impersonal', there is the practical fact that the table shows data from journal articles (not PhD theses). It could be that it is more common for research papers submitted to journals in Marketing, Philosophy and Sociology by **single** authors, and for most/all papers sent to science journals to be written by **two or more researchers**.

Task 1.4 I would say: in the Acknowledgments (for all types of PhD thesis), and in the case of a qualitative thesis I would expect to find "I" in most chapters – perhaps not in the Literature Review.

Task 1.5 What is very odd is the writer's use of the Passive. One would expect the most personal expression in a thesis to be in the Acknowledgements; here there's no mention of "**I / me / my**" and an avoidance of Active verbs.

Tasks 1.6-1.8 are open questions.

Task 1.9 Firstly, there is a difference in numbers: Holliday's seven boxes and Silverman's five elements. Secondly, they use different terms for what seem to be the same things: e.g. Holliday's *Description of Research Procedures* and Silverman's *Methodology*; and H's *Conclusion* versus S's *Final Chapter*. (In Unit 5 we will see why Silverman chose to avoid the word *conclusion*).

I think the student's Chapter 1 = Silverman's A; her Chapters 2+3 = his B; her Chapter 4 = C; her Chapters 5-7 = D; and her Chapter 7 = E. Do you agree?

1.10 This is quite difficult to tell from the Contents Pages, but in fact the first and third set of contents are from qualitative theses. The middle one was a 'mixed-method' study; the "two analyses" in Chapter 9 were quantitative and qualitative.

1.11 The data chapters were Chapters 4-7. As you will see, the student did not call her final chapter "Conclusions".

1.12 I think the 12 listed items represent ten different elements:

- Statement of a gap / lack of research
- Reason for student's interest
- Method of research
- Research questions

- Terminology
- Context for the study
- Signposting/orientating the reader
- Specific focus of study
- Research aim
- Value/benefit of the study

1.13 The 'justification' appears in the sentence beginning "As far as I am aware..."

Unit 2 – The Literature Review

Task 2.1 is an open question. The important point here is to get supervisors' guidance.

- 2.2 Another problem is that in some fields research develops rapidly, so 'early' sources may become out of date.
- 2.3 Open questions, again, but the key is for students to be self-critical about their literature review and make sure there is a clear development of argument and themes.
- 2.4 The main difference lies in the scope of the two students' literature reviews. The first student presented her review in a single chapter (with headings for separate sub-sections, which do not appear in the Contents here). The second spread her review over six chapters (2-7), each on a theme relevant to her research. It is also the case that the first is from a qualitative thesis, while the second student carried out 'mixed-methods' research; that might have been one factor in the first student's decision to make her literature review relatively short.
- 2.5 Question 1 – I think she used a roughly similar number of the two types of citation. I reckon there are five author prominent citations, and four research prominent).

Question 2 – according to my reading, there are six direct quotations and ten summaries. Generally, the advice to students in Britain is to use summary rather than direct quotation, since a good summary is considered to show a better grasp of a topic than (merely) using the original authors' words.

(In case it's helpful, at the end of these notes on Unit 2, you will find my annotated copy of the whole extract, with colour coding to show the two types of citation and the student's use of summary and direct quotation. The specific details matter less than the overall 'picture' – namely, that this student chose to use the various citing devices at the academic writer's disposal, and avoided making her text over-repetitive).

- 2.6 I found four in the extract: '**According to** Oxford...'; '**Following** Oxford...'; '**In Donato's view**...'; and '**For** Vygotsky...'. The advantage of these citing phrases is that they offer a very economical way of showing an author's ideas and arguments, without having to keep repeating **Author + reporting verb**.
- 2.7 Yes, I think the student's use of tenses does match the Feaks & Swales advice. In this particular case, though, one factor in tense choice is that the Soviet psychologist Vygotsky did his research in the early 20th century and died in the 1930s; for that reason there is a tendency to use Past Simple when citing him. On the other hand, his sociocultural theory and various concepts like the ZPD are still current in various academic fields; I just tried googling for Present Simple "Vygotsky argues" and found some 8,000 hits; "Vygotsky argued" (Past Simple) brought me 11,000 hits – a smaller difference than one might expect, for someone who died 80 years ago!
- 2.8 These are open questions.
- 2.9 In the same group as '**argue**' I would put the following: *allege* (though this would be found mainly in law texts); *assert*, *assume*, *deny*, *object*, *portray*, *depict*, *regard* and *view*. In other words, I think a sentence using any of those reporting verbs could be followed by a sentence where the student cites evidence or arguments against the view expressed by the author(s) just cited.

