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Using Web-based Video Technologies to Increase Taiwanese University Staff's Willingness to Use English as a Lingua Franca

ABSTRACT:

An implementation of *YouTube* <www.youtube.com> (last access 10.02.2016), a video sharing website, and *English Central* <www.englishcentral.com> (last access 10.02.2016), a personalized video website that tracks progress on every word learners watch, learn, or speak, is reported in which the administrative staff (*n* = 20) from a Taiwanese university enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes course increased their willingness to use English as a Lingua Franca to orally communicate with internationals (*t* = 2.302; *p* < .05). The staff adapted work related dialogues of encounters with international students and visitors that were filmed and uploaded to *YouTube* for review and commendation. The effectiveness of the course in conjunction with *English Central* and *YouTube* to improve the staff's willingness to use English as a Lingua Franca is discussed.

Introduction and problem statement

The Taiwan Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2002 initiated English language education policies to internationalize Taiwan's universities. The policies, such as English as a medium of instruction (EMI) courses, creating a global learning environment, and initiating international exchange programs, aim to internationalize Taiwanese universities to maximize international student recruitment (Chen, 2006; MOE, 2011a; Yeh, 2009). As Jenkins (2011) indicates, many of the world's universities are considered to be international having implemented a language policy on English as an academic Lingua Franca. An example relevant to mentioned policies is the new English language policy to internationalize Taiwanese universities via offering and/or increasing the offering of EMI courses (Chen, 2010: 89).

There was an approximate 60% increase in the enrolled international students (excluding students from China, HK, and Macau) between the 2006 and 2011 academic years (MOE, 2011b). This significant increase seems to prove the success in implementing the policy of internationalizing

Taiwanese universities. The literature and studies, however, have highlighted the difficulties arising from implementing this policy in various Taiwanese universities. These challenges include conducting EMI courses (Chang, 2010; Wu, 2006); language policy and planning concerning internationalizing Taiwanese language education (Chen, 2006; Hsieh, 2010), social, cultural adjustment of international students in Taiwan (Jenkins and Galloway, 2009), and university administrators', teachers', and students' perceptions of policy of internationalizing universities (Bruyas, 2008; Yeh, 2009). The cited challenges vary between policies, institutes, social groups, and Taiwanese people's perception but all point to use of English to internationalize Taiwanese universities.

Developing English-language curriculum and creating a global learning environment aims to assist international students to study and live in Taiwan. However, this may in turn pose various challenges for the university faculty/staff, teachers, and local and international students. As Taiwan is a non-English-speaking country, one of the challenges is Taiwanese people's English language proficiency to use English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) to communicate with international students. Chang (2010) and Wu (2006), for instance, have addressed the issue of Taiwanese students' and professors' English language proficiency when dealing with EMI courses. It has not yet been explored how Taiwanese university staff use ELF to assist international students to study in Taiwanese universities and whether Taiwanese staff have the language skills required in providing English service to international students.

The School of Management staff from a national university in northern Taiwan expressed uncertainty about conversing with foreign visitors and students during daily routine job duties such as answering inquires through e-mail and phone, solving problems, offering advice, and face-to-face interactions. Based on previous research showing prompt feedback, modelling and encouragement for fostering motivation (Yang, Gamble and Tang, 2012), a 4-month English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course addressing the individual ELF needs of the staff (n = 20) was developed incorporating: dialogues centring around negotiation with foreign interlocutors, short videos of staff as actors uploaded to *YouTube* <www.youtube.com> (last access 10.02.2016), and the use of *English Central* <www.englishcentral.com> (last access 10.02.2016), an interactive English video website with speech recognition, vocabulary, and pronunciation tools. The overarching research question guiding this study was:
How will a 4-month ESP course addressing the individual ELF needs of the staff increase their willingness to communicate in English?

1. Instruction

Before beginning course development, the instructor met with the Dean of the School of Management to better understand the concerns from an administrative level. The Dean expressed a need for the staff to be given English training that could assist them in fulfilling their job duties. The Dean supplied the instructor with a bilingual list of terms that he wished the staff to be familiar with in order to communicate with internationals. During the first two weeks of class the instructor asked the staff to describe encounters in which English language was required to fulfil their job duties. They were encouraged to use both English and their mother tongue, Mandarin Chinese, to express their concerns or difficulties faced. The instructor took notes about the staff concerns while this took place. At the same time, the English vocabulary that the majority of the staff only knew the Chinese equivalents was noted in order to be later cross-checked with the list provided by the Dean. After reviewing the notes, the instructor found that the staff reported their biggest concerns were a lack of professional English vocabulary and difficulty in pronouncing English.

