Public Speaking for Intercultural Education
and Metalinguistic Development in ESP

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As higher education in Portugal becomes more active in the ERASMUS program, an increasing number of foreign students have enrolled in previously homogenous L1 classes in English for Specific Purposes, altering the dynamics of the classroom significantly. My discussion of this reality in a small inland polytechnic institute in the context of English for Specific Purposes in the areas of Marketing, Management, and Accounting will include the results of a four-year study on the effect of these new enrollment characteristics on metalinguistic development and issues of interculturality.

ERASMUS for European Union students

The European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, known by its backronym ERASMUS, is the flagship education and training program of the EU. According to the European Commission, in addition to funding cooperation among European institutes of higher education, ERASMUS has enabled 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year. The objective has been to help create a European Higher Education Area, foster innovation throughout Europe, and, by 2012, have promoted mobility for 3 million ERASMUS students. In November 2010, the statistics from the European Commission were already at 2.2 million so, with increasing interest and financial support, this goal does seem realistic.

A cursory review of the ERASMUS website reveals a selection of quotes from participants remarking on their experience:

- "I realised that the experience made a whole new person of me and that I would never look at the world and Europe, my home, as I did before."

- "ERASMUS life for me is about opportunities. Every opportunity I had, I took it and I thank ERASMUS for it."
- "It is true – when you're in ERASMUS, you find out a lot about yourself."
- "ERASMUS is a lot more than a studying experience. For me it is a way to look at the world with new eyes, to feel and discover new emotions and learn what is not written in the textbooks."
- "If I look at my experience from a distance, I can say that I would definitely do it again, and that apart from (or maybe because of) minor problems along the way, this semester has made me a stronger and more enthusiastic person!"

These words mirror my own experience as an American from UC Berkeley during my junior year in the Education Abroad Program in France in 1986-87 (Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour and the Paris UC Study Center in collaboration with the Sorbonne). Because of my own enriching experience as a university student and the additional characteristic I share with ERASMUS students of being a guest in a foreign country, I identify with ERASMUS students here in Portugal and am committed to contributing to the academic end of their adventure.

ERASMUS at the IPG

The School of Management and Technology (Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão – ESTG) is one of the four schools of the Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Instituto Politécnico da Guarda – IPG). In general, the IPG is a small and essentially monoethnic Portuguese institute of higher education, with a reduced number of French and Swiss family connections via emigration and less than 50 students from African countries that were former colonies of Portugal. Overall, in the city of Guarda, in 2010, there were only one thousand immigrants registered with the local Immigration Services (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras).

In terms of local ERASMUS student reception, several observations apply. First, IPG students are not prepared to receive students from different cultures. The reserved nature of the students from the Guarda region makes integration difficult for the less extroverted ERASMUS students. Furthermore, as most teachers are ill-prepared to lecture content-classes in English,

the integration of the students in the classroom is complicated by all communication taking place in Portuguese, a language which they do not understand. Nevertheless, for the academic year 2008-09, a full-time translator was hired to deal with assessment in English.

ERASMUS students in the English classroom

The local experience has been that ERASMUS students enroll in English for several reasons. First, they are usually able to find a legitimate way to transfer the ECTS credits since their universities also offer courses in English for Specific Purposes. Second, as the language of science and management, the international status of the language holds relevance for most study areas. Finally, the relief of understanding course material is a high point in the day for the students who do not speak Portuguese.

English class is, thus, a potential haven for these foreign students. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, created by the communication scholar Milton J. Bennet (1993), can be applied for greater understanding of the experience of difference for these students. According to this model, difference is experienced in predictable stages ranging from ethnocentric (**denial** of difference) to ethnorelative (**integration** with that which is different). Between these extremes, the experiencer will likely work through stages of **defense** against the identified difference, through **minimization** of the difference, leading to initial **acceptance** of and then **adaptation** to the difference before reaching the extreme of integration.

Language teachers also know that motivation for participating in that which is different must also be factored in for the experience. And while all of this is important to understand just how the ERASMUS student might be feeling, it is my contention that the local students must also be considered seriously. The appearance of a speaker of another language in their English classroom alters their own haven considerably, as the benefits of using the L1 in the L2 classroom (cf. Frankenberg-Garcia) may, at least in part, have to be foregone to focus on teaching ESP in a heterogeneous L1 language environment.