In the '**demonstrate**' group I would put: *prove*, *reveal* and *identify*. I would not expect the student to follow the use of any of those reporting verbs with reasons for not accepting the point just cited.

My annotated version of the Collaborative Learning extract:

Pink = research prominent citation, with several sources listed at end
Light blue = author prominent citation, with name near/at the beginning

Yellow = where the student summarises source material
Green = where she uses direct quotation

Grey = citing phrases (instead of reporting verbs)

Collaborative learning: The socio-cultural perspective

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, metacognitive and cognitive strategies can promote foreign language reading performance, and text simplification is likely to produce more accessible texts for foreign language readers. In this chapter, **I will extend my review of** the theoretical framework underlying the design of my learning and teaching tasks, which are intended to encourage learners' foreign language development.

Introduction

Research on collaborative interaction in language learning classrooms **has drawn on** Vygotsky's (1978) notions of the *zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding*, and *private speech*, which **are claimed to** play an important role in facilitating foreign language learners' language learning processes (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; 2000; Ewald, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Ohta, 1995; 2001; Oxford, 1997). **According to** Oxford (1997), collaborative learning, which has a strong connection with socio-cultural theory, centres on the notion that an individual's knowledge comes from communication with others.

The term *collaborative learning* used in this study conveys a distinct meaning from the term *cooperative learning*. That is, **following Oxford (1997)**, cooperative learning tends to be more structured and is intended to enhance learners' cognitive, communicative as well as social skills in the target language, whereas collaborative learning appears to be less structured and attempts to engage learners through social interactions into knowledge communities. **Oxford (1997) defines** collaborative learning, which is relevant to the context of the study—in which students of mixed ability discuss the meaning of foreign language texts in small group activity— as:

“Collaborative learning is a reacculturative process that helps students become members of the knowledge communities whose common property is different from the common property of knowledge communities they already belong to” (p.444).

Donato (2004) **emphasises** that collaborative work involves “a meaningful core activity and the social relations that develop as a result of jointly constructed goals for the common endeavour” (p.286). **Collaboration, in Donato's view**, also refers to the acceptance of members' contributions to the activity and the establishment of intersubjectivity within groups. **This notion is intended to distinguish collaboration from** the commonly-used term *interaction*, or what he calls “loosely knit configurations of individuals” (Donato, 2004, p.298).

In the next three sections, I will discuss three interrelated areas grounded on Vygotsky's theory—‘the zone of proximal development’, ‘scaffolding’, and ‘private speech’—followed by studies on collaborative interactions in foreign language learning contexts.

Zone of proximal development

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the metaphor **Vygotsky (1978) proposed** as a way to explain the process of an individual's internalisation of knowledge and skills through social forms of mediation. More specifically, **the ZPD refers to the distance between** one's actual development achieved by oneself and one's potential future development through the assistance of the expert or

more skillful peers (Cole, 1985; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Leontiev, 1987; Rogoff, 1995; van Lier, 1996). **Vygotsky (1978) characterised** the notion of the ZPD as follows:

“An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement” (p.90).

