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Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
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CROSS-LANGUAGE PERCEPTION OF NON-NATIVE STOPS AND FRICATIVES AMONG MALAY AND HAUSA NATIVE SPEAKERS

Jamilu Abdullahi1,2, Yap Ngee Thai1*, Sabariah Md Rashid1, and Vahid Nimechisalem1

1Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia
2Department of Nigerian Languages and Linguistics, Bauchi State University, Nigeria

E-mail: jamilu2011@gmail.com2; ntyap@upm.edu.my1; smrashid@upm.edu.my1; vahid@upm.edu.my1

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of native language on listeners’ perception of native and non-native consonants. The study focuses on cross-language perception of selected stops and fricatives among Hausa speakers who have little exposure to Malay, and Malay speakers who have no exposure to Hausa. The primary goal of this study is to examine how Hausa and Malay speakers perceived non-native stops and fricatives that are absent in their native language. Hausa language has a combination of plosives and implosives which involves the use of different airstream mechanisms in their production. Malay speakers who do not have any experience of implosives may find it difficult to discriminate between implosives and plosives, and to produce implosives accurately. In contrast, Hausa speakers may have difficulty discriminating between labial stops and fricatives in Malay as this distinction is not present in Hausa. Forty-five Hausa native speakers and forty-five Malay native speakers were recruited for the study. Audio-recording of minimal pairs of Malay and Hausa words were used as stimuli in an AX discrimination task. Subjects had to indicate whether they heard two different words, or the same words presented twice by two different speakers. The results of the study show that the Malay and Hausa native speakers faced considerable difficulties and problems in perceiving most non-native sound contrasts. Native language influence was found to be a major factor influencing the perception of non-native sound contrasts. This study concluded that the Perception Assimilation Model was successful in the prediction and interpretation of most of the perceptual difficulties encountered by the Malay and Hausa native speakers in the perception of stops and fricatives.

Keywords: speech perception, non-native, fricatives, plosives, implosives

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies of cross-language or second language (L2) speech perception have focused on the identification and/or discrimination of non-native contrasts that are absent in listeners’ first language (L1) such as English /l/ and /r/ for native Japanese listeners (e.g., MacKain, Best & Strange, 1981; Oh, Guion-Anderson, Aoyama, Flege, Guion, Akahane-Yamada & Yamada, 2011), and these studies have identified several factors influencing L2 learners’ success in identifying or discriminating English approximants. These factors include the location of the segment in a word, type of speech stimuli (natural vs. synthetic), lexical familiarity, previous linguistic experience and degree of perceived dissimilarity, among others. For instance, in a study on perception of approximants, Best and Strange
(1992) showed that cross-language discrimination accuracy depended on the cross-linguistic phonemic assimilation patterns and listeners’ experience with spoken English.

Thus far, there is ample evidence that native and L2 speakers of English differ in their perception of the voicing and/or place contrast in word-final consonants (e.g., Flege & Wang, 1989; Flege & Liu, 2001; Aoyama, 2003). In a recent study, Aoyama (2003) examined the perception of syllable-initial and syllable final English nasals by Korean and Japanese L2 learners. The Japanese listeners found it difficult to discriminate the /n/-/ŋ/ contrast in word-final position, but not the /m/-/n/ or /m/-/ŋ/ contrast although none of these nasal contrasts occur wordfinally in their L1. It was observed that the English /m/ was assimilated to a single Japanese category, but the English /n/ and /ŋ/ were assimilated to multiple Japanese categories; hence resulting in perceptual difficulties for the learners. Similarly, Tsukada (2006) reported the perceptual ability of Australian English and Thai English bilingual listeners in the perception of word-final stops in English and Thai. The two groups discriminated the Thai contrast for /p/-/t/ best, particularly among the Australian English listeners. The listeners’ accuracy of discrimination was influenced by the type of stops they heard. The findings also show that first language transfer alone is not sufficient to account for learners’ patterns of response in cross-language speech perception since in the above study, the performance of the Australian English listeners was more accurate.

In another study, Tsukada (2007) examined the discrimination of word-final stop contrasts (/p/-/t/, /p/-/k/, /t/-/k/) in English and Thai by L2 listeners from diverse Asian language backgrounds (e.g., Cantonese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese). The findings suggest that familiarity with specific phonetic realization of sounds (i.e., unreleased final stops) may play a facilitative role in perceptual flexibility. However, without exposure to native phonetic contrasts that include these detailed acoustic characteristics, it may be difficult to develop the capacity to discriminate subtle phonetic differences to the level of native listeners. In the same context, Holliday (2014) conducted a study on native Mandarin listeners’ perceptual assimilation of Korean obstruents. Different combinations of stops, affricates, and fricatives were used for the experiments with 20 native Mandarin speakers. The results revealed that affricates were perceived as post alveolar and alveo-palatal more frequently than as alveolar affricates. The finding also shows that vowel context influenced the perception of fricatives and affricates.

These results appear to be consistent with predictions generated by models of cross-language speech perception such as the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best, 1993; 1995). According to the PAM, instances of contrastive L2 categories that are identified as instances of a single L1 category (Single Category Assimilation) as found in the perception of English /l/-/r/ for Japanese learners, will be relatively difficult to discriminate. However, instances of contrastive L2 sounds that are mapped onto two different L1 sounds (Two-Category Assimilation) as found in the mapping of /w/-/j/ in English and Japanese will be discriminated more accurately.

The findings and recommendations of the previous studies concerning the perception of fricative sounds and important acoustic cues that are associated with the perception of fricatives, however, indicated some limitations. Specifically, it is observed that most of the studies carried out were on the perception of English fricatives by English as second language (ESL) learners. None was found on cross-language perception of fricatives among native speakers of two different languages. A recent study by Lago, Scharinger, Kronrod and Idsardi (2015) examined the relative acoustic contribution and information of phonology in
terms of perceiving fricative sounds. Two fricatives, /ʃ/ and /s/, presented at word initial position were used as stimuli. The results show that the fricatives were discriminated more accurately when they crossed a categorical boundary. Focusing on sounds with different manner of articulation, Alwan, Jiang and Chen (2011) studied the relevant perceptual acoustic cues for the place of articulation of plosives /b d t/ and fricatives /f s v z/ at word initial positions in a noise condition. Relative spectral amplitude and frequency formants were examined for these segments. The study showed that vowel context, manner of articulation and voicing determined the perception of labial/alveolar distinctions in noise. Alwan, Jiang, and Chen (2011) also examined the relevant acoustic cues in the perception of syllable initial plosives /b p d t/ and fricatives /f v s z/. The findings revealed that the perception of alveolar/labial differences in noise was determined by the manner of articulation, voicing interaction as well as vowel context. The acoustic measurement and signal-to-noise-ratio (SNRs) indicated that the formant frequency measurements increased for the perception of alveolar/labial distinctions as the signal to noise ratio degrades. In another study, Stevens et al. (1992) examined the factors that differentiate voiced and unvoiced fricatives. The result shows that listeners based their intervocalic fricative voicing judgments on the interval duration for which there was no vibration on the glottis. The findings revealed that fricatives could be judged as voiceless if the time interval was above 60 milliseconds (ms).

An important discovery in this review is that even when native and non-native languages share a phonetic contrast at the abstract phonological level, listeners may fail to show accurate perception in the non-native stimuli. In other words, positive transfer from L1 may not be reflected in listeners’ performance. An example of this was demonstrated by Hallé, Best and Levitt (1999) for native French listeners’ perception of American English approximants /w j r l/. These phonemes occur in French with varying degrees of similarity to the target sounds. If L1-to-L2 mappings at the traditional phonological level predict cross-linguistic perception patterns, it is predicted that French listeners would not have difficulties with these English sounds. However, it was found that the French listeners had some perceptual difficulties with the English /r/. This finding was attributed to marked articulatory-phonetic differences between the English and French /r/ (i.e. phonetically realized as a central approximant in English and a uvular fricative in French). Of the three contrasts tested (/w/–/ʃ/, /]\/–/\/, /w/–/r/), the French listeners had most difficulty with /w/–/r/ and tended to hear the English /r/ as /w/-like.

Since only limited counter examples of expected L1 positive transfer have been reported in the literature, it may be necessary to examine different non-native language comparisons before any generalization can be made. The present study sought to verify if positive transfer at the phonological level might be observed in word-initial position. The word initial context was chosen since phonetically, it is a more salient position. The word final context is also influenced by other phonological constraints such as English word final voice neutralization and phonotactic constraints against voicing contrast in Malay (Yap, 2013) and may be more difficult for perception because of these other confounding reasons. Hence, this study focused on the perception of native and non-native stops and fricatives in the word-initial position which are functional (i.e. phonemic) in both Malay and Hausa.
Phonemic inventories of Hausa and Malay

The Hausa language has a combination of plosives and implosives. However, in human languages, implosives are rare; linguists have encountered many problems in their descriptions, as most of the world’s languages sounds are produced with the egressive pulmonic airstream mechanism (Ladefoged & Maddieson, 1996:77). In addition, to our knowledge, there is also hardly any study done on the discrimination between plosives and implosives. The lack of published work on implosives motivated this study as anyone who wishes to learn and speak Hausa has to be able to learn the contrast between plosives and implosives as these stops are phonemic in Hausa.

The Hausa language, which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family (Greenberg 1966), also stands as the most powerful language in terms of speakers and prestige among the Westerly sub-group of the Chadic language. It has considerable literature in the forms of poetry, prose and Islamic writings, written in a modified Arabic script (Ajami). In West African sub region, the Hausa language has the highest number of speakers. In Nigeria alone, the Hausa language has about thirty-three (33) million native speakers. It is a second language of about 15 million people and taken together, an approximate total of forty eight (48) million people in Nigeria (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2019). The Hausas have dominated more than half of the demographic map of Nigeria. In the Republic of Benin, it has about 900,000 speakers; in Burkina Faso about 500,000 speakers; in Cameroon about 2,300,000; in Togo about 900,029 speakers; in Sudan about nine 918,000 speakers; and in Niger about 12,000,000 speakers are said to have been in existence (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2019). The Hausa language is spoken across the West African sub-region, and it is also spoken in Central Africa, Chad, Congo, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and North Western Sudan.

In standard Hausa, there are thirty-four (34) consonant sounds (Sani, 2005). Table 1 presents the Hausa consonantal chart.

Table 1: Hausa Consonantal Chart (Source: Sani, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Post-alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Palatalized velar</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Labialized Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plosive &amp; Affricate</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>tj</td>
<td>dʒ</td>
<td>ḳ</td>
<td>g̣</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implosive &amp; Ejective Stop &amp; Affricate</td>
<td>ɓ</td>
<td>ts’</td>
<td>d’</td>
<td>(t’j)</td>
<td>j’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative</td>
<td>Φ</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap/Trill</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>t</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximant</td>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Approximant</td>
<td>ɭ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to Hausa, the Malay language is one of the members of the Malayic subgroup in the Austronesian family of languages. The Malayic subgroup has languages such as Gayo in Sumatra, Iban in Borneo, and Minangkabau in Sumatra (Eades & Hajek, 2006). Adelaar (2005) reported that many local Malay dialects are found in Sumatra, Borneo,
Malaysian Peninsular, and parts of Eastern Indonesia. Different varieties of Malay are spoken in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore and Indonesia; however, these varieties have mutual intelligibility as reported in Steinhauer (2013). With the influence of Javanese and Dutch, it was reported that Indonesia is the most divergent, but the other varieties spoken in the Malayan Peninsular differed mainly phonetically and phonologically.

In the Malay language, there are twenty-four (24) native speech segments (18 consonants and 6 vowels) and nine (8) loan consonants which occur in loan words in Malay according to Nik Safiah Karim et al. (2008). Table 2 presents the consonants of the Malay language with some of the loan consonants presented in parentheses. However, the loan consonants that are less frequent and those that are usually assimilated into other existing phonemic categories have been excluded from the Table (see Nik Safiah Karim et al., 2009: 299).

Table 2: Malay consonantal chart (Source: Nik Safiah Karim et al., 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
<th>Labial-velar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plosives/Affricates</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricatives</td>
<td>(f)</td>
<td>(v)</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>(z)</td>
<td>(j)</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>η</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific stops and fricatives were chosen from Malay and Hausa to be included in the design of the study and to enable comparisons to be made in the interpretation of the analysis. In this regard, implosives are found in Hausa but not in Malay, and likewise the voiceless bilabial plosive and the voiceless labio-dental fricative are found in Malay but not in Hausa. However, both languages have the same set of alveolar plosives and fricatives. The properties of the phonemic inventory of the two languages allow the researcher to examine the perception of the novel and familiar phonetic categories by naïve language learners.

Models of Speech Perception

As the present study investigated how Hausa and Malay native speakers perceived non-native stops and fricatives, the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995) and Speech Learning Model (SLM) (Flege, 1995) were adopted as the framework for the study. Similarities and differences between native language and non-native phonological systems may pose some difficulties in the perception and production of non-native contrasts (Flege, 1995). Research have shown that adult listeners of non-native language have significant difficulties in the perception of most, but not all, phonetic dissimilarity that are not functional in their native languages (Best & Tyler, 2007; Best et al, 1988; Flege, 1995; Kochetov, 2004). In this light, the present study aims to provide an account for the perception of non-native naïve listeners based on the current non-native models.

Specifically, the study examined how Malay native speakers discriminate between word-initial plosive and implosives in Hausa, and how Hausa native speakers discriminate word-initial plosive and fricatives in Malay. Implosives are found in Hausa but not in Malay,
and likewise the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ and labio-dental fricatives, /f/ and /v/ are found in Malay but not in Hausa. However since the alveolar stops, /t/ and /d/ and the alveolar fricatives, /s/ and /z/ are found in both languages, these segments were included in the study as they provided a comparison for interpretation of the analysis.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

Ninety adults volunteered to participate in this study. The participants comprised Malay native speakers (29 females and 16 males) who were born and brought up in Malaysia, and Hausa native speakers (7 females and 38 males) who were born and brought up in Nigeria. They were recruited based on their native language backgrounds. The Malay listeners’ (n = 45) age range was between 23 and 42 years (M = 27.40), while the Hausa native speakers’ (n = 45) age range was between 27 and 52 (M = 34.50). All the Malay native speakers were born and brought up in Malaysia, while the Hausa native speakers were born and raised in Nigeria, but since they were also postgraduate students in Malaysia, they were not completely naïve to Malay. However, most of them did not indicate that Malay and the other local languages such as Chinese and Tamil as a foreign language (see Table 3) that they were fluent or proficient in although they could possible use some rudimentary words and phrases in these local languages when communicating with the locals in Malaysia. The Malay participants as well as the Hausa participants also have knowledge of another language, namely, English. Both groups of participants (Malay and Hausa) use English language to communicate with non-native speakers of their languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Groups</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Knowledge of Foreign Language</th>
<th>Language Often Used</th>
<th>Language Used with Non-native Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Malay (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23-42</td>
<td>27.40</td>
<td>English (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27-52</td>
<td>36.50</td>
<td>Hausa (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(64%)</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English (89%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A purposive sampling based on the results of a demographic questionnaire was first employed to recruit the participants. The demographic questionnaire, which was adapted from the questionnaire of Montrul (2012) was used to filter the population so that the samples would comprise native speakers of Malay and Hausa. Apart from gender and name, pertinent information on the participants’ language of instruction, native language background, knowledge of foreign languages, linguistic history, and linguistic background, and so forth were also elicited. All questions in the questionnaire were designed to elicit essential information to ensure homogeneity of the respondents within each language group and to prevent cases where the participants are not Malay or Hausa native speakers. Table 3 summarizes the results of the demographic questionnaire.
**Instruments**

The study used a questionnaire to elicit background information of the respondents as described in the earlier section. To ascertain the performance of the respondents for cross-language perception of specific segments in Hausa and Malay, PRAAT (Boersma and Weenink, 2018), a computer programme which can analyse and run speech perception experiments, was used to collect the data for the study.