As a result, the language teacher must consider the experience of difference for both the newcomers and the home students. My Portuguese students visibly and verbally go through Bennet's proposed stages of denial and defense in the first days of contact, lasting up to three

classes over a two-week period, expressing their frustration at having the new students in "their" class. It is in these initial classes that integrative activities which require pair work, joint reading aloud, and interviewing are particularly useful to oblige students to work through these ethnocentric sensations. As this article goes to press, I have come across Tarun Patel's TALK blog at the British Council / BBC Teaching English site, at which he advocates five successful activities for heterogeneous language classes – adding new vocabulary and short presentations to my proposed triumvirate for actively integrating that which is different.

I have found Beth Fisher-Yoshida's (2005) approach especially helpful in these initial weeks of contact in the English classroom. Her stated objective is to reframe conflict as a constructive opportunity to engage with people we find different from ourselves. Her work is associated with the indispensable research carried out in association with the organization for Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies: Breaking the Cycle of Humiliation, a site that should be considered required reading for any educator concerned about enhancing the quality of intercultural activity.

In addition to actively reframing cultural conflict in the classroom as opportunities for all those involved, exercising an approach outlined by Adair Linn Nagata (2005), described as Self-Reflectivity, has also proven extremely valuable in promoting a positive intercultural learning environment. Self-reflectivity is described as an iterative approach to increase self-awareness in the home students and in the "other", develop self-management skills, and increase the students' overall will to communicate, all the while making language learning enjoyable. As a general practice, I have integrated her feedforward approach to written and oral activities throughout my English classes, with and without the participation of ERASMUS students because it simply makes sense for future professionals to be guided as apprentices.

Standing the practice of feedback on its head, these feedforward commentaries, also both written and oral on the part of the teacher, involve creating constructive suggestions for the next and following future student activities to exercise the competences being developed. For example, a student who is having difficulty accurately presenting numeral-based information about a company will need to know not only where to get linguistically-relevant guidance from the course manual or a favorite reference grammar but also in what context to best put it into practice, such as preparing a presentation based on the overall financials page of a company

listed at Hoover's, Inc. Clearly, the content of feedforward is contextualized by any feedback you would naturally provide; nevertheless, active application of this methodology opens the students' horizons even more, focusing particularly on each student's needs and specific competences. Language teachers working with portfolios will recognize the urgency of this type of guidance and readily understand the application for student autonomy and creativity.

The nature of feedforward is particularly effective with shorter, frequent activities, such as the short analyses, presentation, debate, and small group discussion of the students' activities and experiences, involving individual and group response in all three modalities (T-T; S-T; S-S, where T is teacher and S is student).

The Study

With these teaching considerations in mind for promoting interculturality and an enhancing learning experience in the English classroom, let's take a look at the study at hand. The driving question was to determine whether any particular language learning activities were favored by these mixed L1 classes.

This study covered four years of classes of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Management, Marketing, and Accounting students at the ESTG-IPG between 2006 and 2010. During this time, a total of eleven ERASMUS students – 6 men and 5 women – participated in these classes, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Enrollment of ERASMUS students in ESP classes at the ESTG-IPG
(including nationality and gender)

year	Erasmus students	nationality	M	F
2009-10	5	Polish, Spanish	2	3
2008-09	1	Lithuanian	0	1
2007-08	3	Turkish	1	2
2006-07	2	Spanish	2	0
TOTAL	11		6	5

The limited number of ERASMUS students should not pose any threats to the reliability of this study. The presence of just one foreign student in an English class, as in 2008-09, is just as valid for Portuguese L1 students of higher education since her mere presence constitutes a difference, just as my presence, as an English teacher from California, is a clear constitution of difference.

Including these ERASMUS students, a total of 148 students enrolled in the second semester ESP class for Management, Marketing, and Accounting students were tested. Each year, between 2006-07 and 2009-10, in the first and last weeks of the semester, students responded to a simple multiple-choice question:

Choose your favorite English language learning activity:
- speaking in groups
- public speaking
- group writing
- individual writing

The results of the pre- and post-tests are documented in table 2 below, where the grey shading indicates the pre-test results.