Again, Vygotsky referred to the actual development level, already established in the child’s mental functions, **and the level of potential development**, which **is built up** by guided support from more capable individuals through problem solving activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.266). **The assistance from others eventually becomes one’s self-regulation**; in other words, through the support from others, an individual or learner **can** over an extended period **move** from other-regulation to self-regulation (Ohta, 2001). **This process** of gradually moving from depending on others’ guidance to becoming more independent in manipulating one’s own language use and mental activity **is called ‘internalisation’** (Donato, 1994; Wertsch, 1985). **Vygotsky’s notion** of how knowledge is internalised **is regarded as ‘outside-in’**, because once interaction or relationships with others are established, knowledge **can** then **be** internalised, constituting the process of cognitive development.

For Vygotsky, these processes of internalisation **entail two crucial stages** of developmental learning: **(1)** the stage related to the social level **and (2)** the one related to the individual level. **The social level primarily involves** interactions between individuals, **whereas the latter concerns** the inner part of the individual. Vygotsky (1978, p.57) proposed that:

“Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals”.

Wertsch and Stone (1985) emphasised the importance of Vygotskian developmental theory in the educational context **and argued that all developmental processes occurred from** social processes and then internal functioning. **They summarised their views** on the internalisation processes as follows:

“We will argue, however, that the Vygotskian formulation involves two unique premises. First, for Vygotsky, internalisation is primarily concerned with social processes. Second, Vygotsky’s account is based largely on an analysis of the semiotic mechanism, especially language, that mediates social and individual functioning. Thus, internalisation is viewed as part of a larger picture concerned with how consciousness emerges out of human social life. The overall developmental scheme begins with external social activity and ends with internal individual activity” (Wertsch and Stone, 1985, p. 164).

We therefore need to take into consideration both the external (social) and the internal (individual) when it comes to the basic idea of internalisation, or individual development through social interaction (Donato, 1994; Oxford, 1997; Wertsch & Stone, 1985).

The concept of the ZPD and internalisation **has played a key role in** both psychology and pedagogies, including foreign language instruction. In order to integrate the notion of the ZPD into foreign language pedagogy, **van Lier (1996) argues** that the teacher **needs to be advised to ensure that all kinds of teaching take place in the ZPD** through pedagogical scaffolding. **Likewise, Ellis (2003, p.180) views the ZPD as the crucial construct in language learning**, because it **provides an insight into why** learners do not succeed in acquiring and using some foreign language structures, despite external forms of mediation; **why** they are able to use some structures with the support from others, but not independently; **and how** learners’ internalisation process occurs.

In the next sections I turn first to the specific role of *scaffolding* within Vygotsky’s socio-cultural view of foreign language instruction and then to the notion of *private speech*.

Unit 3 – Methodology

Task 3.1 *Contested underpinnings* are underlying assumptions are controversial or disputed.

Contingent data: data that 'happened to be' available at the time it was collected; for example, if a classroom researcher happened to record a lesson in which a pupil cried, that data could well be interesting but might not be typical, even of the context in which it occurred.

Non-random suggests some bias or unconscious influence on the selection of cases; a researcher who asked his closest colleagues to participate in a survey might end up with responses similar to those he would have given himself, if the reason for his friendship with those people was a similarity of outlook on the topic under study.

3.2 Murcott's first three points seem to me to be covered, but Holliday's list does not explicitly include the second part of Murcott's final point - "Why those and not others?"

3.3 Holliday does not specifically mention **ethics**; both the students do (in sections 4.4.3 and 3.1.6). The writer of Chapter 4 also discusses the **problems she anticipated** she might encounter in collecting her data. Both writers mention the **participants** in the context of their research: teachers, receptionists, etc.

3.4-3.5 (open questions)

3.6 There are several cases that may, at first, look like a Passive which are not Passives, in fact, but the Verb TO BE+ Adjective; those are shaded grey in the text below. The four real Passives are underlined.

3.4.2 Access

The problem of access was twofold. First there was the question of physical access to practices, which have tight security and are designed to keep out intruders. For example, arriving at the first practice I attended early on a mid-December morning, I found myself in a cold, wet car park before daylight, unable to get in to the practice to set up my equipment before the front doors opened to patients because the back door was also locked and had no bell. This also happened at the second practice, though in better weather conditions. By the time I approached the third practice, experience had taught me that it would be better to begin recording just after the front door was opened.