Following the first two weeks, the instructor created dialogues that mimicked the interactions described by the staff in attempts to incorporate many of these unknown professional vocabulary words (e.g., introducing and assisting with international student scholarship policies, assisting students with course adding/dropping and auditing, explaining school policies). These dialogues were then used as the classroom texts staff used during class discussion. These discussions mainly consisted of the staff's opinions on whether the contents of these dialogues written by the instructor fully represented the interactions they had with foreign faculty, students, and guests at the university. If not, with the support of the instructor, the staff revised the dialogues to better represent realistic interactions. An example of such a revision imitated by the instructor will make the need for revisions clearer. One of the dialogues written by a staff member included an interaction between the staff member and an international student asking the location of the library. Since the instructor was aware that international students are given a guided tour of the campus during their initial student orientation, the instructor confirmed with the staff member that this was not a question that is usually asked. The instructor then worked with the staff member to figure out what type of places that international students need to get to but are unaware of after orientation. Working with the staff member, the instructor found that many international students ask for the location of the automatic document kiosk

in the administration building (used for printing of academic transcripts among other documents). The instructor then worked with the staff member to revise the dialogue to include directions to the printer kiosk. This then led to teaching of other prepositions (e.g., front of, behind, beside) and vocabulary (e.g., kiosk). The staff were then encouraged to further edit the dialogues at home. Eventually the staff began to write new dialogues incorporating other interactions they have had with foreign staff. The creation of class content by the staff through negotiation with their colleagues provided them with the opportunity to share experiences and language (e.g., vocabulary, phrases, translations, pronunciation) and to form a supportive learning community. At this point, for homework practice, the staff were encouraged to log onto *English Central* and *YouTube* to receive additional input and practice pronunciation. The participants were free to choose any material they wanted to practice, although they were encouraged to select content they felt were most related to the interactions they would encounter while doing their jobs (i.e., answering inquires, solving problems, and offering advice). The main reason for encouraging the staff to log onto *English Central* and *YouTube* was to get them comfortable with speaking and listening in English. Prior to enrolment in the course, the staff had used avoidance strategies to limit their interactions in English. The exposure to English on these websites was intended to aid in desensitization of the emotional negative responses that many of the staff had towards exposure to the English language.

English Central is a video website that provides learners with interactive video courses designed primarily for examination (e.g., TOEFL) and communication purposes (e.g., business, travel). Learners practice and learn words taken from the videos watched; *English Central* monitors users' progress on every word spoken. *English Central* uses a three-part 'watch, learn, speak' approach to assisting learners in enhancing English proficiency (see Figure 1). During 'watch' learners watch videos split into segments in which each word is 'clickable'; clicking on any word visually and aurally provides information on pronunciation and meaning. During 'learn', target vocabulary from videos is replaced with blanks for a cloze exercise to assess listening and spelling skills. Learners listen to a line from the video, type the missing word, and then study the word's spelling, part of speech, meaning, pronunciation, and usage in sentences. During 'speak' learners first listen to a line from the video and then speak the line. Feedback on pronunciation and fluency is prioritising the development of internationally intelligible English. Learners can thus focus on the sounds to produce internationally-intelligible English as discussed. A letter grade is

assigned after practicing a video. *English Central* also provides a social community of learners that allows learners to carry out intercultural learning exchanges within a private circle or with learners from around the world.

YouTube <www.youtube.com> (last access 10.02.2016) was used to upload the short videos of the staff interacting in communicative exchanges in order to allow for evaluation and criticism by both the staff as well as other *YouTube* users. The content of these videos were based on dialogues supplied by the instructor and later adapted by the staff or those solely written by the staff; all the dialogue topics centered on communicative information exchanges with foreign interlocutors.

The staff would come to class ready to put on role plays of the scripted dialogues. There was minimal time for the staff to rehearse dialogues at home and memorization of the dialogues were discouraged; instead, the instructor hoped that they would try to spontaneously act and use the language they felt comfortable with in order to improve language competence through role play practice of them fulfilling job duties. The instructor provided guidance in negotiation strategies to aid with communication. These strategies included speaking more slowly, requesting the internationals to repeat themselves, asking or using paragraphing, circumlocution, and speaking more deliberately. Students would be paired up with colleagues and take turns at the roles of 'international' and 'staff'. After practicing a few times, the instructor or one of the staff would film interactions. Students would then upload these short films to *YouTube* for review and annotation. A similar process continued throughout the semester with staff being encouraged to write and practice dialogues focusing on communication breakdowns or difficulties experienced during the time period in which they were enrolled in the course. The staff were also encouraged to use *YouTube* to view recorded interactions of similar situations as those they uploaded throughout the semester.