Table 2. Pre- and post-test learning activity preferences

| (1)	(2)	year	Speaking in groups		Public speaking		Group writing		Individual writing	
5	27	09-10	10	8	7	14	2	4	8	1
			37%	30%	26%	52%	7%	15%	30%	4%
1	33	08-09	20	15	1	6	2	8	10	4
			61%	46%	3%	18%	6%	24%	30%	12%
3	43	07-08	16	16	2	10	13	10	12	7
			37%	37%	5%	23%	30%	23%	28%	16%
2	45	06-07	15	14	5	12	15	17	10	2
			33%	31%	11%	27%	33%	38%	22%	4%
11	148	TOTAL	61	53	15	42	32	39	40	14

(1) Number of ERASMUS students
(2) Total number of students enrolled

The average rate of change from pre- to post-test preference for each of the activities over all four years was greatest for public speaking (180%), followed by group writing (22%). In the cases of speaking in groups and individual writing, both activities were selected less frequently in the post-test, with average rates of negative change of 13% and 65% respectively.

These results are more readily visible in the pie charts of figure 1, where the students' pre- and post-preferences are illustrated from left to right with a noticeable growth in preference for public speaking (red) in all four years. Selection of group writing (green) grew in all but the year 2007-08, a year in which public speaking (red) made a great leap en post-test preference. Individual writing (purple) and speaking in groups (blue) were both selected by fewer students, notably in the last two years of the study.

Figure 1. Graphic illustration of pre- and post-test learning activity preferences
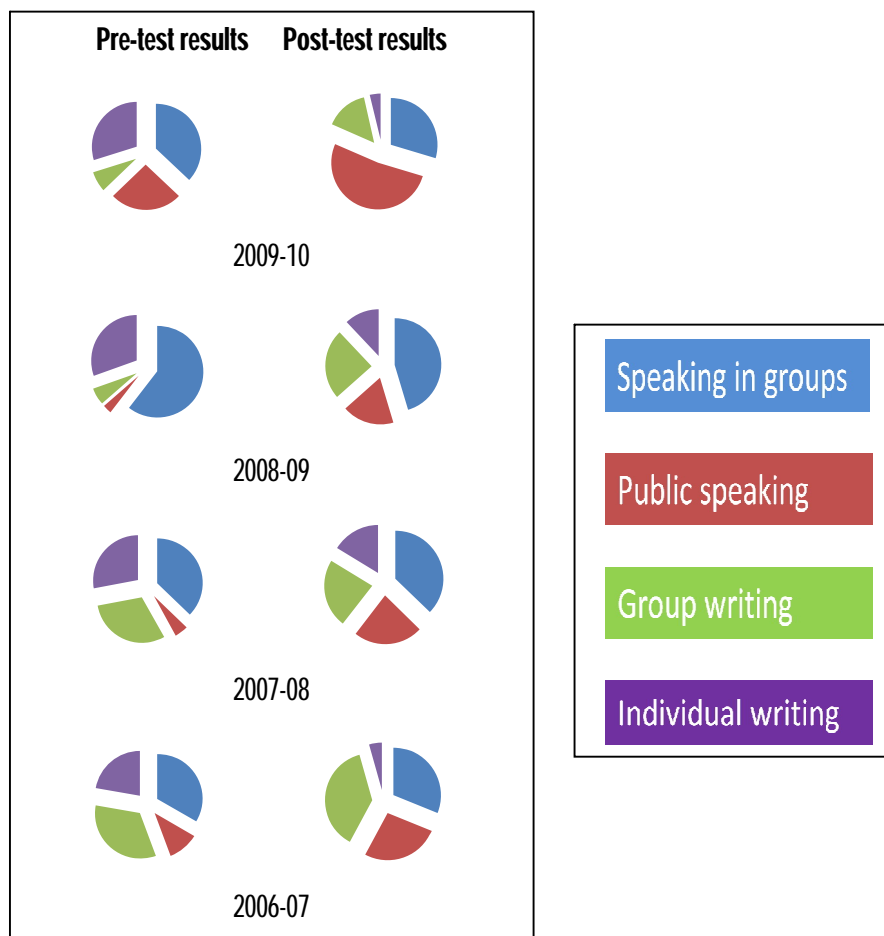
Reserving comments and further analysis of the study results on the other activities for another article, the focus here, as promised by the title, is on public speaking as it was, in fact, the language learning activity in each yearly post-test that consistently attracted more learners than in the pre-test.

As an activity, public speaking differs from speaking in groups in that, in groups, the students are informally gathered in groups of 2 to 5, talking among themselves in a group activity. The activity of public speaking necessarily involves standing in front of the class, although it may take place either in a group gathered at the front of the class for this purpose or individually.