The second problem of access related to when it was appropriate either to ask questions of receptionists which would clarify work practices or simply to engage in rapport-building chit-chat while present at the front desk. At the first practice I began by asking questions during periods when the receptionists were not occupied with patients, either directly or on the telephone. However, I quickly realised that the receptionists had to use these quiet periods to complete paperwork and other tasks resulting from encounters with patients and, thereafter, remained silent unless spoken to, listing questions to ask when receptionist were off duty. This was made easier by the fact that both practice and reception managers at the first two practices had allocated large amounts of their time to giving me detailed explanations of how reception desks were run and also invited me to seek further information from them whenever I wished. This extensive coverage also proved useful later at the third practice, where only a short explanation of practice procedures was given in advance by the practice manager, although one of the receptionists at the practice also provided a running commentary on work practices.

(Appendix Task) The answer to the first question is that it is possible to replace all the student's Passives with Actives, as shown in the version below.

But on the second point - whether it is necessary or more appropriate to use the Active in every case – that is a matter for individual judgment.

4.3.3 Procedure

My research adopted a case study approach. I divided the 12 voluntary participants into three groups (Group 1, 2, 3). I paired four of them with a partner they were not familiar with before the study.

At the beginning of week 4, I required all the participants do the first task with their assigned partner through instant exchanging in an online text-based CMC environment. Then, they saved their MSN 'written' exchanges by copying and pasting them to a word processing program and sent me the file at the end of the week 4. I corrected and marked their written exchanges and sent them back individually by email. I also provided the learners with explicit feedback with explanations of the errors they made in written records in a later face-to-face session.

After receiving feedback, students in Group 1 and 2 carried out the first task orally with their partner in voice-based CMC environments (Group 1 with the use of microphones and webcams; Group 2 with the use of microphones only); students in Group 3 carried out the same oral activities in a face-to-face environment in week 6.

All the participants had to record their spoken performances. Participants in the two synchronous groups recorded their online spoken practice using Audacity software, which was free for downloading and which I provided on the class website. I required them to familiarize themselves before the study with the software by following the user instructions given on the website. I asked participants in Group 3 to record their face-to-face spoken practice by using an MP3 player. All the participants needed to submit their sound files to me by email. And then I invited them to repeat their spoken activities publicly in the subsequent face-to-face sessions.

After listening to the files of each pair, I gave each pair their marks and feedback by email, pointing out each learner's pronunciation and grammar errors. I also asked the learners to practise those common pronunciation errors that appeared in their sound files in the following face-to-face sessions after pointing out the errors most of them made and providing them with correct sounds for those errors.

All the participants had to receive instruction in regular face-to-face sessions and then practised given tasks at an appointed time after the classes. Dörnyei (2001a) claims that "making the teaching materials relevant for the learners" (p.29) is one strategy classroom teachers can use to generate students' initial motivation. He suggested that teachers can discover the topics students want to learn and build them into the curriculum as far as possible (Dörnyei, 2001b). Following his suggestion, I provided a number of topics to the participants and had them select their favourite topics at the first session of the course. Then I created course materials which I based on the learners' topic selection.

I also chose some French learning websites to be the teaching content of the course and presented to learners in the classroom. I intended the use of these authentic materials to make French 'real' to the participants and therefore enhance their language-related values and attitudes (Dörnyei, 2001b).

The semester constituted cycles of three-week practice on three tasks. I posted the task practice procedures and task content on the class website in order that learners could follow the design of the study and complete the tasks appropriately. Additionally, I invited them to post questions or share information on the classroom bulletin board, where I provided course-related information for those students who were absent from the classes or who learned slowly during the classes to catch up with the course outside the classroom.