Audio-recordings of Hausa and Malay minimal pairs with the target speech segments were used as stimuli. The target sounds (stops and fricatives) were presented at word initial position. The stimuli were recorded by two male native Hausa speakers and two male native Malay speakers in order to ensure a standard and accurate pronunciation of the target segments. The two Hausa speakers were graduate students at a public university in Malaysia, one at the master level, the other at the doctoral level and both were conducting research on English and Hausa phonetics. The two Malay speakers were also graduate students of at a public university in Malaysia at the master level conducting research on the Malay language. The Malay speakers age ranges between 22 and 24, while the Hausa speakers age ranges from 27 to 33. The use of multiple speakers (2 Malay and 2 Hausa) was essential for the discrimination task as it ensured that the decisions were not made based on acoustic peculiarities from one speaker, such as pitch, intonation, or any other voice specification. All the stimuli were recorded with a Logitech Wireless Headset h600 microphone and PRAAT, the software program for speech analysis (Boersma & Weenink, 2001). The sampling rate used in the recording was 44100 Hz. The recordings were done in a quiet room, and each sentence was recorded once from the four speakers. The words for the discrimination task were extracted from the sentences using PRAAT and the discrimination experiment was also designed using PRAAT.

Each stimulus from the two languages (Malay and Hausa) was recorded in the carrier phrases shown below.

1. Malay carrier phrase:  
   **Baca ... sekarang** ‘read … again’

2. Hausa carrier phrase:  
   **Ya...sam** ‘3sg pronoun … again’

The use of the carrier phrase was important to determine the onset of the stops (Kang, 2014; Ogut, et al., 2006). The carrier phrase also helped to maintain the important acoustic cues which can be deleted if the recordings were done in isolation. In particular, it would be difficult to determine the closure duration which could be an important acoustic cue for the distinction of plosives and implosives. The carrier phrases were chosen to ensure that the target phonemes were all presented following a vowel to enable the closure phase and the release phases of the stops to be captured more accurately.

The Hausa and Malay minimal pairs that were recorded and used for the perceptual discrimination task are shown in Table 4. The researchers have chosen disyllabic words to ensure that both words are minimal pairs as Malay and Hausa words are usually disyllabic (Abubakar, 2001; Newman, 2000; Sani, 2000).
Table 4: Stimulus items for the discrimination task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hausa words</th>
<th>IPA Transcriptions</th>
<th>Malay words</th>
<th>IPA Transcriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>daba</em> - <em>taba</em></td>
<td>/dá: bà:/ vs /tá: bà:/</td>
<td><em>fasa</em> - <em>pasar</em></td>
<td>/fasa/ vs /pasar/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘horse riding – cigarette’</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘phase – market’</td>
<td>[fasa:] vs [pasa:]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>zara</em> - <em>sara</em></td>
<td>/zá: rà:/ vs /sà: rà:/</td>
<td><em>visa</em> - <em>bisa</em></td>
<td>/visa/ vs /bisa/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘pull out something – cut’</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘visa – possible/poison’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bata</em> - <em>bata</em></td>
<td>/bá: tà:/ vs /bá: tà:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘spoil – bottle’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dara</em> - <em>dara</em></td>
<td>/dá: rà:/ vs /dá: rà:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘exceed – draft’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phoneme /f/ was paired with /p/ while /v/ was paired with /b/ as the phoneme /fl/ and /vl/ are absent in Hausa phoneme inventory (Sani, 2015). Also, /fl/ and /pl/ were paired with one another as they both share the labial and voiceless feature and it has been recorded in the literature that Hausa speakers often confuse these two segments by producing [f] when [p] is expected (Maiunguwa, 2015). As for the Malay words, loan words such as *visa* and *fasa* are usually pronounced with the final [a:] and not with the schwa as noted in Asmah (2008:164) for loan words ending with the letter <a> in Malay. However the word *bisa* can be pronounced with a schwa or with the final [a:]. Care was taken during recording to ensure that the words *bisa* and *pasar* were pronounced as intended to ensure that the words presented in the task were minimal pairs. The final /l/ is *pasar* is not realized resulting in lengthening of the preceding vowel (Yunus Maris, 1980; Asmah, 2008). The word *bisa* is therefore ambiguous in meaning as it could refer to ‘poison’ pronounced with the standard pronunciation or it could refer to ‘possible’ in Indonesian Malay.

The perception task employed in this study is a discrimination task, whereby discrimination is “the act of differentiating two or more stimuli presented in some predefined format” (Logan & Pruitt, 1995). As Pisoni and Liverly (1995) explain, a discrimination exercise promotes “acquired distinctiveness”. In the AX categorical (same-different) discrimination task, the subjects’ task was to specify whether or not two stimuli in randomized word pairs were exemplars of the same phonetic category. In this study, the discrimination task was chosen as it taps phonological knowledge directly without mediation of lexical knowledge. Also, the stimuli used were non-native to listeners, it is appropriate to use a discrimination task, and not the identification task which taps into lexical knowledge (Tsukada, 2006; Tsukada, 2008). Therefore, listeners had to form some kind of mental representation of the phonetic categories under comparison instead of directly comparing stimuli on the basis of physical identity or mediate it via their lexical knowledge. Stimuli in the same pairs were physically different tokens drawn from the same phonetic category, while stimuli in different pairs were drawn from distinct categories. This type of discrimination task was used widely in cross-language studies (e.g. Strange & Dittmann, 1984; Ratos, 2014; Tsukada, 2006; Tsukada, 2008).

**Experimental Procedures**

The participants were seated comfortably, almost 40 cm away from a laptop computer in front of them, wearing a microphone headset. In the discrimination task, the participants listened to two words presented through the headphone sets and had to decide whether they
represented the same or different words. The subjects were presented with a total of 120 trials each. There were six sets of minimal pairs as shown in Table 4. For each set of minimal pairs, two same pairs and two different pairs were constructed. For example for /v/-/b/, the same pairs were visa-visa and bisa-bisa, while the different pairs were visa-bisa and bisa-visa. These four stimuli pairs were presented five times resulting in twenty tokens for each set of contrasts. The task took every participant about 10 to 15 minutes to complete, depending on the participant’s response pace. Results for each participant were registered by the computer and transferred to an Excel Spreadsheet for processing and scoring. One (1) mark was assigned to each correct attempt and zero (0) mark for each incorrect response. The scores of each participant were then transferred to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 22) for statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

The descriptive results show that the Malay native speakers discriminated the Hausa implosives-plosives contrasts poorly with lower correct percentages obtained [/ɓ-ɓ/: M = 36 /ɗ-ɗ/: M = 48] compared to the performance of native Hausa speakers who had high correct percentages [/ɓ-ɓ/: M = 80; /ɗ-ɗ/: M = 93]. In contrast, the correct percentages obtained for the discrimination of Malay fricative-stop contrasts for /f-p/ and /v-b/ by Malay native speakers was higher [/f-p/: M = 87; /v-b/: M = 76] compared to the Hausa group [/f-p/: M = 54; /v-b/: M = 51]. Both groups performed relatively well with the alveolar segments as shown by the high correct percentages for both pairs of control segments [Malay: /s-z/, M = 84, /t-d/: M = 83; Hausa: /z-s/, M = 85, /t-d/: M = 86]. See Figure 1.

The results obtained from the discrimination of Malay fricative-stop contrast show that the Hausa native speakers were unable to discriminate the following pairs of contrasts: /f-p/ and /v-b/ with the correct percentage of only 54% and 51%, respectively. Since there were only two options available for their response, the results seem to be hovering around the guessing rate of 50%. This shows that the Hausa native speakers were less accurate than Malay native speakers when they heard the Malay fricative-stop contrasts. However, their discrimination accuracy depended on the type of contrasts they heard. Some contrast such as /f-f/ and /v-v/ were easier to discriminate with 66% and 64%, respectively. Contrasts such as /f-p/ and /v-b/ were more difficult to discriminate with only correct scores of 42% and 37%, respectively. Moreover, the results supported the claim made by the current research on non-native speech perception, as not all non-native segmental contrasts are equally difficult. Some are discriminated moderately well, and others at near native-like levels (Best, McRoberts & Sithole 1988; Best, McRoberts & Goodel, 2001; Best & Strange, 1992; Kochetov, 2004).
The independent sample \( t \)-test was conducted to identify any significant differences between the results of the two groups of participants. The results of all the 12 different pairs are summarized and presented in Table 5. As shown in the table, a significant difference is found for all consonant pairs except for the contrasts between /s-z/ and /t-d/ for both Hausa and Malay. The results show that the difference between the Malay and Hausa subjects are...
statistically significant for the plosive-implosive pairs as well as for the fricative-plosive pairs. The Malay subjects were unable to discriminate between plosives and implosives while the Hausa subjects were unable to discriminate between the fricatives and the plosives for /f-p/ and /v-b/. However, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant for /s-z/ and /t-d/ as these contrasts were found in both Malay and Hausa; hence the speakers are sensitive to these contrasts.

**DISCUSSION**

This section discusses the results and major findings of the task for both Malay and Hausa native speakers, which include the level of difficulty encountered by the two groups of speakers in the discrimination of the various sounds contrasts discussed earlier. The results of the study were examined find out whether the perception of the contrasts was accounted for by existing models of speech perception.

**Sound Contrasts Found in both Malay and Hausa Languages**

The results obtained for the perception of fricatives and plosives /z-s/, /d-t/ supported the predictions postulated in the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM), where a two-Category (TC) assimilation involving the mapping of the L2 contrasts to two categories in the L1 may result in ease of discrimination for the target L2 contrasts. The contrasts for /z-s/ and /d-t/ are found in both Malay and Hausa (Sani, 2005; Nik Safiah Karim et al., 2008). The phonetic experience of this contrast in the speakers’ L1 appears to be sufficient and results in positive transfer from the L1 to the L2 which facilitated performance in the discrimination task.

**Sound Contrasts Present in Malay Language and Absent in the Hausa Language**

The phonemes of these contrasts are sounds phonologically found in Malay phonemic inventory and phonologically absent in Hausa phoneme inventory. The sounds are the voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ and the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/, and they are in contrast with /p/ and /b/, respectively. These pairs of contrast were predicted by PAM to be difficult for Hausa speakers as a Single Category Assimilation may result in the collapse of the L2 contrast into a single L1 category. Hausa has the voiceless bilabial fricative /φ/ but not the voiceless labio-dental fricative, /f/ nor the bilabial plosive /p/. When presented with two words from the latter categories, Hausa speakers may assimilate both of these segments to the only voiceless labial segment it has, the voiceless bilabial fricative /φ/. When presented with two words that represent the voiced labial segments /b/ and /v/, Hausa speakers may assimilate the voiced labio-dental fricative to the only voiced labial segment it has, the voiced bilabial stop /b/.

The results obtained from the discrimination of Malay fricative-stop contrast show that the Hausa native speakers were indeed unable to discriminate the following pairs of contrasts: /f-p/ and /v-b/. The performance of Hausa subjects hovered around the guessing threshold of 50% although the /f-p/ was slightly higher (M= 54%) compared to the mean correct percentage for /v-b/ which was only 51%. The results support the claim made by the current literature on non-native speech perception, as not all non-native segmental contrasts are equally difficult. Some are discriminated moderately well, and others at near native-like levels (Best, McRoberts & Sithole 1988; Best, McRoberts & Goodel, 2001; Best & Strange,
1992; Kochetov, 2004). In the context of this study, the performance of the discrimination task was native like for the alveolar stops and fricatives as discussed in the earlier section, but the performance for labial stops and fricatives are poor as predicted by the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) proposed by Best (1994).

**Sound Contrasts Present in Hausa Language and Absent in Malay Language**

The phonemes of these contrasts are sounds phonologically found in Hausa phonemic inventory and phonologically absent in Malay phoneme inventory. These sounds are voiced bilabial implosive /ɓ/ and voiced alveolar implosive /ɗ/. The results obtained show that the Malay native speakers, having no linguistic experience of Hausa implosives, failed to discriminate between the plosives and the implosives. This suggests that the acoustic differences may not be audible to the Malay native speakers. The results supported the predictions made by PAM Single-Category (SC), as the Hausa sounds contrasts are judged by the Malay native speakers as equally good or poor tokens of the only bilabial or alveolar stop category found in Malay. The two Hausa implosive sounds are assimilated to the Malay voiced plosives, which resulted in poor discriminations. The same instances were reported by Schmidt (1996), as Korean native speakers found it very difficult to discriminate /ϴ-ϑ/, /ʃ-ʃ/, /p-b/, and /f-v/ contrasts in English as a result of single-category assimilation to Korean phonemes.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the discrimination of the stops revealed that the Malay native speakers were able to discriminate most of the sounds contrasts but faced substantial problems in the perception of plosives-implosives. The Hausa native speakers, on the other hand, successfully discriminated all the implosives-plosives contrasts but they could not distinguish the labial fricatives and stops in Malay. The alternating pattern in the result of the two respondent groups indicated that the /ɓ-b/ contrast was difficult for the naïve Malay group while the bilabial stop and labio-dental fricative was difficult for the Hausa group despite not being completely naïve to these pairs of contrasts as the Hausa group has some exposure to Malay and are also second language learners of English where these segments are quite frequently encountered. Although the study did not examine the effect of proficiency in English on the performance of the subjects in the discrimination task, the contribution from proficiency in English seems to be minimal as the performance of the Hausa group was hovering slightly above the chance level.