2. Instrument and data analysis

A willingness to communicate (WTC) questionnaire was adapted to measure the staff's willingness to use ELF when communicating with foreigners (see Appendix A). WTC was operationalized as «a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2» (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément and Noels, 1998: 547). The questionnaire was translated from English into Mandarin Chinese and then back translated to ensure validity of the questionnaire items. The

face validity of the questionnaire is strong and Alpha reliability estimates ranged from .85 to above .90 in previous studies (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). Cronbach Alpha Reliability analysis was performed to ensure the reliability of the adapted questionnaire in this study. According to Field (2005) and Nunnally (1978), the reliability coefficient should be more than 0.7 for the data to be reliable. The reliability was .977 before and .981 after taking the course. A paired-sample t test was conducted to investigate whether staff's willingness to use ELF increased after the curriculum. Other basic bio data and related English learning experience was also obtained.

3. Results

After the curriculum, the staff's overall willingness to use ELF to communicate increased (t = 2.302; p < .05) (See Table 1) as well as their willingness to use ELF with foreigners during meetings (t = 2.669; p < .05) and public speaking (t = 2.809; p < .05); furthermore, their willingness to use ELF to communicate with foreign strangers increased (t = 2.744; p < .05) (See Table 2). However, there was no significant difference found between the pre and post-curriculum in terms of staff's willingness to use ELF during group discussions, interpersonal situations or with acquaintances and friends.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The questionnaire results indicate an overall shift in the perceptions of the staff in terms of their willingness to use ELF with internationals. In addition, willingness to use ELF in several of the situations showed a significant increase. In fact, except for interpersonal communication, the staff's willingness to use ELF increased for all situations. Below we first discuss some probable reasons for these results and then provide opinions on how a future course could be improved upon. Lastly, we provide some thoughts on areas in which upcoming research should focus.

It is likely that there was no significant increase in the staff's willingness to use ELF during interpersonal communication and with friends due to the focus of the course, specifically on the use of ELF in a work environment. In other words, although the staff began to perceive English as a language able to assist them in their job duties, they seemed less inclined to transfer this use of English to non-work settings. We do not

necessarily see this as a negative outcome of the course, since there was no apparent need for the staff to use English outside of a work context. Sadly, this is a bit indicative that they may have been unwilling to make friends with internationals or the results at least point towards the conclusion that they did not feel comfortable using English with international friends (see items 6, 9, 4, 19 in Appendix A and Table 2). This, cannot, however, be confirmed without more in-depth interviews. Still, it must be noted that prior to the course, in comparison to other situations, the staff were more comfortable with using ELF in interpersonal communication (M = 57.33). A higher pre-treatment mean score on the questionnaire results in less room for improvement to be shown on the post-treatment mean score. In fact, before the course, the staff were also somewhat willing to communicate with acquaintances using ELF. Unfortunately, willingness to use ELF during group discussions did not significantly improve. We believe this may have related to either how the class was run or the staff job requirements. Firstly, job requirements often cantered on one-on-one interactions with internationals. Since, the staff rarely encountered job related situations in which they needed to communicate with more than one or two individuals at a time in English, they were less likely to be willing to take part in such interactions. Furthermore, during class group discussions the use of Chinese was never limited. It may be beneficial to encourage the staff to try to use ELF more during these interactions as a practice for future group interactions. We believe the staff's willingness to use ELF in public speaking situations stems from their interactions during the role plays; they may have interpreted either the classroom interactions or the uploading of their videos as public speaking situations. This then may have translated to their willingness to speak English in front of strangers.