Unit 4 – Your Data Chapters

Task 4.1 (open question)

- 4.2 The student's Introduction is basically an overview of the chapter.
- 4.3 I think it is an Analytical Story
- 4.4 She refers to previous research through section 6.1, where she discusses alternative views of classroom process
- 4.5 Below are my annotated versions of the two pairs of paragraphs. In the paragraphs on page 46 she uses the verbs **seem** and **appear**:

At this point the students are seated in three groups. As seen on the video recording, at the beginning, the teacher **does not seem to have** the attention of the whole class. He begins to call their attention with intermittent questions, exchanges with individuals and small groups, while **looking around at the class**. His first address to the whole class is made when only one or two students **seem to be paying attention**, by looking at him and not talking to other students. The teacher elicits a response from one or two students. He pauses, addresses them all again looking round. He positions himself in front of the board at this stage, but also moves between there and the nearby groups. He then pauses again, looks at his papers. He then addresses the class again with a question, and looks at one student's file. He pauses again, then asks them another question and gets an answer from one student. He echoes the student who answers him and identifies two students. Throughout this phase, the volume of student talk gradually decreases, and more students look up and **appear to pay attention**. The first plenary address "OK" **seems to signal** that he wants all their attention. At this point he raises his voice, stands in front of the board and points at the handout. The group falls silent.

This pre-plenary phase is characterised by an "open" expression on the part of the teacher, fairly quiet addresses using rising intonation, and gaps within and between the addresses to the class. At this stage **he seems to be** not quite "on stage" or "off stage" - he addresses the class, looks back at his notes, arranges his papers, then looks up and addresses them again. He uses what might be termed "brick wall questioning" - asking questions to a group, many of whom he knows are not listening. **It seems that** the purpose of these questions is not to elicit an answer, but more to function as a signal, to gain the attention of the class. As questions requiring an answer from the whole class, they are unsuccessful, but **they seem to fulfil** their function as signals that tell the class to stop talking and listen. During this pre-plenary phase the students talk together, take out papers and organise objects on their desks. At the point where the teacher says "OK" (line 32, shown by an arrow on the transcript above), the students fall silent. The volume of his voice increases at this point, and he positions himself in front of the board.

On pages 52-53 we find a wider variety of hedging expressions. As well as using **seem** and **appear**, the writer used **modal verbs** (*may* and *might*) and the verb **suggest** (rather than a stronger one like *indicate*). The word **reminiscent** is a sort of a hedge, too, because it means "reminding us of something *similar* but not identical" and it is made weaker by having the word **rather** place in front of it.

In this sequence the teacher begins by asking for comments on the style of the paragraphs in the letters. The students initially respond with comments about other aspects of the letters, such as the references and the fact that they are from companies. Although he comes back to these points later in the sequence, he twice brings them back to the theme of paragraph style. **This suggests that**, although the analysis task was open, his checking "agenda" is not - he has a particular point to make about that aspect of letter format, and wants to cover it first. He elicits the answer, the students give their ideas, the teacher gives them feedback, and then he provides a normative explanation (examples indicated by arrows). So what we have here is a sequence following **a pattern that might be termed IRFI** – Initiation, response, feedback and *instruction*. This cycle is repeated several times in this particular checking sequence, as the teacher goes through different points. In each case he begins by asking questions and eliciting ideas, then evaluates them, then adds some normative statements. At the point where he gives a normative statement, he sometimes knocks the whiteboard, and **may use repetition**:

[Data Extract 6.5: Lesson 2 Letter-Writing 1]

So it seems the teacher is using the open-response checking sequence as a framework within which to provide instruction. He uses a form **rather reminiscent of Socratic dialogue** to guide the students towards the learning points, asking them series of questions as he leads up to his instructional discourse. Both his closed-response and open-response checking sequences **appear to operate as** frameworks with particular points that are permeable to additional instruction on language, student questions, normative instruction and so on. The point of permeability to instruction in all cases is at the end of the IRF cycle. However, as

the tasks become more open in these examples from the data, the type of embedded instruction changes, to reflect the focus of the activity, in the examples given above.