This study also showed that the non-native perception model was successful in the prediction and interpretation of most of the perceptual difficulties encountered by the Malay and Hausa native speakers in the perception of stops and fricatives. The Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) predicts the success of adults’ monolinguals ability to discriminate unfamiliar foreign contrasts with little or no experience to the target language. The results of the analysis of the perception task pointed out that both the native speakers have problems in perceiving non-native contrasts as the non-native segment is often assimilated to the nearest native category that exist. In the case of implosives, Malay subjects considered them as members of the plosive stops found in Malay. As for the Hausa subjects, the voiced labio-dental fricative, /v/ was probably assimilated to the voiced bilabial stop, /b/ in Hausa.
However, it is not clear what happens with /p/ and /f/ as both phonemes are absent in Hausa. Although it was not tested directly in this study, it is possible that both segments were considered as members of the bilabial fricative /φ/ which exists in Hausa. Future studies can test this directly to examine the extent to which instances of /p/ and /f/ are considered good examplars of /φ/ in Hausa. Future studies should also explore whether performance in the task can be improved with directed attention to the plosive-implosive contrast in Hausa as well as the dental-bilabial contrast in Malay and English. These future directions of studies will provide important suggestions on how to ensure successful learning of these contrasts by second language learners.

REFERENCES


EXPLORING THE ADOPTION AND PRACTICE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

Oberiri Destiny Apuke and Livinus Jesse Ayih

Department of Communication, Taraba State University, Nigeria
E-mail: aupukedestiny@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Despite the numerous advantages reported as regards citizen journalism in developing countries, little has been documented on its adoption and practice in rural developing communities. This study, is anchored on democratic participant media theory. A qualitative research design was adopted and interviews were conducted among 40 participants within three large rural developing communities in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. The findings confirmed that a large proportion of the rural dwellers were not aware of the term citizen journalism, and only a few of them participated fully in the practice of citizen journalism. The results establish that citizen journalism practice is still very minimal in the rural areas of Nigeria, due to poverty, power failure, their attitude, religious upbringing, customs, high level of illiteracy, high internet subscription and slow speed. Nonetheless, it was found that citizen journalism provides an avenue for community dwellers to gather and disseminate messages with immediacy, assists in exposing the excesses of government officials, and promotes a healthy lifestyle in community settings. It is relevant to encourage citizen journalism practice in rural areas, and further studies could continue to explore the issues affecting the adoption and practice of citizen journalism in developing countries.

Keywords: Citizen journalism, community, Nigeria, democratic participant media theory, rural dwellers.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
The development of the Internet and other new technology devices has resulted in a new course where people cover events and distribute content easily and directly. Therefore, the advent of the new media has introduced the concept of citizen journalism, which is the act of allowing ordinary individuals to play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information to the public. By implication, a common citizen is involved in citizen journalism when he takes the task of gathering news and spreading it using the new media (Salawu, 2011). Atton (2009) provides a nuanced definition of citizen journalism, describing it as a journalism that is produced not by professionals but by those outside mainstream media organizations; that is, amateur media producers who typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists; they write and report from their position as citizens, as members of communities, as activists, or as fans. Therefore, the development of blogs, mobile devices, social networks, micro-blogging and other digital tools has permitted people to publish their own stories and cover their own communities, in turn reducing the monopoly of information gathering and dispersal from the conventional media to a more interactive media environment (Tsegyu, 2016).

Globally, research has confirmed the effectiveness of citizen journalism since through the availability of technology, citizens often can report breaking news more quickly than traditional media reporters. Notable examples of citizen journalism reporting of major world
events are, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the 2013 protests in Turkey, the Euromaidan events in Ukraine, and Syrian Civil War and the 2014 Ferguson unrest (Gilardi, 2016). Specifically, in Nigeria, citizen journalism played a substantial role in the nationwide protest against fuel subsidy removal in 2012 (Odii, 2013). This indicates the relevance of citizen journalism in our contemporary times (Noor, 2017). Despite the numerous advantages reported as regards citizen journalism in developing countries, little has been documented on its adoption and practice in rural developing communities. It has been observed that the media in developing countries do not give adequate coverage to the rural areas, and the manner the media perceive rural news shows that the rural areas are alarmingly neglected (Ate and Ikerodah, 2012). For example, Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) stated that in Nigeria the mass media has over the years, solely neglected the rural areas and writes from the standpoint of an urban dweller's world. This suggests that the ills of the rural areas, the difficulties of life there, and their burning sense of grievance are seldom seriously conveyed. How then do the rural dwellers find ways to disseminate and get information since the Nigerian press seems to neglect them?

No doubt, the role of citizen journalism cannot be ruled out in the case of the rural dwellers since citizen journalism is based upon public citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information. There is therefore a need for a study that demonstrates how these neglected rural citizens adopt citizen journalism to foster information dissemination which is the objective of the current study. The outcomes of this study are beneficial to the eclectic growing body of studies on alternative, participatory, community and citizen journalism, and have a wider significance not only in Nigeria but across the continent of Africa.

**Aim and objectives**
The main thrust of this study is to ascertain the prospects and constraints of citizen journalism practice in rural communities in Nigeria. To accomplish this purpose, this paper is guided by the following objectives:

- To confirm whether rural dwellers entirely accept and participate in the exercise of citizen journalism.
- To determine the prospects of citizen journalism in rural communities.
- To find out the constraints of adopting citizen journalism in rural communities.
- To outline the forms of citizen journalism that manifest in rural communities.
- To highlight ways in which citizen journalism practice could be better encouraged in rural communities.

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
The adoption and practice of citizen journalism have been felt both in the western part of the world and in Africa. In the western context, Rodriguez (2000) argues that independent media enable “ordinary” citizens to become politically empowered. This means that when people create their own media, they are better able to represent themselves and their communities. She sees these “citizens’ media” as projects of self-education. The author described “citizens” as those members of society who “actively participate in actions that reshape their own identities, the identities of others, and their social environment, [through which] they produce power” (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 19). For example, Rodriguez (2000) reports that the
production of a video by striking women workers in a Colombian maternity clinic demonstrates how citizen journalism helps in the shifting power roles that facilitate a creative collective dynamic that challenges institutionalized leadership roles (Rodriguez, 2001). According to Atton (2009), an alternative or citizen journalism may serve specific communities and enable participation by those communities in media production. The same author highlighted the different manifestations of citizen journalism in different contexts from natural disasters, political violence or organised armature and community practices which is the case in the current study. Similar research conducted in the western region of the world demonstrates that since its advent the citizen journalism brand has been tested in several places and situation; for example, the 2004 Indonesian Boxing Day Tsunami, bombing that took place in London, Virginia Tech disasters where citizens massively engaged in journalistic work of snapping photographs, text and voice messages which were used to report such events to them. Further examples are the Arab Spring, the 2013 military takeover of power in Egypt and its protest, and the Occupy Wall Street movement (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, and Tsang, 2014). In this entire scenario, the ordinary citizens collected information, which included on-the-spot action pictures and uploaded to the internet for the world’s consumption.

In the African context, most especially Nigeria, studies on citizen journalism have been predominantly carried out on urban dwellers. For instance, Salawu (2011:194) observed that citizen journalism has profound implications for the blossoming of democracy. This supports Bowman and Willis (2003) that listed the benefits of citizen journalism to include an increased trust in media, shared responsibility in informing democracy, and a better journalism, etc. Also, Apeverga (2010) in Idoko (2012) carried out a study on the impact of citizen journalism in Nigeria. The study revealed that citizen journalism has impacted a lot on the lives of Nigerians, and that everyone is now a reporter and has the right to air out his view without running to a media house. However, the findings of the same study establish that people most times do not get the true picture of a story before posting it on the internet just because they want to be the first to post about a particular happening. Furthermore, Okoro et al. (2013) discovered that citizen journalism is emerging as a powerful phenomenon across Nigeria. This view is concretized by Dare (2011) who found that Sahara Reporters, a citizen journalists’ website was rated by 86 of the 120 respondents as a serious source of breaking news. This proposes that due to its interactivity and ability to present news in split seconds, citizen journalism has presented a severe challenge to the mainstream media in Nigeria; it has broadened people’s access to a variety of news, during emergencies.

Consequently, some scholars maintained that citizen journalism is a serious sort of journalism that eradicates the top-down monopolistic communication. Annotating on the benefits of citizen journalism, Alemoh (2013) observed that most of the issues the mainstream media leave out, the citizen journalist easily captures. Events that occur in distant places are now published directly by citizen journalists, making the public mindful of certain matters that happen around them. For example, the plane crash of the former and the late Governor of Taraba state of Nigeria Governor Danbaba Danfulani Suntai that occurred on 25 October 2012 was reported instantly by citizen journalists/eyewitnesses; however, it took about 24 hours for the mainstream media houses in Nigeria to report the same story. Furthermore, most of the events of the Boko Haram bomb blast are reported instantly by citizen journalists accompanied by photographs of the incident even before the mainstream media stations arrive at the bomb attack scenes. This suggests that citizen journalism
provides an avenue for both pros and novices in the origination and airing of news content to the receiving public/audience. It has made journalism more democratic and participatory as opposed to the mainstream monopolistic media production. Some other interesting aspect of citizen journalism is its speed in delivery of the message. It delivers messages in a flash like the focal ratio of light and this is possible due to its lack of gatekeeping. It, therefore, has immediate feedback from the audience as in the case of Facebook comments and liking. That is the reason why many people call citizen journalism “we media” because of the content made by the people, and for the people.

However, some other authors claim that due to its lack of credibility and authenticity of its content it is endangering the societal information cycle. In respect of this, Maher (2005) observed that the effectiveness of citizen journalism has been debunked by the mainstream media due to its lack of objectivity. Consequently, some journalists and media houses view citizen journalism with doubt and uncertainty, believing that journalism practice is intended for trained journalists who understand the objectivity and balance as well as the whole canons of journalism. Supporting this view, Mgbejume (2008) asserts that a journalist has to undergo training before he is equipped to publish effectively; he likened an untrained journalist to a madman left with a gun who can shoot at will without control which leads to disaster. As far as this writer is concerned, before one publishes news online, he ought to receive journalistic training in order to become familiarized with the moral philosophy of the profession. In addition, Educause Learning Initiative (2007) postulates that by permitting anyone to collect and broadcast the message to the public, citizen journalism practice will be more of personal interest, myopic view and as well cultivate new media community of similar interests. However, via Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter citizen journalists have disseminated breakthrough information on political oppression, corruption and economic theft in the society and the world at large.

Substantiating the criticism on citizen journalism, Dare (2011) reported that only 33 respondents of the 120 surveyed trusted Sahara reporters. This suggests that some Nigerians do not believe stories from citizen journalists because they spread falsehood. In the same manner, Apuke (2016) commented that the issue affecting citizen journalism in Nigeria is its lack of gatekeepers or editors to filter the information before it gets to the public. This suggests that citizen journalism in Nigeria might be full of duplication, malpractices, and wrong misleading information. Most of the news and information passed using citizen journalism might not be genuine; they could be propaganda that is aimed at either annoying or causing anger, promoting injustice or even creating enmity among the targeted audience. This view is consistent with Okoro et al. (2013) who argue that citizen journalism fuels civil unrest, political instability, and ethnoreligious crisis. In this regard, Aligwe and Nwafor (2017) in an empirical study that focused on Citizen Journalism and the coverage of the 2015 General Elections in South-East Nigeria identified a lack of professionalism, credibility question, over-sensationalism, the anonymity of sources and difficulty in regulation as some of the major weaknesses of the practice.

The problem affecting the effectiveness of citizen journalism in Nigeria has also been outlined by some authors. For example, Idoko (2012) discovered the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria to include; computer illiteracy, difficulty in accessing the internet and high price of ‘surfing’ the net. This means that the high cost of internet subscription impedes the effectiveness of citizen journalism in Nigeria. Due to the lack of free internet service, anyone who desires to post any event online must buy “data” which is expensive to some due
to the economic situation. Even so, the author found out the benefits of citizen journalism cannot be cast out. These include wider coverage of events, urgency in media reports and encouragement of information and communication technology (ICT) in the country. Another impediment to citizen journalism in Nigeria is the high level of illiteracy in the country. According to the World Development Indicators (2010) reports, the adult literacy level in Nigeria is 60%. This means that 40% of the population (about 60 million people in Nigeria) is excluded from citizen journalism and all other opportunities for audience participation that may require basic literacy (UNDP, 2010). This is clearly dangerous to the health of the nation’s democracy and a strong bane to citizen journalism in Nigeria. Aligwe and Nwafor (2017) found uneven penetration, illiteracy, constant power failure, endemic poverty and systemic corruption as the major threats affecting the effectiveness of citizen journalism in Nigeria. They recommended more efforts to enhance even penetration of ICTs in the country and address the issue of systemic corruption and endemic poverty, as these have continually constituted a major setback to every aspect of her development.

**Theoretical framework**

This paper, which is anchored on the democratic participant media theory examines the role citizens play in gathering and disseminating information in a society.

**Democratic participant media theory**

The democratic participant media theory was developed by Dennis McQuail during the 80’s. According to Folarin (1998), the theory discards the top-down communication system that involves professionals and commercially driven operators who hijack the media for their selfish interest, but agitate for pluralizing and democratize form of access and production of media contents. The theory advocates that media content generation, production, and dissemination should be done by one person to another instead of concentrating on particular top groups. It calls for the media to be a medium of the people, for the people and by the people rather than a medium in the hands of a few monopolistic groups. Ojobor (2002) states that this theory advocates for more horizontal rather than vertical (top-down) communication due to the continued commercialization and monopolization of the media stations as well as centralism of public broadcast stations. Corroborating this view, McQuail (1987) noted that one of the basic principles of the theory is that “individual citizens and minority groups have rights to access the media (rights to communicate) and rights to be served by the media according to their own determination of need. Therefore, this theory advocates for the liberalization of the media for the common good of the people it is meant to serve. It suggests that the people should have free access to the means of communication as against the monopolistic and rigid structure of traditional mass media. This theory is applicable to this current research because it focuses on the citizens’ participation in information gathering and dissemination. Thus, the theory supports participatory, citizen and alternative journalism, which this present work attempts to investigate in the Nigerian context.

From the literature reviewed, it could be deduced that the issue of citizen journalism in Nigeria has been little studied. Even though the knowledge of its practice seems to be prevalent among some citizens, the literature is growing. It was also observed that most of the reviewed papers are still far from adequate due to their surface technique of examining the subject matter. Most of the studies depended on a survey questionnaire method with a strong focus on understanding the phenomenon of citizen journalism from mostly the
professional media personnel, and urban dwellers with little emphasis on the rural public/dwellers (Odii, 2013). It is, therefore, worthwhile to study the phenomenon of citizen journalism through the rural dwellers’ lens since it is mostly referred to a journalism for the common man/citizen or community. This current study will, therefore, contribute to the body of knowledge by researching (using an interview method) citizen journalism practice among the rural dwellers and community. It will attempt to understand the prospects and constraints of citizen journalism practice in rural communities of a developing country such as Nigeria. To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, this paper is one of the first to make such an attempt. Therefore, the qualitative rich data derived from the interview will increase and contribute to the growing literature on the citizen or participatory journalism.