5. Limitations and future research

Although the *English Central* website provided the staff with graded spaced-repeated vocabulary learning that allowed opportunities to improve pronunciation through an on-line speech system, unfortunately the website does not provide any videos containing the speech by non-native speakers. This is unfortunate in that as Seidlhofer (2005) points out, even when the «vast majority of verbal exchanges in English do not involve any native speakers at all»…«there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage» (2005: 339). Given the multilingual nature of ELF intercultural exchanges (Canagarajah,

2007), the use of *English Central* was not intended to impose any linguistic norms on or to take a monolingual approach to the learners' development of English language proficiency. *English Central*, instead, was used to cater for international intelligibility of the staffs' English and their strategic negotiation of intercultural understanding, as Jenkins (2000) and Cogo (2012) suggest and to draw the staffs' attention to how to use pragmatic strategies to negotiate meaning with international interlocutors. For example, *YouTube* offered the staff opportunities to observe language strategies in use and then comment on those strategies while *English Central* provided them with opportunities for language practice The *English Central* and self-filmed videos uploaded to *YouTube* provided the staff with the practice in developing internationally-intelligible English and confidence needed to use ELF to communicate with foreign students. Moreover, this was accomplished without increasing the amount of time that the staff spent on English learning each week (about 1.5 hrs./wk.).

Potential pitfalls from internationalizing Taiwanese universities may be avoided if administrators take the initiative of providing ELF-relevant language practice for university staff that encourages use of ELF with international students and visitors. Combined with language learning and confidence building exercises provided by websites such as *English Central* and *YouTube*, university staff will become more willing to use ELF, creating a more global learning environment. Future research should aim to address the needs of the international students by seeking to uncover their perceptions of using ELF for communication with Taiwanese university staff, administrators and local students.

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ANNEXES

TABLES

Table 1 – Differences between pre and post treatment for overall WTC scores

WTC	Pre		Post		*t*-value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall	46.17	22.09	54.58	24.04	2.302	.033*

Note. *Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 – Differences between pre and post treatment for each WTC category score

WTC	Pre		Post		*t*-value	Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Group discussion	55.33	25.69	63.33	24.13	1.559	.136
Meetings	44.67	21.31	56.00	24.98	2.669	.015*
Interpersonal communication	57.33	27.31	56.67	23.14	-.154	.879
Public speaking	27.33	26.22	42.33	30.46	2.809	.011*
Stranger	37.25	22.39	49.25	25.66	2.744	.013*
Acquaintance	54.00	23.20	60.00	23.79	1.552	.137
Friend	47.25	24.79	54.50	25.59	1.852	.080

Note. *Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
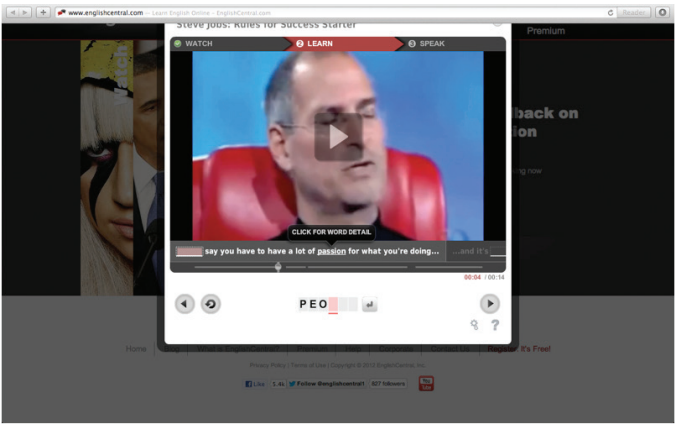
Fig. 1 – English Central's Web User Interface

APPENDIX A

Below you will find twenty situations in which people could find themselves with the opportunity to communicate with foreigners in English. Assuming you have complete freedom to choose, please indicate your willingness to communicate in English for each item. Checking 0% indicates that in the situation you are always <u>unwilling</u> to communicate, while checking 100% indicates you are always <u>willing</u> to communicate.

		0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Example:	I am willing to give directions in English to a foreign visitor. (If you feel the above description fits how you would act at all times, then you would check 100%.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑

問卷題目	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign service attendant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign physician.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I am willing to give a presentation in English to a group of foreign strangers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign acquaintance while standing in line.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign salesperson in a store.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I am willing to talk in English in a large meeting with foreign friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign police officer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I am willing to talk in English with a small group of foreign friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign friend while standing in line.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign server at a restaurant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I am willing to talk in English in a large meeting with foreign acquaintances.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign stranger while standing in line.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign secretary.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. I am willing to give a presentation in English to a group of foreign friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. I am willing to talk in English with a small group of foreign acquaintances.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign garbage collector.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I am willing to talk in English in a large meeting with foreign strangers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I am willing to talk in English with a foreign spouse (or girl/boyfriend).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I am willing to talk in English with a small group of foreign friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. I am willing to give a presentation in English to a group of foreign acquaintances.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