Unit 5 – The Final Chapter

- Task 5.1** Literally, 'freewheeling' is when the cyclist stops pedalling, usually when going downhill, to save energy. Metaphorically, it means making little or no further effort to do whatever it is you are doing – in this case, "down to the finish" of your PhD.
- 5.2** Doing something, such as PhD research, over several years means that one is a different person at the end of the process than at the beginning. In this sense, one's later self can be a successor to one's earlier self.
- 5.3** My answer to this question takes the form of the potential elements of a qualitative thesis, which is appears at the top of page 58.
- 5.4** (open question)
- 5.5** Some suggestions for alternative expressions are in my version below. In some cases, I would simply remove the hedging verb **seem** and leave the other verb unhedged, to make a *stronger claim* for the findings.

8.2 Relationship to previous research

In terms of the first research question, which looked at the issue of "layers" of classroom discourse, the findings of this study **build in particular on** the work of some of the researchers reviewed in Chapter 3. Many of these studies characterise classroom discourse in terms of functions, and the concept of the classroom-rooted and non-classroom variety of discourse is present in more than one analysis, as discussed in Chapter 5. The findings of Chapter 6, in the investigation of the second research question, looked at the features of the stages on the lesson, in particular the plenary checking stage and IRF discourse. The notion of the spontaneous contributions within IRF cycles **echo** Erickson's (1982) notion of spontaneity and ritual in classroom discourse. White & Lighbown's (1984) finding that questions are frequent in classroom discourse **seems to be borne out by** the prevalence of checking sequences in the data, with their dependence on questions. Likewise, the existence of question types **appears to be confirmed in** the data, which exhibits both *display* and *referential* questions. White & Lightbown's (1984) finding that teachers tend to repeat and rephrase questions **rings true in** the analysis of instructions in this study. The analysis of the data in relation to the third research question, and the issue of subgroup activity during plenary and groupwork, **is on very much the same lines as** Hancock (1998), with his notion of *off-record* discourse. Slimani's findings as regards the diversity of perceptions of salience **are borne out in** this study, which shows some students more focused on vocabulary, for example, while others are more focused on interaction.

One of the main concepts from earlier work which has been applied to this study is that of the discourse world (Edmondson 1984). This concept has proved to be a useful one in the description of the layers of classroom discourse identified in the data. More generally, the findings of Chapter 7 **tend to back up** the various assertions in the literature that participants **make** an active contribution to the ongoing process. Their engagement in individual and subgroup activities makes a contribution to the overall process, as does task adaptation and spontaneous contributions. Reluctance to interact may require the teacher to give a further instruction, again influencing the overall process of classroom communication.

- 5.6 This is an open question. Different students will find different expressions useful for their particular study.

One useful feature I would point out is the student's use of 'modal+HAVE+past participle' expressions in her final paragraph, as a way of pointing, in retrospect, to potential improvements in her research: **could have been simplified and targeted more carefully, and might therefore have been better to...**

- 5.7 My advice to the student who wrote this section would be to adjust the balance in her claims as to how her study has contributed to the field. Some of her expressions seem too strong to me, while others could be made stronger. In the version below I have used yellow to show where I would strengthen a claim, and green where I would tone it down.

7.6 Contributions

In addition to the provision of some directions for future research, my study has made three **particular** contributions to the literature on computer assisted language learning and teaching, since research in these three areas is relatively new and the related literature is still limited.

Firstly, my participants were early-stage learners developing their oral skills in CMC. Among the four skills, speaking has been considered the most difficult to acquire for language learners, especially for those at beginner-level. My study should **contribute to our understanding** of the development process of beginners' oral skills in CMC environments.

Secondly, the target language of my study was French, research into the learning of which is limited in comparison to that involving English. Although some Canadian researchers have conducted studies in relation to French (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 2005; Lapkin & Swain, 2004; Lapkin, Swain & Smith, 2002), they have been in the Canadian immersion context where French is learnt as a second language, rather than a foreign language, as in this study. As a result, my findings should enhance our knowledge of the learning process of FFL learners, particularly those whose first language is non-alphabetic. [I think the student's claim "should enhance our knowledge" is fine]

Finally, my investigation of the concept of social presence increased the originality of my study. Although its application to CMC started in the late 1980s (Lowenthal 2009), the concept and its impact on learners' acquisition of language skills remain unfamiliar to many teachers who include synchronous CMC in their curriculum. Therefore, I hope that the findings of my study **will** attract other language teachers' attention to this concept.