METHODS

Study design

This study made use of the qualitative research design following the phenomenological approach described by Braun and Clarke (2013). Interviews were conducted among 40 conveniently selected participants. The interview technique was used because few studies exist that explicate the phenomenon of citizen journalism in Nigeria. Thus, a method allowing for sufficient freedom and depth of probing was needed. This method has been shown to permit participants to describe their feelings in their own words and new themes could be followed up as they emerged (Dogari, Apuke, & Shadrach, 2018). It was also felt necessary to develop a context-based understanding as regards citizen journalism practice in the rural areas of Nigeria. In keeping with the general practice of qualitative research, the participants were promised and given anonymity in order to encourage them to discuss pertinent issues in depth and detail (Kontagora, Watts, & Allsop, 2018). For example, the participants were coded as participant 1, 2 3…40.

Participants and sampling

The study took place in three communities in the north-eastern region of Nigeria (i.e. Ardo Kola in Taraba state, Maiha in Adamawa state and Kaltungo in Gombe state). For clarification, a community in this study refers to either a small or large group of people that has something in common, such as norms, religion, values, and identity, and as well share a sense of place that is situated in a given geographical area such as a town. Therefore, the communities used in this study were selected based on convenience and proximity to the researchers. Additionally, it has been observed that technological development within this region is growing but very little research in the implementation of (ICT) has been undertaken (Apuke and Apollos, 2017; Poushter, 2016). Since the main aim of this study was to explore citizen journalism practice in rural communities, the authors made sure selected participants understood what citizen or participatory journalism is, because it was observed that most of the rural dwellers do not understand the term citizen or participatory journalism, so the authors had to explain what it meant in their local dialect through an interpreter. After the explanation, the authors asked if they practice what has been explained, those who then acknowledge that they practice citizen journalism were selected for this study and this amounted to about 40 participants across the three communities. So basically, those who use various forms of new media and acknowledge its usage for participatory journalism were
selected. Of the 40 participants, (n=22) were male and (n=18) were female. In terms of age range, (n=23) were between the ages of 18-29 and (n=16) were 30 and above. With respect to educational background, (n=18) had a formal education while (n=22) had no formal education but could still communicate in English.

Figure 1: North East Nigeria

**Data collection procedure**

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and all interviews were recorded. The interviews were conducted in the early months of 2017 and lasted for approximately 8 weeks. The questions in the interview script were adapted from established research (i.e., Alemoh, 2013; Aligwe and Nwafor, 2017; Okoro et al., 2013; Salawu, 2011) with appropriate revisions and modifications to suit into the context of this study. Each interview lasted for about 20-60 minutes to complete and was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Data analysis**

To examine the qualitative data received from the interview sessions. The six thematic data analysis steps identified by Braun and Clarke (2013) were employed. These entail the researchers transcribing the recorded interviews; rereading the transcriptions to identify emerging themes from the recorded data; reviewing the themes; defining the themes; naming the themes, and lastly writing the outcomes. The purpose of using thematic analysis is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed.

**Results and discussion**

The results section has been organised into five themes. The first demonstrates the acceptance and participation in the practice of citizen journalism among rural dwellers. The
second highlights the prospects of citizen journalism in rural communities of Nigeria. The third demonstrates the constraints of adopting citizen journalism in rural communities of Nigeria. The fourth establishes the forms of citizen journalism that manifest among the rural community dwellers, and finally, the fifth highlights the ways in which citizen journalism practice could be better encouraged among rural community dwellers in Nigeria.

The reception and participation in citizen journalism among rural dwellers

In response to the first question about the participants’ acceptance and participation in the exercise of citizen journalism, it was found a large proportion of the rural dwellers were not aware of the term citizen journalism even though they adopted and practiced it. In this regard, the entire participants support citizen journalism practice, but only a few of them participated fully in the practice of citizen journalism. This indicates a minimum full participation of citizen journalism practice in the sampled areas. In this respect, one of the interviewees remarked:

Although we have a slower technological advancement, the advancement of citizen journalism has been felt in our area. But, many of us do not practice citizen journalism and prefer to use our devices to communicate with friends than post breaking news and events [Participant_1].

Another participant stated that:

At some time, I do engage in citizen journalism practice. I recall a time when a woman gave birth in the street due to lack of adequate medical facility in my community. I immediately captured the event and posted it online so as to draw humanitarian responses. Nevertheless, I do not frequently partake in citizen journalism [Participant_6].

Supporting this view, a participant claimed that:

I am fully cognizant of how citizen journalism works and I completely accept its practice, but this is not fully encouraged and acknowledged in my community. We have this culture of people minding their business which in turn discourages me sometimes from posting certain issues that happen in my community [Participant_18].

Only a few participants mentioned that they fully partake in the practice of citizen journalism. In this respect, a participant acknowledging to be a citizen journalist affirmed that:

Citizen journalism or participatory journalism is indeed a blessing to us because it has permitted me to share my viewpoint with heterogeneous people in my community and beyond. I will boldly say that I frequently engage in citizen journalism and this has been helpful to my audience. For example, there was a period where rape cases in my community were the order of the day. I took it upon myself to research into the issues,
got live photos and footages of those caught in the act and posted them so as to create more awareness [Participant_15].

In line with this notion, one of the interviewees commented that:

I have been practicing citizen journalism for about 5 years now and I don’t regret this practice or its notion. The practice has enabled me to inform a couple of people on the dangers of certain issues in our community and beyond [Participant_22].

Additionally, it was found that the few participants who fully practice citizen journalism do so predominantly through their mobile devices using social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Overall, the findings suggest that a large proportion of the rural dwellers were not aware of the term citizen journalism, yet they adopt and practice it, but the practice is low. These results contrast studies which revealed that citizen journalism has impacted a lot on the lives of Nigerian people and that everyone is now a reporter and has the right to air out his view without running to a media house (Apeverga, 2010; Idoko, 2012). The implication of this current study is that although citizen journalism has permitted an easy dissemination of stories in split seconds, its full practice has not yet been acknowledged in the grassroots areas of Nigeria and only a few people are willing to partake in the practice of citizen journalism. This outcome reflects the findings of a research which reported that in Nigeria, citizen journalism is gradually developing (Dare, 2011). The factors discouraging these participants as regards the full practice of citizen journalism will be outlined in the subsequent themes.

The prospects of citizen journalism in rural communities of Nigeria

The entire interviewed participants acknowledged that the prospects of citizen journalism in their community are inevitable. They believed that citizen journalism has provided an avenue for anyone willing to gather and disseminate messages to the rural dwellers and beyond. It has democratised the distribution of information as anyone could instantly report events in their community. The participants generally held the view that the fastness in the dissemination of messages also makes citizen journalism an interesting one. It delivers messages in a flash like the speed of light which in turn attracts an instant reply from the community dwellers. This notion supports the theoretical framework (Democratic participant media theory) of this study which advocates that people should have free access to the means of communication as against the monopolistic and rigid structure of traditional mass media (McQuail, 1987; Ojobor, 2002). In this regard, one of the rural community dwellers commented that:

The use of citizen journalism has helped some of us expose the ills of government in our community. The issues of lack of basic amenities have been constantly reported by some in our community and neighbouring villages. There are a lot of issues being neglected by the mainstream media that volunteered community citizen journalist report and this has made some government officials come to our aid [Participant_20].
In line with these, a considerable amount (n=31) of the interviewed rural dwellers held the notion that citizen journalism and the advent of the new media has assisted them to expose the excesses of government officials in their rural communities. They stated instances whereby government approved projects in the communities and the rural district head embezzled such money. When such cases are reported to the mainstream media, they are rarely aired. However, with the help of information communication gadgets community dwellers have been able to post such issues on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, which in turn have attracted the attention of the government to act and remedy the situation. This has brought about developments in their community. One of the interviewed community dwellers reports:

I recall a time when the government approved the renovation of our community high school. The top officials in our community neglected the project and embezzled the money. This situation attracted the community’s attention and some of us posted the pictures of the debilitated school, which in turn made the government arrest the officials that embezzled our community allocation. Within two months the government was able to look for capable hands that renovated our high school [Participant_40].

The participants also held the notion that their community which is situated in the north-eastern part of Nigeria has witnessed some attacks from Boko Haram, which is not immediately reported by the mainstream media. However, some of them have been able to report instantly the occurrence of a bomb blast and attacks before any media organizations arrive at the scene. This has enabled them to report first-hand information that could attract a humanitarian response. They believed that the mainstream media could alter the reports to favour the government in power. In line with this notion, one of the participants alleges that:

There was a time when our community was attacked and I was an eyewitness. The mainstream media reported that the attack was not a serious one and there should not be much panicking, however, the incident was a serious one that took the lives of many of our community dwellers. Some of us were able to capture the accurate event and post via various social media platforms which in turn attracted the attention of the United States government. As I speak, we now have a barracks in our community and this has reduced the constant attack on us [Participant_38].

Most of the interviewed rural dwellers perceived that the advent of citizen journalism has enhanced their choice of political candidates. Through the posting of a candidate’s achievement and lapses by some of the community dwellers, they have been sensitized to the appropriate candidates that could move their community to greater heights. This suggests that citizen journalism promotes grassroots mobilization. In this respect, a community interviewed participant commented that:

Some of our politicians who are representing us in the National Assembly have been exposed through the help of some willing citizen journalist in our community. For example, in many occasions I have posted the underachievement of some of our so-called political leaders. As far as I am concerned, citizen journalism has assisted us to
expose some of these politicians and sensitised us on an appropriate candidate to select [Participant_20].

Another benefit of citizen journalism highlighted by the interviewed rural community dwellers is in the aspect of health and hygiene promotion. Most of them pointed out that citizen journalism has helped them to keep hygiene and avoid certain practices. For example, during the outbreak of the Ebola and Bird flu virus, the efforts of some of the community dwellers assisted most of them to stay on guard so as to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, they also claimed that through various posts online they have been able to grasp the dangers of HIV and AIDS and have attempted to visit the community health care centre which in turn has reduced the rate of its spread among some of the rural dwellers. Although some of them are not learned, the pictures and videos posted by some learned ones have assisted them to understand the dangers of HIV, Bird Flu, and Ebola. This suggests that citizen journalism's impact could also be felt by both educated and non-educated. Therefore, it should highly be recommended among rural dwellers as they are more prone and vulnerable to diseases. In addition, it was found that in contrast to research finding which claims that lack of credibility and authenticity of citizen journalism content is endangering the societal information cycle (Maher 2005), the participants believe that the content of citizen journalists is credible as it reports first-hand information, unlike the filtered mainstream media information.

The authors also asked the few rural dwellers that fully engage in citizen journalism to state the ways in which they involve other members of the community, particularly those who do not engage with the new media. In response to this, the participants claim they regularly attempt to engage other rural dwellers who do not have the means of sharing information online by getting vital information from them and requesting them to be a source of information. They expressed that although these ones do not have the means to share information, the word of mouth (WOM) has been essential in assisting and informing them on messages they should disseminate through their technological devices. Some of the participants stated that they normally go to market places where many rural dwellers who do not engage with technological gadgets are found and from there, they get vital information on situations happening in their community.

Generally, the implication of the above comments suggests that citizen journalism has provided an avenue for community dwellers to gather and disseminate messages to their fellow rural dwellers and beyond. This implies that instead of them waiting for the mainstream media, some of them have been able to inform the public of their aspirations and yearning which in turn has brought some development in the community as well as attracted humanitarian response. The outcome of the above comments also suggests that citizen journalism has assisted rural community dwellers to expose the excesses of government officials in their communities, which in turn has enhanced their choice of political candidates. With respect to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle in the community settings, it could be deduced that citizen journalism has helped some of the community members to keep hygiene and avoid certain practices. For instance, during outbreaks such as Ebola and Bird flu virus, community dwellers have been sensitised appropriately. Additionally, their knowledge of HIV and AIDS has also been improved due to their exposure to the videos and photos that demonstrate the dangers of HIV and AIDs, suggesting that videos and photo features of citizen journalism is very helpful to rural dwellers as most of them seem not to be
learned. The outcome of this study is consistent with Alemoh’s (2013) observation which advocates that most of the issues the mainstream media leave out, the citizen journalist easily captures. Events that occur in distant places are now published directly by citizen journalists, making the public mindful of certain matters that happen around them. In addition, Educause Learning Initiative (2007) postulates that through Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter citizen journalists have disseminated breakthrough information on political oppression, corruption and economic theft in the society and the world at large.

The constraints of adopting and practicing citizen journalism in rural communities

The interviewees were asked to outline some of the issues confronting the actualization of citizen journalism practice in their community. A large proportion of the participants reported poverty and power failure as one of the major constraints to the effectiveness of citizen journalism. This notion was also shared by Aligwe and Nwafor (2017) who found that uneven penetration, illiteracy, constant power failure, endemic poverty and systemic corruption as the major threats affecting the effectiveness of citizen journalism in Nigeria. In addition, the participants in this current study also pointed out to the attitude, religious upbringing and customs of some of the community dwellers. For example, most of the married women in the community are confined to their homes due to the religious rules and this affects them from covering events that could assist the public. Furthermore, the custom of not allowing certain events (such as accident scene, rape cases, murder cases, etc.) to the snapped affects the effectiveness of citizen journalism in rural areas. In respect to this view, one of the interviewed participants stated that:

Poverty and power failure affect most of us from getting good information communication gadgets and even if we do, there is no constant electricity to keep them charged. For the past six weeks a rainstorm dropped some electric pole wires in our community, resulting in the shutting down of our cell phones and other technological gadgets [Participant_25].

Other challenges that discourage the adoption and practice of citizen journalism was the high level of illiteracy among the rural dwellers. Although some of them engage in citizen journalism, most of them are discouraged due to lack of adequate knowledge to operate modern technological devices. In line with this, one of the participants commented that:

The level of illiteracy in our community is so much that most people don’t even wish to own a technological device; they’d rather talk about practicing citizen journalism. Although some of the community dwellers might be willing to partake in citizen journalism, they are highly discouraged because they cannot read nor write, neither are they acquainted with modern technological devices [Participant_6].

Supporting this point of view, another rural dweller stated that:

I own a smartphone and sometimes chat with it, but I lack adequate knowledge that will enable me to construct better sentences that I could use along the pictures I wish
to upload to the public and this sometimes discourages me from frequent reporting of events that could assist my community [Participant_12].

The participants also pointed out to the issue of high internet subscription and slow speed in the rural areas as a factor discouraging them to fully harness the effectiveness of citizen journalism. Most of the participants claimed that they run out of data subscription and have only access to 2G networks. These findings seem to be a problem that also extends to the urban areas of Nigeria; however, it is most glaring in the rural areas because the rural dwellers report to have slower internet services compared to urban cities. In a related study carried out in an urban centre in Nigeria, Idoko (2012) discovered the challenges of citizen journalism include; computer illiteracy, difficulty in accessing the internet and high price of ‘surfing’ the net. This suggests that the high cost of internet subscription impedes the effectiveness of citizen journalism in both rural and urban areas of Nigeria. Therefore, due to the lack of free internet service, anyone who desires to post any event online must buy “data” which is expensive to some due to the economic situation.