On a daily basis, public speaking took place in these English classrooms: sometimes as impromptu activities when I would call a work group or individual to the front of the class, requiring improvised speech, other times as specific planned activities. The students' public speaking activity covered the rhetorical forms of analysis, description, narration, exposition, evaluation, and argument and included visual rhetoric, an aspect that was readily embraced by students interested in marketing.

To strengthen the relevance of this activity, which in the first three years was consistently the least favored language learning activity in the pre-test results, each public speaking activity was followed by immediate attention to a checklist, what I called a Quick Response, based on 19 of the communication strategies tested by Wendy Lam (2007).

As such, the students became familiar with a strip of paper that simply listed these strategies, as in the list below. After speaking, they would pull out a copy of the list, cross off the strategies that they had not used, and add their name and date to the end.

Quick response on strategies:

1) Paraphrasing
2) Simplification
3) Activating background knowledge
4) Asking for help

5) Taking risks

6) Using gestures

7) Resourcing

8) Enhancing task knowledge

9) Facilitating progress

10) Seeking clarification

11) Using fillers

12) Monitoring contribution

13) Abandoning message

14) Monitoring turn-taking

15) Elaborating

16) Facilitating atmosphere

17) Focusing on task

18) Planning ideas in advance

19) Seeking views

The version used by the students did not follow any particular order, even listing the strategies in a different order each year so as not to favor any of them, for example, for being in first or last position. Four years of collecting data led to a very clear selection of learner communication strategies in public speaking: my students overwhelmingly used all of strategies listed here as 1 to 11, identifying strategies 12 to 19 in less than 50% of the Quick Responses.

This extra tie-in to public speaking as a language learning activity could be a factor contributing to greater appreciation of public speaking as demonstrated in the post-tests. Students were actively encouraged to reflect on their communication strategies; the action of recording their self-assessment on the Quick Response strips cemented the experience. Talking about communication strategies became commonplace in the classroom and the written analysis, simply by crossing out what did not apply, gave students a metalanguage to do so, empowering them to understand their own oral activity, to question it, and to improve.

I have no doubt that a positive constructive attitude from their teacher helped build a learning environment that was self-reinforcing and contributed to their self-reliance for, if students cannot make mistakes in the classroom, where can they err? In preparing as students in the classroom for their professional activity in the boardroom, they reach for greater challenges, striving to find in themselves the ability to face the greatest confrontations. Students thus entrusted to participate so actively in the classroom create more opportunities for their own learning.

This is the great reason for not using a course manual in these classes. The ESP content necessary for business and marketing, in general, includes obligatorily activities based on case studies, research, a historical perspective, and simulations, in tandem with business communication skills such as informing, entertaining, and especially persuading and expressing prediction for the future. All of these areas can be bolstered on material relevant to their business content courses rather than on predetermined material selected by the teacher. Also essential was the use of feedforward, which structured the autonomous student thrust by creating a roadmap for each individual student who rose to the occasion of the challenges proposed.

Conclusion

The study at hand set out to determine language learning activities that were impacted most by a growing intercultural environment, as reflected by the participation of ERASMUS students in ESP classes that had been previously attended by only Portuguese learners at a small inland polytechnic institute.

Learning interculturally clearly alters the dynamics of the classroom. Sometimes, the difference represented by ERASMUS students in the classroom is not readily accepted by the home students. When this happens, reframing this conflict as an opportunity to become more self-aware can also contribute to an enhanced intercultural education. Materials need to be adjusted to the new reality to correspond with the diversity of input of experience revealed by ERASMUS student participation. The enriched environment contributes to the development of

learning strategies and, hence, of language competence. Everyone involved can benefit from the situation.

In preparing for this study, and throughout its execution, the following resources (see Works Cited for links) proved to be rather useful, inspiring activities and providing both a practical and a theoretical basis:

- International Association for Intercultural Education
- Paul C. Gorski's Critical Multicultural Pavillion Awareness Activities
- Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies: Breaking the Cycle of Humiliation

The group for Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies is a jewel. Many researchers and practitioners will feel motivated, as I have, by the work developed by these scholars whose stated definition and goal transcribed here are the words on which I will end this article:

We are a global transdisciplinary network and fellowship of concerned academics and practitioners. We wish to stimulate systemic change, globally and locally, to open space for equality in dignity and mutual respect and esteem to take root and grow, thus ending humiliating practices and breaking cycles of humiliation throughout the world. We suggest that a frame of cooperation and shared humility is necessary – not a mindset of humiliation – if we wish to build a better world, a world of equal dignity for all.

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