- 5.8 The expressions of personal change and learning that I would highlight are shown in yellow in the version below.

7.4 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION

Undertaking this research study **has been an invaluable learning experience**. **I have gained some understanding of** the nature of research and of the cyclical, sometimes messy, nature of the research process. **I have learned**, for example, that things do not fit neatly into categories and that research can be frustrating and sometimes tedious, yet at other times immensely rewarding and even exhilarating.

This research study has **also provided some key ideas which have helped me** examine my own professional values, and **guidelines for possible changes to** my own future practice. As well as adopting the course provider recommendations above for DELTA courses, **I intend to explore further** the impact of other teacher education courses with which I may be involved, since **I now have a growing awareness of** how impact might be affected by process factors. **I have also begun to question** how my colleagues and I come across as course tutors, how much attention we pay to our participants' beliefs about teaching, how much we value what they bring to the classroom and the role that affective factors might play in relation to participants' experiences of our teacher education courses. The research process **has also encouraged me to** view my own TEFL context within the wider educational field and **has provided a wealth of resources from which we can learn** in order to improve the quality of TEFL teacher education and development.

Unit 6 – The First Few Pages

- 6.1 Individual opinions and experiences will vary on this issue. The item in the list that should **not** be there is the Index. PhD students do not (yet) have to produce an index for their thesis, though I suppose in future that might be required/expected as it can be done automatically. Without an index, readers of a thesis may well use the Contents Pages to get an overview of how the thesis will develop.

When I read a thesis as an **examiner**, the first parts I actually see are the Title and the Abstract, because those are sent out (based on the *Intention to Submit* form) when one receives the invitation to act as examiner. Later, when I receive the thesis itself, I tend to read the Contents Pages first, and then skim the References (to see how much of the literature review is likely to be new to me). I usually skim the Conclusion next and after that probably begin to read chapter by chapter.

I don't know whether my reading behaviour is typical. Ask your supervisors what they do!

- 6.2 Before you submit it, the first readers you need to impress are obviously your supervisors. Once it has been submitted, the next readers will be the external and internal examiners. I suppose the impression I wanted to create when I presented my thesis was one of competence.
- 6.3 The first title is the final one for the submitted thesis. The second title was the student's original 'working title'; her supervisors felt the student should make clear that her thesis was a study of learners of French as a foreign language (because relatively few theses are) and that she should avoid the abbreviation CMC, in case future potential readers might be unfamiliar with the abbreviation.
- 6.4 As you may already know, it is quite common for thesis titles to be in two 'halves', separated by a colon. It is quite a useful of dividing up what might otherwise be quite dense information. But this is a convention and not a rule.

Something else to think about is whether you should use abbreviations which you can expect potential readers of your thesis to know. As you see, one student used **EAP** (for English for Academic Purposes) while another spelt out English for Specific Purposes (rather than **ESP**). Do you know what **L2** means, in the fifth title?

- 6.5 The version below shows how the student divided his abstract into four paragraphs. The blue letter inserted at the end of a sentence indicates which element of the abstract 'model' I think the sentence represents.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the potential benefits for language development of the inclusion of *Focus on Form* (FoF) tasks in a university EFL oral academic presentation course in Japan. [P] Previous work on FoF activities suggests that they can help learners to notice divergences between their spoken output and the target language, and to reconsider their hypotheses about the target language, and that this process might lead to subsequent improvements in their output. [B] While the majority of previous research involves FoF that is controlled by the teacher, this study examines how the students noticed and reflected on language without the teacher's direct assistance. [P] In addition, sociocultural theory looks at ways in which cognitive development arises from social interaction. [B] This study adopted this approach in identifying ways in which the students made language gains. [P?]