Generally, it could be inferred from the above comments that poverty and power failure, the attitude, religious upbringing and customs, high level of illiteracy, high internet subscription and slow speed in the rural areas are factors discouraging the adoption and practice of citizen journalism in rural areas of Nigeria. In line with this, the participants were asked for comments on the ways in which citizen journalism could be promoted and encouraged in their community and beyond.

**The forms of citizen journalism that manifest among the rural community dwellers**

The participants were asked how they manage to practice citizen journalism, even though they are faced with challenges due to material deprivation which has been defined as the inability to afford basic resources and services. A large proportion of the respondents remarked that when they are out of internet subscription, they make efforts to reach other community members who have technological gadgets and inform them of certain information so they could post on their behalf. As regards slow internet access, the participants mentioned that they sometimes wait to post information at night when the network is better. They acknowledge this could affect the immediacy of citizen journalism; nevertheless, this technique has been helpful to them. In addition, the participants who do not have adequate knowledge on the usage of technological devices admitted that they meet other people to assist them operate their phones so they could post vital information. They reported that besides using social networking sites, they also use SMS to disseminate vital information among their community members because it is cheaper. The participants mentioned two types of citizen journalism they engaged in; the opportunistic and planned types. The opportunistic type happens when a bystander or citizen happens to be in the right place at the right time; for example, at the site of a tragedy that has just happened and they witness the incident unfolding before them and capture it through film, photos or write about the event. Whilst the other type of citizen journalist is somebody who has purposely placed themselves at the scene in order to capture an event as it unfolds to communicate this to the rest of the world. In this regard, the participants remarked that the opportunistic type is the more common form of citizen journalism among them.
Ways in which citizen journalism practice could be better encouraged among rural community dwellers

The majority of the interviewed rural dwellers suggest that government agencies make development a priority. They believe doing so will improve the living condition of those in the rural areas, which in turn, encourages the use of technological devices that foster citizen journalism. The participants also called on the government to improve power supply in their community. It was observed that most transformers are no longer functioning and some areas have not seen electricity for a long while, thereby deterring the effectiveness of community and citizen journalism. Most of the participants also reported that more orientation as regards the essence of citizen journalism is needed in the rural areas as some of the rural dwellers might not be even conversant with its practices. One of the participants remarked that:

I believe if the government provides gadgets and improves our skills; it will encourage us to buy gadgets that will enable us to effectively carry out citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is only effective when you have the technological tool to broadcast breaking news and events [Participant_28].

Another participant commented that:

In my ward, there are only few people that are aware of citizen journalism or even have a gadget that could facilitate its practice. Thus, I strongly recommend orientation [Participant_21].

The participants also recommended that good schools be set up in rural areas just like urban areas, as most of the learned people in their community were opportune to school outside. Due to the lack of good education, many people are not encouraged to study, thereby resulting in a high rate of illiteracy which in turn discourages the adoption and practice of citizen journalism. So, they believe when the level of illiteracy among the rural dwellers is reduced to the barest minimum, it will encourage citizen journalism as many will have the knowledge to operate modern technological devices. The participants also recommended that the issue of high internet subscription and slow speed be tackled with urgency so as to encourage rural dwellers to partake in effective community and citizen journalism. Internet service providers should reduce the cost of their subscription and extend a 4G network to rural areas so as to improve the internet speed, which in turn might encourage citizen journalism.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study, which is anchored on democratic participant theory, aimed at increasing our understanding of citizen journalism practice, with a focus on rural dwellers, which has been little studied. The findings of this study suggest that a large proportion of the rural community dwellers in Nigeria are not aware of the term citizen journalism, but few participated fully in the practice of citizen journalism, and many of them support citizen journalism practice. The few participants who fully practice citizen journalism do so predominantly through their mobile devices using social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The possible issues that discourage the full adoption and practice of citizen journalism in rural areas are poverty, power failure, their attitude, religious
upbringing and customs, high level of illiteracy, high internet subscription and slow speed. These issues could be reduced if the government makes efforts to improve power supply in their community. Orientation as regards the essence of citizen journalism is also required to improve the understanding of rural dwellers. Service providers should reduce the cost of their subscription and improve their network speed to 4G as obtainable in developed areas so as to encourage citizen journalism among rural dwellers.

Although these rural dwellers face some challenges, they still strive to practice citizen journalism. For example, when they are out of internet subscription, they make efforts to reach other community members who have technological gadgets and share certain information with them, so they could post on their behalf. In respect to slow internet access, some of them wait to post information at night when the network is better. This could affect the immediacy of citizen journalism, nevertheless, this technique has been helpful to them.

As regards inadequate knowledge among rural community dwellers who practice citizen journalism, it has been shown that those who do not have adequate knowledge on the usage of technological devices could meet other people to assist them operate their phone so they could post vital information. This suggests that a person must not be learned before he or she could partake in citizen journalism. Besides using social networking sites, rural citizen journal could also be achieved through the use of SMS because it is cheaper to disseminate vital information among community members. The two predominant types of citizen journalism as demonstrated in this study are the opportunistic and planned types. Of the two, opportunistic or impromptu citizen journalism is more common in the North eastern part of Nigeria. These points to fresh ways of conceptualising citizen journalism.

Conclusively, it could be seen that although the acceptance of citizen journalism is still minimal in rural areas of Nigeria, its prospect is inevitable. This implies that citizen journalism provides an avenue for community dwellers to gather and disseminate messages to their fellow rural dwellers with immediacy, and this notion supports the democratic participant media theory which advocates that people should have free access to the means of communication as against the monopolies and rigid structure of traditional mass media (McQuail, 1987; Ojobor, 2002). Citizen journalism encourages grassroots mobilization. It also assists in exposing the excesses of government officials in rural communities, which in turn enhances their choice of political candidates. It promotes a healthy lifestyle in the community settings, most especially during outbreaks of viruses. Therefore, it is pertinent to encourage citizen journalism practice in rural areas, and further studies could explore more issues confronting rural dwellers as regards the adoption and practice of citizen journalism in developing countries.

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POLITENESS IN LIBYAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS’ E-MAIL REQUESTS TOWARDS LECTURERS

Ergaya Alsout¹ and Mohsen Khedri²*
¹Department of English Language & Translation Studies, Sebha University, Libya
²Faculty of Language Studies, Sohar, University, Sohar, Oman
E-mail: rogyalibya@gmail.com¹; mkhedri@su.edu.om²

ABSTRACT
This study aimed to explore the politeness phenomenon in Libyan postgraduate students’ e-mail requests to their lecturers based at four top-ranked Malaysian universities: University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, and Universiti Utara Malaysia. The data consisted of 109 e-mail requests to faculty written by 20 Libyan postgraduate students who were studying in Malaysia. The data was analyzed by adopting Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory which is considered as a plausible analytical framework to identify politeness strategies. The research method and design used in this study was essentially qualitative approach. The findings of the current study revealed that the Libyan postgraduate students applied mostly negative politeness strategies more than the other politeness strategies. This study argues that these e-mails which featuring a high level of directness, displayed a fundamental inadequacy in the use of politeness strategies, thus creating potentially a higher chance of pragmatic failure.

Keywords: E-mails, lecturers, Libyan postgraduate students, politeness strategies, requests

INTRODUCTION
In this study, the construct investigated is the e-mail of request. Requesting speech acts are one of the students’ main communicative purposes for using e-mail as they go about their academic business, to obtain feedback, to make appointments, to ask for extensions of time for assignment submission, etc. A request can be defined as a direct speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to perform an action or provide information that is for the limited interest of the speaker (Trosborg, 1995). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a request is one of the most face-threatening forms of speech act, especially in a student-lecturer context. This is because students who are in a low-power position are forced to make impositions on lecturers who have the power of control (Brown & Gilman, 1960). An ill-formed request can threaten and impose more heavily on a lecturer’s face. If the speech is produced with inappropriate linguistic structures and modifications, it might cause pragmatic failure between students and lecturers. As a result, there is usually a need for requesters to mitigate their message. To mitigate successfully, students have to use different politeness strategies types (positive, negative, bald on-record, and off-record) to reach their communicative goal.

Politeness plays an important role in interactions between interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. However, misunderstanding and deviation from social conventions in its use can be expected. In student-lecturer communication, politeness is an important issue, particularly in the context in which the current research is framed, because the interlocutors come from different cultures in situations where the English language is used as the lingua
franca. For this reason, students need to be aware of politeness norms so that they can compose appropriate e-mails. Students should know how to compose an appropriate e-mail in order to accomplish their goals and also to be aware of the impact of their e-mails upon their lecturers. To gain a better understanding of potential issues and the possibility of pragmatic failure in the student-lecturer exchanges, the current study set to identify Libyan students’ politeness strategies used in their e-mail requests to faculty. In addition, the participants of this study are students who can be expected to perform a high frequency of requests than other speech acts such as thanking, complaining, or apologizing. This frequency of use warrants a study of such discourse as it impinges on communication efficacy.

Lecturers have been known to complain about students, both native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English, sending inconsiderate requests, using impolite style, inappropriate salutations, unsuitable level of formality, misspelt words, inaccurate grammar and insufficient explanations on the use of abbreviations (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). As such, students have to know the appropriate way to compose e-mail requests to their lecturers and be mindful of how they affect the lecturers’ impression of them (Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012; Danielewicz, 2013; Jessmer & Anderson, 2001). Foreign students need to adjust to their new social and cultural surroundings, and effective communication entails pragmatic awareness of appropriate speech practices, especially when interacting with lecturers, who are important gatekeepers of the students’ request for academic success. Thus, it is imperative for students to show deference and respect towards lecturers through appropriate linguistic behavior, because of their dependent status in an academic setting.

An extensive search of the literature reveals that some gaps still persist regarding the speech act of requesting. Firstly, studies on how NNS students express their requests using e-mails as a medium of communication from a pragmatic perspective are scarce. Secondly, despite a rich literature on politeness, research on student-lecturer communication is still in its infancy (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Najeeb et al., 2012; Chejnova, 2014; Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016). Finally, while there are some studies studied on e-mail and the politeness of NNS students in academic settings, it needs to be reiterated that there have been no studies on the politeness of English e-mail requests from Libyan postgraduate students. This suggests a research gap which obviously needs to be bridged and obtained results will have implications for other cultural groups.

Thus, the current study sought to fill in a gap in literature regarding the study of speech acts of politeness. The study adopted a predominantly pragmatic perspective drawing upon Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory as the underlying framework to identify politeness strategies used in e-mail requests of Libyan postgraduate students studying in Malaysian universities. To be specific, this study endeavored to answer the following main research question:

1. How do Libyan postgraduate students deploy politeness strategies in their e-mail requests to faculty?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigators understand that politeness strategies are used differently by people from different cultures (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Chejnova, 2014; Najeeb, et al., 2012). Linguistic realizations differ from culture to culture and are used differently in different societies (Sifianou, 1992). For example, cultures such as that of Arabs, whose politeness structured by
two concepts: religious faith and social conventions (Samarah, 2015), operate using negative and positive politeness strategies as a continuum rather than a dichotomous concept (Al-Shalawi, 2001; Najeeb et al., 2012). Similarly, Greek students preferred a range of negative and positive politeness strategies (Chejnova, 2014).

Al-Shalawi (2001) conducted a study attempted to explore the politeness strategies utilized to reduce the Saudi ESL students’ English disagreements within e-mails. The study also aimed to assess the usefulness of the framework by Brown and Levinson (1987). The data were natural e-mails collected for a period of three months. The findings revealed that strategies of positive and negative politeness were both used. The research proposed that these two strategies should be treated not as dichotomous concepts, but as a continuum between positive and negative strategies.

A study conducted by Bulut and Rababah (2007) investigated authentic e-mails written in English by Saudi females to their male professors. A total of 99 e-mails with different speech act performances were sent by 9 female Arab Saudi students to their NS speaker teachers. The results revealed that positive politeness was the preferred strategy, which was not suitable in the status-unequal context and could lead to pragmatic failure.

Another study by Najeeb et al. (2012) analyzed Arab postgraduate students’ politeness strategies in their e-mails while they were pursuing higher education in Malaysia. The study revealed that direct strategies were preferred. Eighteen e-mails were sent by six Arab student participants from three different universities. The results showed that Arab students used various politeness strategies, including both negative and positive strategies. In particular, they tended to be more direct in making requests.

In Chejnova’s (2014) study of e-mails written by Czech students, the researcher explored verbal politeness makers in the forms of address and the frequency of internal or external modifications. Choice of politeness behaviors, following Brown and Levinson (1987), was the primary concern. The data (e-mail messages sent to the author) were collected from students who were majoring in the Czech language or teaching at primary level schools. A total of 260 e-mails was analyzed. Regarding the dimension of directness level, the CCSARP framework was adapted from the works of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), and Biesenbach-Lucas (2007). Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) categorization of internal and external mitigations was used to analyze the data. In addition, the researcher drew upon the work of Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) and Schauer (2009). Similar to findings from previous studies, Chejnova found that lexical modifiers were used less frequently. Moreover, syntactic modification was employed as a negative strategy to minimize the imposition of the request.

A recent study on politeness SMS messages is Eshghinejad and Moini’s (2016) study. They studied the politeness strategies employed by female and male message senders to determine if any difference exists between these two groups of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners when transmitting SMS messages to their superiors, considering that the social distance and the asymmetric power relationship existed among interlocutors. A dataset of 300 L2 (i.e. English) and L1 (i.e. Persian) letters was gathered. From data analysis, the study showed that there was no significant difference between male and female groups in the use of positive and negative politeness.

These studies have revealed similarities in using negative and positive politeness strategies with the implication that culture-specific differences might present challenges for students faced with interacting in cross-cultural communications. Among the different
politeness strategies, only on-record politeness (positive and negative strategies) was studied. Thus, the present study extended the analysis to incorporate four strategies of politeness (negative, positive, bald on-record, and off-record) based on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework. Additionally, most of the studies were conducted in the context of NS and NNS speakers of English. However, this study investigated politeness strategies where both students and lecturers were NNS speakers of English.

METHODS

Subjects and E-mail Data

The participants in this study were 20 Libyan postgraduate students (9 males and 11 females), who were studying in the four internationally recognized universities in Malaysia, which are Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Kembangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM); 5 students per university). The participants pursued various fields of studies other than linguistics and the reason for selecting these students was due to the fact that linguistic students ought to have pragmatic awareness regarding politeness. The participants were self-selected samples; that is, they volunteered to take part in this research.

The e-mail corpus consisted of 109 English e-mails addressed to lecturers during the years 2015 to 2016. Typo errors, grammatical mistakes, contracted forms, misspelling, and alike found in the e-mails were not changed and the focus of analysis was on original message contents.