The students were asked to note down any new language they had noticed and, working from transcripts of their recorded presentations, to collaborate in groups in scrutinising their own oral output and correcting any mistakes they found in it. [M] Recordings of their discussions were also included in the noticing data. [M] Meanwhile, recordings of the students' oral output, as represented by a series of class presentations, were made in order to see whether there was any development in the use of the forms that the students attended to during the noticing tasks. [M]

An analysis of the data revealed that the students noticed more language forms as they became more practised in the noticing tasks. [R] In general, they focused their attention on a wide variety of forms, although there was a degree of variation at the individual level, and there was evidence that group tasks resulted to more noticing than tasks completed alone. [R] Tracking the students' spoken English over seven months revealed improvements in the vocabulary and grammar forms the students had focused on. [R] As regards sociocultural theory, the thesis also shows how elements of 'dialogic interaction' in the students' collaboration helped enhance their knowledge and use of English. [R] These include contributions from a more capable peer (although expert roles switched even within a single discussion), collective scaffolding, and the achievement of intersubjectivity. [R]

The study suggests that students are able to notice language form and make language gains through form-focused elements in task-based instruction. [C] In particular, group work within such a framework might benefit language

learning, both in terms of the amount of noticing it promotes, and of the effects of collaboration, from which learners can gain new insights into the second language. [C]

6.6 Open question – what do you think? (I gave my answer in 6.1).

6.7 I think the first one makes better use of spacing and indentation to help readers grasp the development and relationship of parts.

6.8 Here are the three acknowledgments, with my comments:

A. *I owe a debt of gratitude to (NAME), my supervisor whose perspicacious advice and guidance has enabled me to carry out this arduous study. Her amazing zeal is only matched by her wondrous teaching skills and impressive learning.*

This is a culturally very interesting case. Because of (what we think is) the very 'flowery' expressions of praise, British readers of text A tend to think the student was being either **unduly flattering** about his supervisor, or alternatively that he was being **sarcastic** (wishing to imply that the supervisor did not give helpful advice, was a poor teacher and did not know a great deal about the subject).

Presumably the student was from a country where this sort of praise and admiration was expected and would not have seemed excessive. Of course, whether students should 'fit in with' local British expectations and assumptions is a matter for debate.

B. *I owe a great deal of my work to my wife, who is only a nurse and scarcely knows English nor teacher training, but did her best to collect materials and send them to me.*

What this student probably wanted to do was emphasise that his wife had helped him with the logistics of his research (collecting and sending 'data') but did not help him with the content of his study. But the overall effect is rather patronising.

C. *The work of writing this dissertation has been a cooperative venture and I am grateful to (NAME of friend), who helped me a great deal.*

And in this example we seem to have the 'opposite' of text B: this student rather implies that his friend has actually contributed rather more to the dissertation than is permitted!

6.9 The Acknowledgment begins relatively formally

I would like to thank the ten exemplary school library media specialists who helped with this research for their participation. I would like to thank the members of my committee for their extreme patience in the face of numerous obstacles.

The third sentence also begins formally, apart from the choice of the word *quagmire* to refer to the difficulties of being a PhD student:

*I would like to thank my fellow doctoral students—those who have moved on, those in the **quagmire**, and those just beginning—for their support, feedback, and friendship.*

Then a sentence with words I don't understand; I assume the people referred to would know what they mean:

*I would like to thank the **staffers at CLIS** and in the **HCIL** for the "**noms**" and the last minute favors.*

Finally, two sentences that mix thanks with playful insults:

*I would like to thank my friends, especially the "**Usual Suspects**", for accepting nothing less than completion from me. I would like to thank **my insanely large / largely insane family** for taking the blows and giving me a chance to thrive.*

6.10 An open question to complete this course. I hope you have found the materials helpful during the demanding stage of writing-up. If you have suggestions for ways of improving them, please send them to Dr Joy Northcott, the ELTT 10 course director: Joy.Northcott@ed.ac.uk

Good luck with writing-up and for your viva!

Prof. Tony Lynch
English Language Teaching Centre