Data Collection

The procedure used for collecting the data for analysis is similar to that used by Chen (2001). Libyan postgraduate students attending courses in the four selected Malaysian universities were requested to forward up to 10 of their e-mail requests that they had previously written and sent to their lecturers. In the early stages of the study, the researchers relied on a Facebook group called ‘Academic Affairs of the Libyan Students’ to communicate with the students. Then, students who were willing to participate contacted the researchers and signed a consent form assuring them that all identifying features and particulars would be kept strictly confidential. Prior to forwarding their e-mails, the students were instructed to send the researchers only English e-mails in which they requested their lectures either for an action, or information, or the like. Upon receiving e-mails, they were thoroughly checked to determine whether the content has at least one request head act and contains no confidential information. Head act is “the minimal unit which can realize a request” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 275). Overall, a total of 160 e-mails contributed by 20 Libyan postgraduate students (4 to 12 emails per student) were shortlisted and out of which 109, who met the needs of the study, were finally considered for analysis. As for data coding, all selected e-mails were anonymized, and a generic code such as, S1 UKM e-mail 1, S2 UUM e-mail 6, was assigned to identify the writer and the university where it originated.

Analytical Framework
This study adopted Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory to analyze pragmatic choices and how deference and solidarity are expressed. The theory emphasizes the concepts of face, face-threatening act, and modifications. According to the theory, politeness strategies are performed on-record with redressive action (i.e. positive and negative politeness) and without redressive action (i.e. bald on-record politeness). What follows presents a detailed description of each politeness strategy.

To go on-record without redressive action is a bald-on-record strategy that is used to perform a very direct speech act performance; it does not give much attention to social niceties and it is often realized through the use of imperatives. It is used often in emergencies or when there is a small threat to the hearer’s face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It can also be used when the speaker has control over the hearer, for example in a message from lecturer to student not from student to lecturer.

Redressive action using either a positive or a negative strategy are the second and third types of politeness strategy that can be used, respectively. Positive politeness strategies are utilized between interlocutors to minimize distance, and this can be done by being friendly or by maintaining a good relationship. There are fifteen sub-strategies listed under this strategy, which are: “notice, attend to hearer (H) (his interests, wants, needs, goods), exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H), intensify interest in H, use in-group identity markers, seek agreement, avoid disagreement, presuppose/ raise/ assert common ground, joke, assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants, offer, promise, be optimistic, include both S and H in the activity, give (or ask for) reasons, assume or assert reciprocity (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation) and give gifts to H” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 102).

Negative politeness strategies are used to preserve the face of the hearers. This is the most elaborated and conventionalized form of strategy use (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Indirectness is mainly associated with negative politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson list ten sub-strategies of negative strategy: “be conventionally indirect, question, hedge, be pessimistic, minimize the imposition, give deference, apologize, impersonalize S and H, state the FTA as a general rule, nominalize, and go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H” (1987, p. 131).

The off-record strategy involves the indirect use of language to remove the speaker from the possibility that the hearer will feel imposed upon. Brown and Levinson (1987) express fifteen off-record politeness strategies: “give hints, give association clues, presuppose, understate, overstate, use tautologies, use contradictions, be ironic, use metaphor, use rhetorical questions, be ambiguous, be vague, overgeneralize, displace and be incomplete by use ellipsis.” (p. 214).

**E-mail Analysis Procedure**

This study took mixed methods approach to explore the politeness phenomenon in the context of e-mail requests. To analyze the data qualitatively, content analysis (Carley, 1993) was run on the data to identify politeness strategies appeared in the e-mail requests of the selected Libyan postgraduate students. For example, in light of the positive politeness strategy, any feature that signalled the reason for sending the e-mail (i.e. because, since, as) was considered as ‘giving reason’ sub-strategy. ‘Being optimistic’ is another positive politeness sub-strategy that was identified when, for instance, the verb ‘hope’ was used in the
students’ e-mail messages with the aim of getting help from their lecturer. Another illustration, which relates to negative politeness strategy, is ‘if-clauses’, which acted as hedges to minimize the imposition of the act. As for the quantitative phase of the study, frequencies of occurrence of the identified strategies were counted and tabulated in an Excel sheet.

To identify the politeness strategies, the head act of requests performed by the students was considered. As mentioned earlier, head act is the nucleus of the speech act, usually the most explicit utterance in the email, based on which the addressee understands the meaning of a message. Each head act was analyzed on a directness level to find out the request strategies based on the CCSARP framework (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). The head act can be performed alone or with supportive elements called modifications to mitigate it. Modifications are various linguistic elements (i.e., syntactic, lexical and phrasal devices), which play a role to soften the head act or the context where the head act is embedded (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). These head acts and modifications were then identified for the different politeness strategies. It should be noted that request strategies and modifications were beyond the scope of the present study and left for further studies.

In this study, to reduce the risk of randomness and demarcate the precision of the analytical approaches taken at an adequately high level of consensus, a consistent method was very central to data analysis. Therefore, analysis was improved through a channel of inter-coder agreement albeit the data was mainly analyzed by the researchers themselves. The emails were first coded sentence by sentence based on directness level and the politeness strategies and a sheet of analysis was appended to each one for systematic analysis. Two experts in the field were then recruited to act as coders: one was an applied linguist at Kafkas University, Turkey, and the other was a Ph.D. graduate, who had done her dissertation on politeness in academic lectures. They received a small sub-set of the data (20 emails; 10 per each) with a coding manual containing descriptions and instances. Once the corpus was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, the coders were contacted and together with the researchers went through the texts to identify any conflicting results. Despite minor inconsistencies, which were only in relation to the identification of politeness strategies and were even ironed out in discussion, the inter-coder agreement measured by Cohen’s kappa obtained value signalled a high reliability index of .87.

FINDINGS

Politeness Strategies Used in the E-mail Requests

The analysis and findings presented here was guided primarily by politeness strategy model of Brown and Levinson (1987) to give insights into the occurrence of the different types of strategy used in the e-mail requests. It is noteworthy that analysis of the 109 e-mails identified a total of 137 politeness strategies (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrence per e-mail</th>
<th>Number of e-mails</th>
<th>Politeness strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Frequency analysis of politeness strategies per requests
From the analysis of on-record politeness strategies (bald on-record without redressive action, and positive and negative on-record with redressive action) and off-record strategies, the data showed that 113 number of on-record politeness strategies performed the request in a direct and unambiguous way either with or without redressive action. This gives (82.48%) of occurrence in the data. However, only 24 requests were made least indirectly (off-record strategy). This represents (17.52%) of the occurrence in the data. The next subsections report on the use analysis of sub-strategies for each of the four politeness strategies (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politeness strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-record</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>82.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-record</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Negative Politeness Sub-strategies**

The total number of negative politeness appeared in the dataset was 70 cases. This strategy, representing the most prevalent politeness strategies, used to express requests made by the Libyan postgraduate students. Negative politeness was to be expected in e-mails from students to lecturers because these negative politeness sub-strategies were concerned with minimizing the particular force of the FTA. Table 3 below illustrates the negative politeness sub-strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question and hedge</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be conventionally indirect</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the Hearer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize imposition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of negative politeness strategy</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis showed that 4 negative politeness sub-strategies were used repeatedly in the e-mails of the Libyan postgraduate students: that is, they were conventionally indirect, used questions and hedges, go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the Hearer, and minimizing the imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). What follows presents a detailed description of the negative politeness sub-strategies that appeared in e-mail requests in the present data.

**Question and hedge**

This sub-strategy was used to convey uncertainty as to whether the hearer was able to perform the action requested (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 136). In this sub-strategy, the students used mitigating expressions within the students-lecturers interactional constraints to lessen the impact of the request. The questions and hedges accounted for the highest use of on-record politeness strategies (46 occurrences), which represented questions (30 cases) and hedges (16 cases) of all requests identified in the data. Questions which asserted an assumption that the lecturer was unlikely to perform the act or to show uncertainty on the
part of the student about the lecturer’s ability to perform the act, made up this category of
negative politeness sub-strategies. Such questions appeared to be mitigated internally with
modals like (have, can). The example below illustrates this sub-strategy:

Good evening Prof. (name)
It's (student’s name)
This is a new topic (project title)
Is it good enough to be a topic for proposal. If not, can I meet you tomorrow in your
office? What time?
Thank you

(S17, UUM, e-mail 90)

The student, in the example provided above, used the model can to carry additional
connotation regarding his request for appointment because it is the lecturer that can decide on
his request and set the appointment time.

Hedges were used in the form of modals, if clauses, and performatives in phrases like if you
don’t mind. Below is a text example:

Dear: Dr
My name is (student’s name), and I am a student in faculty of science, UM, in
department of chemistry. I am interested to do my project in Environment area. I
hope you don't mind my getting in touch and would very much appreciate it if I
could meet you in person, or if convenient talk on the phone. I understand you are
a very busy person so I'd appreciate any time you could give me.
With many thanks

(S15, UM, e-mail 78)

In the above sample, the student hedged the illocutionary force using expressions like
I hope you don’t mind and if I could meet you. By doing so, the student presupposed that she
had the permission of the lecturer to do the act (i.e., to register her project with this lecturer).
These two sub-strategies were the standard way to perform an on-record polite request
(Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that hedges and questions can
enable “cooperation, informativeness, truthfulness, relevance and clarity which on many
occasions need to be softened for reason of face” (p. 146).

Be conventionally indirect

The speaker is faced with an opposing tension between “the desire to give H an ‘out’ by
being indirect, and the desire to go on-record” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 132). This
means that the student performed the request by using certain conventional linguistic
expressions that are unambiguous even if they are not be based on the literal meaning of the
expression (Ruzickova, 2007).

Being conventionally indirect is an expected sub-strategy in student-lecturer
communication since it acknowledges the imposition of the request (Brown & Levinson,
1987). This sub-strategy registered 20 times of occurrence of on-record politeness strategies
total number employed by the Libyan postgraduate students. Being conventionally indirect inquired on the lecturer’s possibility or ability to comply with the request by using the phrase could you, or I would. The following is an illustration of this sub-strategy.

Salam.
Dear Dr. (name)
We apologize to you, because we did not come at an appointment time. My friend (Student’s name) came late, because the bus came late.

Could you please fix another appointment for us?
thank you
Yours faithfully,
(student’s name)

(S2, UUM, e-mail 9)

In the above examples, the student used indirect speech with a degree of politeness to express the conventional indirect strategy could you and politeness marker please to make a request for an appointment and for feedback. The use of this sub-strategy would presumably minimize the imposition and encourage cooperation between student and lecturer.

Go on-record as incurring a debt or as not indebting H

By employing this sub-strategy, the S can take care of any FTAs in a way that claims his indebtedness explicitly to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The speaker could also disclaim any indebtedness as a way of going on-record. This sub-strategy appeared three times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies found. The example below illustrates this sub-strategy.

Dear
I am planning to submit the attached paper to Q1/Q2 journals.
I’d be very grateful for your comments and advice before I send it.
Thanks

(S10, UKM, e-mail 53)

The example provided above indicated that the students expressed their gratitude in anticipation of the request. The analysis showed that the expressions like I’d appreciate or I’d be grateful used by the Libyan postgraduate students to show their appreciation in the event that the lecturer did comply with the request.

Minimize the imposition

This is a way to defuse the strength of the FTA by indicating that the imposition of the request is not great in itself, so this might pay deference to the H, indirectly (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This negative politeness sub-strategy accounted for only one case of the total number of on-record politeness strategies used in the dataset. See the text example provided below.
Assalamualikum Dr
Thank you Dr for your reply. Actually I have not discussed chapter five with the other supervisors. Any time you are free I will come to discuss about it together, just let me know the suitable time for you.
Thank you

(S8, UM, e-mail 40)

Minimizing imposition can be realized using certain words like just to minimize the imposition, as illustrated in the example (S8, UM, e-mail 40), where the student did to arrange an appointment. Positive sub-strategies minimize the negative impact on the hearer’s positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The next section presents data on the occurrence of the positive politeness sub-strategies.

**Positive Politeness Sub-strategies**

The analysis revealed that the second most prevalent strategy used was positive politeness. It constituted 26 times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies. It was also found that only 4 of 15 positive sub-strategies were positive politeness strategies. Table 4 summarizes the results of these sub-strategies occurred in the analyzed e-mail requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give (or ask for) reasons</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be optimistic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Positive Politeness strategy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Give (or ask for) reasons**

By employing this sub-strategy, Speaker and Hearer are cooperatively involved in the activity by giving reasons as to why the request is made (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus, giving a lecturer (in the present context) a reason to form a request was seen as a positive move. The findings showed that the giving (or asking for) reasons sub-strategy was the most often positive sub-strategy used by the Libyan postgraduate students. It was used 14 times of the total number of on-record politeness. The request was based on the notion that the lecturer would cooperate once he or she understood why the request was made. This sub-strategy is illustrated in the example below.

Hi Dr. (name),
How are you? I hope you are very fine.
Sorry if I bother you but I have a question and I want to know from you if you don't mind. I decided to travel to my country on June and I want to book a ticket from now so I wish to know the date of the final exam for (course code) because I want to travel after the date of the exam immediately.
Thanks to you and I am so happy to be one of your students.

(S5, UPM, e-mail 26)
In the data, the students used *want* and *wish* to show the reason for issuing their requests. Further, words like *because* and the preposition *for* showed what help is needed from the lecturers. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that speakers can assume cooperation by giving reasons because this implies “you can help me” (p. 128). The lecturer would be implicated as he processed the reason.

*Be optimistic*

Being optimistic is a way to make “S to assume that H wants S’s wants for S (or for S and H) and will help to obtain them.” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 126). By applying this strategy, a student assumed that the lecturer was likely to have the desire to satisfy the student’s wants. In other words, the lecturer’s wants and the student’s wants were assumed to be shared as they had mutual interest. The prime function of this cooperative strategy was to maintain a friendly stance. This politeness sub-strategy was used 8 times of the total number of on-record politeness strategies. Examples are provided below:

Dear sir,
good day, I am (student’s name), I hope take with you my project next semester, if you can. I prefer meet you, but someone tell me, you are not here. so, could you tell me, When I can meet with you?
thank you
yours sincerely,
(student’s name)

(S18, UM, e-mail 95)

In the example (S18UM 95), the participant of this e-mail expressed their requests using the optimistic expression *I hope*. This expression worked by reducing the force of their request, which implied cooperation between students and lecturers and that the request can be taken for granted. Thus, the principal function of ‘be optimistic’ sub-strategy was to capitalize on the perceived advantage that would be experienced by the lecturer and in the event would fulfill the student’s request.

*Promise*

A promise can also be used to redress the potential threat of request as the speaker shows his good intention in satisfying the hearer’s positive face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125). This sub-strategy was utilized two times of the total number of on-record politeness sub-strategies. An example of this sub-strategy is presented below.

Alsalamualicom
I apologize. This form has given me Dr. (name).
**I will come to you on Tuesday morning to the application form Cartridge**
Thank you very much
(Students’ name)

(S13, UM, e-mail 69)
In the example (S13, UM, e-mail 69), the student tried to show good intention in satisfying the lecturer’s positive face want by intensifying what kind of form (the application form Cartridge) his lecturer needed to look at.

*Include both speaker and hearer in the activity*

This sub-strategy is utilized while a speaker means either *you* or *me* when using the *we* form. It calls upon the activation of cooperative assumptions so that an FTA will be redressed (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The occurrence of this sub-strategy use was used in only twice of the total number of positive politeness sub-strategies. The following example represents the use of this sub-strategy in the e-mail data.

Salam,

Dear Dr. (name),
Firstly, I told you about my case "maybe I'll give birth during the final exam ", and you said that is better if I'll do the exam earlier, so I asked Dr. (FN) to know what will happen, she said if Dr. (FN) agree no problem but I have to get letter from you.
Secondly, *We* need outline or template to complete project report, please upload it.

Thank you very much
Respectfully yours,

(S3, UUM, e-mail 15)

The above example illustrated clearly how the student had included the lecturer in the action with the inclusive *we*, which actually meant *I* in reference. This sub-strategy was evident when the request incorporated the student and the lecturer together.

Bald-on-record strategies, however, serve to meet any FTAs head on so that the student’s intentions are very clear. The following section discusses the occurrences of bald on-record politeness sub-strategies in the e-mail requests made by the Libyan postgraduate students.

**Bald On-record Politeness Sub-strategies**

The last on-record politeness strategy used by the Libyan postgraduate students was bald on-record politeness sub-strategies. This politeness strategy relied on the use of imperatives (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The strategy was used to alleviate the lecturer’s anxiety by preemptively inviting him or her to impinge on the student’s request. The imperative strategy was used 17 times out of the total on-record politeness strategies found in the e-mail requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This strategy seemed to threaten the lecturer’s dignity and, as such, it was not expected at all to appear in student-lecturer communication (Chejnova, 2014). It was considered to be inappropriate for use in an interaction in an academic context. Nonetheless, this strategy could be softened with the use of hedges or the politeness marker ‘please’. The
Politeness In Libyan Postgraduate Students’ E-Mail Requests Towards Lecturers

presence of this strategy in the e-mails might indicate that the Libyan postgraduate students were not aware of the force of their impositions on the lecturers. The way how they used bald on-record slightly different in their e-mails is illustrated in the two examples below.

How are you?  
**Give me your comments about power point.**  
I think this is better  
Thanks.  

(S13, UM, e-mail 68)

Salam Dr.  
Dr (name) ask me to send the abstract to you. **Please help me to submit to Symposium Organizing Committee.**  
Attached file.  
Thank you.  

(S19, UKM, e-mail 103)

As can be seen in the above first example (S19, UKM, e-mail 103), imperative form was used baldly to explicitly express the request. This request was made without any redress. In the other example (S19, UKM, e-mail 103), the student used an imperative clause, *help me*, when asking for feedback. However, the student used the politeness marker *please* to reduce negative impact. Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that request with imperative can be mitigated by a ‘please’ marker. Although these imperative constructions appeared with the conventional politeness marker ‘please’, they can still be regarded as inappropriate constructions in student-lecturers’ interaction (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).

The following section describes the occurrence of off-record politeness strategies in the Libyan postgraduate students’ e-mail requests to their lecturers.

**Off-record Politeness Sub-strategies**

Off-record politeness sub-strategies appeared to be the third most frequently used strategy. This strategy occurred only a total of 24 times of the total number of politeness strategies. Of the sub-strategies used, hints were used 10 times of the total number of off-record politeness sub-strategies, while giving clues of association was appeared 14 times of the total number of off politeness sub-strategies. The frequency of each sub-strategy of off-record politeness is reported in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hint</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give clues of association</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The non-conventional politeness strategy, which violated the norms of conversation because the maxim of manner was violated, was nevertheless able to imply a particular
recommended course of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this case, the student left himself out by allowing for plausible deniability, so that he was not held responsible for the negative interpretation of the act. In the present data, off-record politeness strategy was accomplished by two sub-strategies: giving hints and clues of association. Below are examples to illustrate these two sub-strategies.

Hi doctor
good evening
first thing first, **for course notes I do not find it in the spectrum.**
secondly, i cannot understand what we have to write about documentation in presentation project because every one of my group understand it by different way. **for me i understand that documentation is talking about how we will save the document of our company**
I am waiting your answer
thank you
**greetings**

(S16, UM, e-mail 86)

In the example (S16, UM, e-mail 86), the hint sub-strategy illustrated, which consisted of an attempt to highlight the act in association with reasons for wanting to pursue the act. In this example, the student stated her request indirectly by commenting that she did not understand what was required to complete the project set by the lecturer. This implied that the lecturer should explain the requirement for the presentation project. As can be seen from example (S11, UM, e-mail 60) below, the purpose was to ask the lecturer indirectly for feedback about the student’s work. However, the student had merely mentioned that he/she had attached the copy (of the assignment). The student also used the phrase **for your kind consideration** as a hint to motivate a positive action from the lecturer.

Dear Dr. (name)
It's me (student’s name).(matric number)
**Here I attached the copy for your kind consideration.**
Best regards,

(S11, UM, e-mail 60)

In brief, giving hints and clues of association were the two sub-strategies that occurred in the data under study.

**DISCUSSION**

The detailed analysis of authentic data produced interesting findings. The most frequently used on-record politeness strategy were negative politeness strategies. In order to safeguard the students’ own positive face and their lecturers’ negative face, the participants resorted to a variety of negative sub-strategies, which included “question and hedges, be conventionally indirect, go on-record as incurring a debt or as not indebting H, and minimize the imposition” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 131). Social distance between interlocutors appeared to be emphasized by means of the negative politeness strategy and sub-strategies. However, the integration of hedges, conventionally indirect strategies and questions could increase the
politeness of such requests (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The most prevalent negative politeness sub-strategies were the use of hedges and questions. A possible explanation for the presence of such a high frequency of hedges could be that hedges used for this purpose are very much a part of the writers’ schema for mitigating and reducing loss of face. This claim can be justified by Jensen’s (2009) argument that hedges are rhetorical devices of modification. The use of hedges also expressed politeness and respect towards lecturers because they weaken the illocutionary force of an utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

By performing requests with negative politeness sub-strategies, the students hoped that their requests would be fulfilled without the lecturer feeling that they were obliged to do so. In the context of interaction between students and lecturers, students were expected to perform requests politely and possibly this led them to soften the tone of their e-mails.

The positive sub-strategies recorded were ‘be optimistic’, ‘include both S and H in the activity’, ‘give (or ask for) reasons’ and ‘promise’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Among the positive politeness sub-strategies; ‘give reasons’ strategy was the most used positive sub-strategy. This high level of preference indicates that the Libyan postgraduate students believed that giving reasons had a logical appeal that would motivate the lecturer’s cooperation. As Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) acknowledges, giving reasons was indeed a polite way to underlie a request. However, unless the reasons or explanations for the necessity of granting the requestee’s request was clear, the lecturer may not wish to comply. Giving clear reasons encourages cooperation between interlocutors and increases the likelihood of the lecturer acting in a positive fashion. It is worth noting that giving reasons entailed an explicit explanation especially when the conjunction ‘because’ was used. E-mails that were based on positive politeness strategies thus enhance solidarity between interlocutors.

Off-record sub-strategies can be used as a request for action, such as giving feedback and fixing an appointment. This is in line with Krish and Salman’s (2016) study which reported that Arab students use the indirect strategy specifically for feedback. The Libyan postgraduate students probably opted for the indirect strategy considering the level of imposition that would be actualized by a direct request, which could threaten the lecturer’s negative face. Krish and Salman (2016) revealed that female students used hints which might refer to their attention to avoid direct confrontation with the recipients (i.e., teachers in their study). A student may even select to or not to make the request speech act in order to prevent face loss. However, this opaque strategy might require more effort in interpretation on the lecturer’s part to understand the illocutionary force of the request act. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that it is common among high social distance relationships; however, it is not a preferred strategy in some cultures like Malaysia, who do not use hints in their communication. This is supported by Khalib and Tayeh’s (2014) study when Malaysian students avoided using hints either with their lecturers or their peers.

CONCLUSION
This study aimed to investigate politeness strategies used in e-mail requests written by Libyan postgraduate students to lecturers in four selected Malaysian universities. In order to identify which politeness strategies were used in the students’ e-mail requests, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework was adopted to answer the research question. The findings revealed that negative politeness strategies were the most frequently used (identified 70 times) in the request head act of the present study. The second most commonly used strategy
identified from the analysis was positive politeness, followed by the off-record, while the least occurrence in the data was the bald on-record politeness strategy.

The present work contributed to the growing body of politeness research in e-mail requests in academic settings, especially in the area of Arab pragmatic linguistics. It dealt with Libyan postgraduate students in Malaysia, who encountered a different culture, language and communication challenges, especially in terms of e-mail writing, during their studies at Malaysian universities.

This study has implications for the students, lecturers, decision makers, and educational syllabus designers to avoid pragmatic failure from occurring, and to facilitate effective communication across cultures. As Libyan students step into a new context to pursue their higher education, they might benefit from learning how to interact with people from different cultures and with higher power and status.

Research on pedagogical intervention has concentrated on the significance of instruction to students, essentially English NNS students, across different domains. In conjunction with different studies (Economidou-Kogetisidis, 2011; Felix-Brasdefer’s 2011, 2015, Lazarescu, 2013), the current study places emphasis on the need for increasing awareness among language learners about the appropriate use of politeness strategies when they compose e-mail requests to their lecturers.

This study recommended a cross-cultural comparison between local Malaysian postgraduate students and the international postgraduate students could be carried out to determine how politeness strategies vary between the two groups. This contrastive work allows for more precise findings on cross-cultural and inter-language pragmatic features of these e-mails.

Ultimately, this study concentrated on the politeness strategies used within request events and excluded the opening and closing moves of the e-mails. However, further studies are needed to also consider politeness in the opening and closing, as well as forms of address used by Libyan students, for the purpose of achieving a complete picture of the politeness phenomenon.

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Politeness In Libyan Postgraduate Students’ E-Mail Requests Towards Lecturers


THE EFFECTS OF CHINESE ON ENGLISH ARTICLE USE BY CANTONESE ESL LEARNERS

Alice Yin Wa Chan
Department of English
City University of Hong Kong
E-mail: enalice@cityu.edu.hk

ABSTRACT
This paper discusses the effects of Chinese on the use of English articles by Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners. A total of 63 Cantonese ESL learners participated in two language tasks about the use of English articles, including a cloze passage task and a noun countability task. In the cloze passage task, participants completed two cloze passages by providing a suitable article for each of 50 blanks and explained, immediately after the completion of each passage, the reason for each article choice. In the noun countability task, participants used a bilingualized dictionary to determine the countability and associated article use of seven nouns in different contexts and explained, in an introspective questionnaire, how their judgements were made. Results of the tasks showed that despite the absence of structural equivalents of English articles in Chinese, Cantonese ESL learners occasionally resorted to their mother tongue in their article selection processes. A translation and comparison strategy was often employed to validate an article choice by comparing a given English sentence with its seemingly equivalent Chinese version. In teaching the use of English articles, ESL teachers are suggested to alert learners to the differences and similarities between English and their mother tongue and to help learners tackle possible adverse L1 influence.

Keywords: English article system, Cantonese ESL learners, language acquisition, L1 influence, article selection

INTRODUCTION
Negative L1 transfer has well been documented in the literature as one source of learner errors. Many errors have been argued to be the result of negative L1 transfer, such as the topic-comment structure (Kwan, Chan & Li, 2003) and “the independent clause as subject” structure (Chan, Kwan & Li, 2003) commonly used by Chinese ESL learners. There are, however, target language items where no structural parallels exist in the native language. For these areas of L2 learning difficulties, arguments about the effects of L1 are diverse. While it has been argued that the difficulties can be seen as the results of an absence of a comparable system in the native language (Chan, 2010), L1 effects for such language items cannot be easily attested.

The English article system is an area which has been seen as controversial. There are languages which have structural equivalents of English articles, such as French, but there are also article-less languages, such as Chinese, Korean and Thai. Although empirical evidence for L1 transfer has been observed for article-less languages, and the poor acquisition of English articles by Chinese ESL learners has been argued to be related to the first language, especially at the early stages of language learning (Master, 1997), the effects of L1 on article acquisition by speakers of article-less languages are often countered (e.g. Serratrice, Sorace,
acquisition by speakers of article-less languages are often countered (e.g. Serratrice, Sorace, Filiaci & Baldo, 2009).

For example, Mede and Gurel (2010), who studied the acquisition of English articles by a bilingual child and two monolingual English speaking children, noticed cross-linguistic transfer for the bilingual child whose native language, Serbo-Croatian, did not have articles. These ascertained the effects of article-less L1 on the acquisition of English articles. On the other hand, Zdorenko and Paradis (2008, 2012) found counter-evidence for L1 influence, that the overuse of the for a in indefinite specific contexts was observed in children whose native languages had articles as well as in those whose native languages did not have articles. This disconfirmed the influence of the L1. Ionin et al., (2004) also found that ESL learners whose native language lacked articles (e.g. Korean, Russian) showed fluctuations between the definiteness and specificity settings in the article choice parameter, yet access to the specificity feature cannot be explained by L1 transfer or L2 input. Although different theoretical perspectives have been adopted in these previous studies, (e.g., Ionin et al., (2004) adopted an article semantics perspective and used a strategy based explanation to account for the findings, whereas Master (1997) focused more on actual usage), it can be seen that the effects of L1 on L2 learners’ use of English articles have been under debate in the literature irrespective of the theoretical orientations.

Not only have there been conflicting findings about the influence of article-less L1 on L2 article acquisition, but there also exists a gap in the nature of the investigations: previous research into the effects of L1 transfer on the acquisition of English articles focused mostly on learner performance with particular reference to learner errors or difficulties (e.g. Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Liu, Dai & Li, 2013; Serratrice, Sorace, Filiaci & Baldo, 2009; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2008, 2012). Learners’ knowledge of the English article system, as well as their thinking processes, has not been the focus of extensive investigation. Although it is true that learners’ performance may be indicative of the extent of L1 influence, our understanding of L1 effects can be enhanced if we probe into learners’ knowledge of the English article system and the reasons underlying their selection of a certain article. The focus of the present paper is on learners’ thinking processes during article selection.

GOAL AND METHODOLOGY
The present paper aims to uncover how L1 influence works in Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners’ acquisition of English articles by putting together relevant results and insights obtained from two sub-studies (tasks) of a larger study, including a cloze passage task (Chan, 2017a) and a noun countability judgment task (Chan, 2017b). These two tasks were not specifically designed to investigate the effects of Chinese on the acquisition of English articles, yet the effects of L1 were revealed during the course of the investigations.

Participants
A total of 33 Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners participated in the cloze passage task whereas another group of 30 learners participated in the noun countability task. They were all English majors at a local university, including a total of 12 males and 51 females. They had all studied English for 14 years or more. Among them 49 learners had received a C or above in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Use of English (UE) Examination1 or General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-level Examination, 7.5 or above in the International English Language
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Testing System (IELTS) test, or 5 or above in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE)\(^\text{ii}\). The rest had received a D in HKALE, 6.5-7 in IELTS, 4 in HKDSE, or C in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). They could all be regarded as advanced learners of English.

**Objectives and Procedures of Tasks**

CLOZE PASSAGE TASK: The objective of the cloze passage task was to investigate the reasons behind learners’ article selection and the hypotheses they made in their selection processes. Whether a certain correct article choice could be the result of an inappropriate learner hypothesis was also investigated. Participants completed a cloze passage task by providing the most suitable articles (a/an, the, /) for a total of 50 blanks in two short passages of about 200 words each. Immediately after the completion of each passage, participants were asked to explain verbally why they had chosen a certain article for each blank. In the explanation of article choices, participants were allowed to use whatever language(s) they were comfortable with. As a result, 94% of them used a mixed-code of Cantonese and English, and the rest used English throughout the whole process\(^{iii}\) (For other details, see Chan, 2017a).

NOUN COUNTABILITY TASK: The objective of the noun countability judgement task was to investigate the effectiveness of a bilingualized dictionary\(^{iv}\) in helping learners determine the countability of English nouns and associated article use. Participants were required to consult the Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (8th Edition) (Hornby, 2013) to help them make decisions about the countability (i.e., deciding whether the noun was countable or uncountable) and related article use for three sentence contexts for a total of seven nouns (e.g. feeling, reason, understanding, etc.), all of which had different countability when used in different contexts. They had to show their decisions on article use by choosing the most appropriate option from three choices (singular form without an article (e.g., basic understanding), plural form without an article (e.g., basic understandings), and singular form with a/an (e.g., a basic understanding)). All the sentence contexts for all the target nouns were chosen from popular dictionaries available on the market, including Cambridge dictionaries Online (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/), Collins COBUILD Advanced Learners’ English Dictionaries 4th edition (Sinclair, 2003), etc. After completing all three sentence contexts for a noun, participants had to complete an introspective questionnaire to report on the feelings about their decisions on ending a search (whether they were sure that their decisions were correct, and why), to write out the definitions, examples etc. which led them to their decisions, to describe how such definitions, examples, etc. showed them that their decisions should be correct, to explain why they were doubtful about a certain decision and to spell out the difficulties they encountered. All the participants used English in their completion of the introspective questionnaire, as the questions were all given in English (For other details, see Chan, 2017b).

**RESULTS**

As noted earlier, the two tasks did not specifically aim to investigate the effects of L1 transfer on learners’ article use, yet a few phenomena related to L1 influence could be observed from the results of the tasks. Because both tasks involved some form of self-reports (verbal explanations of article choices for the Cloze Passage task and answering of questions
in the introspective questionnaire for the Noun Countability task), relevant self-reports will be included in this paper to illustrate participants’ thinking processes during article selection and/or countability determination. Numerical results on participants’ performance in the two tasks and other data not relevant to the goal of this paper will not be presented.

**Influence of Similar but Distinct Structural Items in the Native Language**

Despite the non-existence of structural equivalents in Chinese, learners were prone to formulate their thoughts in Chinese and model their article selection on the “corresponding” Chinese structures. This was manifested in a “translation and comparison” strategy, in that an article choice was validated by comparing a given English sentence or phrase with its seemingly equivalent Chinese version, notably those with Cantonese determiners showing definite reference, such as demonstratives.

In the Cloze Passage task, where participants were asked to insert the most appropriate article in two passage contexts, some participants made their article selection based on translations from Chinese, especially when the article selected was **ZERO**. For example, for the clause **handle your lenses with / damp hands**, a participant said that she chose **ZERO** for **damp hands** because of direct translation of the clause from Chinese.

```
唔 好 用 濕 嘅 手,
not good use damp POSSESSIVE hand,
唔係 唔 好 用 唔啲‘濕 嘅 手’, 所以.
not not good use ‘those’ damp POSSESSIVE hand, so,
就 譯 咻 ,
then translate PERFECTIVE
我 用 廣東話, 覺得 唔 會 用 唔啲,
I use Cantonese, think not will use ‘those’,
就 捡 咻 無啲 啲
then choose PERFECTIVE nothing PARTICLE (participant 11)
(Do not use “hands that are damp”. Not “do not use those hands which are damp”, so I just translated. I used Cantonese. I think we should not use ‘those’, so I chose nothing (no articles)).
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When the chosen article was other articles, such as **the**, similar contention about Chinese translations was given in participants’ descriptions of their article choices. An example was the selection of the in the clause **If the** following simple rules are followed, as illustrated in the self-report from another participant:

```
喺啲 嗜樣 嘅 步驟,
those like POSSESSIVE procedures
我 好 鍾意 中文 用 譯 嗜樣: 嘱啲,
I very much like Chinese use translate like ‘those’
就 捡 嘻 the 啲
then choose PERFECTIVE ‘the’ PARTICLE (participant 22)
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(Those procedures like this. I like to use Chinese to translate like this: ‘those’, so I chose ‘the’.)

It can be seen that the acceptable presence of a determiner (a demonstrative in the above examples) in Cantonese was taken as confirmation for learners’ choice of the, whereas the absence of such was taken as confirmation for the choice of ZERO. Although the articles selected were correct, the participants’ selection was based on inappropriate comparisons of target language structures with native language structures.

Influence of Native Language Translations of Head Nouns in the Same Noun Phrase

The translation and comparison strategy discussed in the previous section was manifested in another form in the Noun Countability Task, where participants were asked to use a bilingualized dictionary to help them determine the countability of an English noun and associated article use. Because the task involved the use of a bilingualized dictionary which included Chinese definitions and examples, the influence of the native language became more apparent, in that participants determined the countability of an English lexical item (e.g., feeling) based on the countability of the “thought-to-be” best Chinese translation (e.g., 情感) as used in the given sentence contexts. The associated article use for the target English noun was modelled on the structures of the English examples and/or English definitions for that chosen “best Chinese translation”. The majority of the nouns under investigation showed instances of such inappropriate modelling, which sometimes resulted in correct article choices but sometimes incorrect choices.

In determining whether to choose feeling, feelings or a feeling for the sentence

It’s incredible that Peter can behave with such stupid lack of feeling (Sinclair, 2003, p. 526),

Participant 40 found the Chinese meaning 情感 for the target noun feeling and was puzzled whether the word feeling meant 情感 in the given target sentence. Irrespective of her puzzle, the Chinese meaning 情感 and the corresponding structure feelings in the example sentence He hates talking about his feelings and I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings (Hornby, 2013, p. 761) led her to use feelings instead of the target answer feeling. Her introspective report shows her thinking process:

I am struggling what is the feeling means here. I don’t know whether it means 情感 and ‘feelings’ led to my decision. (Participant 40)

Reliance on Chinese translations sometimes resulted in correct article choices. In determining whether to choose was understanding, were understandings, or was an understanding for the sentence

We had not set a date for marriage but there was an understanding between us (Sinclair, 2003, p. 1579),
Participant 38 chose the correct answer based on the English example shown for the “thought to be” best Chinese translation of the target English word understanding (協議):

協議 + the example ‘We finally came to an understanding’ led me to my decision.

The definition 協議 fits perfectly and ‘came to an understanding’ shows me an article should precede ‘understanding’. (Participant 38)

When explaining whether they were sure about their decision for choosing a certain option for a certain sentence and/or whether their determination of the countability of a target noun as used in a certain sentence context was correct or not, some participants explicitly mentioned their reliance on Chinese translations during the decision process:

I was not sure whether my decision was correct because the Chinese translations are similar (Participant 61; target word reason)

The Chinese translations of definitions helped me a lot in making my decisions. (Participant 56; target word reason)

The Chinese definition really stands out and eye catching and it fits with the situation the question is positioned in. (Participant 39; target word understanding)

The translation and comparison strategy as discussed in the previous section was, thus, manifested in learners’ search for a Chinese translation which was thought to be the best fit for the meaning of a target English noun in a certain context and their modelling their article selection on the syntactic structure of an English definition/example for that selected Chinese translation.

DISCUSSIONS

It can be seen from the above results that, in their selection of English articles, Cantonese ESL learners tend to formulate their thoughts in their native language, translate their thoughts to the target language and compare the structures of the two languages in their minds. This kind of translation and comparison strategy clearly reveals the effects of L1. That a translation and comparison strategy was employed in article selection in the Cloze Passage task can be understood by learners’ confusion between English articles (e.g. a/an, the, ZERO) and demonstratives (e.g. these), as the latter are sometimes regarded as examples of articles by Cantonese ESL learners. In Chan (2016), which reports on the result of another sub-study of the same study about the inventory of English articles, it has been shown that demonstratives such as this, that, these, those, and their were listed by some Cantonese ESL learners as members of the English article system. It has also been argued in the literature that Cantonese demonstratives, such as 唑個 (that) or 嗰啲 (those), being the most commonly used determiners in Cantonese and often used for deictic functions pointing or referring back to noun phrases mentioned in the same context, are quite like English the in terms of functions (Chan, 2004). Learners’ modelling their article selection on the use of Chinese demonstratives in their decision of whether to use English the or not may have been a result of this similarity. Such reliance may not result in wrong article choices, but it reveals
learners’ misconceptions about the English article system and their unawareness of the subtle
differences between articles and demonstratives.

Learners’ modelling their sentence construction for a target English lexical item on
the syntactic structure of an English definition/example based on the Chinese translations of
that English definition/example, on the other hand, shows their insensitivity to the differences
in the syntactic requirements of the different senses of a lexical item. As documented in Chan
(2012), some lexical items have different senses which are dependent on the grammatical
contexts the items are in (e.g. the verb boast has different meanings when used transitively
(boast something) and intransitively (boast about something)), so the usage of these words is
governed by the syntactic requirements of a particular sense in a particular context. What is
more, lexical items in two languages seldom have precisely the same meaning. Different
languages may also have different syntactic requirements (e.g. verb transitivity) for
corresponding vocabulary items (e.g. While listen is intransitive in English, its corresponding
Chinese 聽 is transitive) (Chan, 2017b). The syntactic context of a Chinese word is, thus, not
necessarily an appropriate model for the corresponding English word. Choosing a certain
sense of an English lexical item based on its translations in another language (e.g. Chinese)
and then modelling corresponding sentence construction on the English syntactic
requirements of that chosen sense is not a desirable strategy and may result in errors not
noticeable to learners. However, such a strategy shows learners’ tendency to resort to their
native language when encountering difficulties in making a judgment, revealing that the
extent of L1 influence is not restricted to a target structure (e.g. articles) but also to the
surrounding syntactic environments (e.g. head noun of a noun phrase) which trigger the use
of the target structure.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the study have both theoretical and pedagogical significance. They confirm
that L1 influence operates not just when the target language items have functional
equivalents in the native language but also when the target language structures do not have
functional equivalents in the native language. In learners’ production of these target language
structures, they may rely on native translations of distinct language items (e.g. demonstratives instead of articles) or even native translations of other (key) lexical items in
the syntactic environments (e.g. head noun of a noun phrase) and be (mis)led by the
structural requirements and/or usages of those items. While inappropriate reliance on the L1
may not necessarily lead to learner errors, the potential problems brought by the shadowy
effects of correct language use as a result of L1 influence are clearly revealed and merit
attention. Learner performance can be deceptive, as learners’ correct language use may be
grounded on inaccurate hypotheses (Chan, 2017b). Our findings support this contention,
disclose the inadequacy of empirical evidence which is restricted to performance data, and
expose the need for more in-depth qualitative research probing into learners’ thinking
processes. To bridge the gap of previous research which focused mostly on learner
performance (see Introduction), future research into the acquisition of English articles should
not just analyze learner errors and/or compare and contrast the L1 and the L2. A qualitative
component, such as introspective think-aloud protocols or post-task interviews requiring
learners to articulate the reasons for their article choices, should be incorporated alongside
language tasks.
Pedagogically, our findings suggest that a contrastive analysis approach can be employed, irrespective of whether the native language is article-less or has articles, to discuss the functional and semantic similarities and differences between similar items in the two languages, such as English *the* and Chinese determiners (喺個 *(that)* or 嘢啲 *(those)*), possessives or numerals. Though the differences between, say, demonstratives and articles might look indispensable in certain cases, such as when the target noun phrase has definite reference and the language items are substitutable without affecting grammaticality, ESL learners, especially advanced learners, should be made aware of the very subtle functional and meaning differences between these seemingly equivalent items. For example, English *the* does not have a demonstrative function whereas Chinese demonstratives are not articles in the language, and, unlike English *the*, they cannot be used in non-definite contexts. These are subtle differences which ESL teachers should highlight in their classrooms. Teachers could design awareness-raising exercises which compare these similar but distinct items in the native and target languages and guide students to discover their similarities and differences.

Language tasks which encourage learners to verbalize their knowledge of the use of such language items in the target and native languages could also be introduced, so learners’ misconceptions could be eradicated.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations inherent to the present study may be of concern. No attempt was made to systematically investigate L1 transfer. The instruments used in the two language tasks were not specifically designed to probe into the influence of L1 on L2 article acquisition, so no comprehensive data from a sizable group of participants about the extent of L1 influence could be collected. The use of a bilingualized dictionary consisting of translations in the L1 in the Noun Countability task may also be argued to have aggravated or even triggered unintended L1 reliance. However, despite the diverse objectives and nature of the two tasks, unconstrained data about learners’ thinking processes were obtained from the self-reporting protocols (verbal explanations immediately after completion of the Cloze Passage task and introspective questionnaires for the Noun Countability task). The patterns of L1 influence observed from such elicitation protocols reflected learners’ conscious and subconscious reliance on the L1 and demonstrated the genuine presence of possible L1 effects. The insights obtained are, thus, worth attending to. Future research may include language tasks as well as self-reporting protocols which specifically probe into the effects of L1 transfer for comprehensive understanding and triangulation.

It may also be argued that language use is largely an unconscious process and therefore the self-reporting protocols used in the two tasks may not be authentic or natural enough in providing data for real language use. This may be true, but the diverse nature of the self-reporting protocols used in the two tasks, as well as the implementation times of the protocols, makes them reliable tools for understanding learners’ underlying cognitive processes during their language use: The two self-reporting protocols were both self-reports with no intervention from the researcher, and they were implemented either immediately after the completion of the language task (for the cloze passage task) or during the language task (for the noun countability task), so the protocols could relate clearly to learners’ learning behavior. The reasons reporting protocol for the cloze passage task has been used in other similar studies, such as Butler (2002), and the introspective questionnaire for the noun
countability task has also been adopted in several similar studies, such as Chan (2012). Both of these protocols are useful in providing the data required.

CONCLUSION
The results of a study uncovering the effects of L1 on Cantonese ESL learners’ acquisition of English articles have been reported in this paper. While previous research has mainly focused on performance, the present study probes into learners’ thinking processes during article selection. It reveals the effects of L1 which are shadowed by correct language use and provides insights into the importance of tackling L1 effects on the use of target language items which do not have native language equivalents. Teachers are advised not just to tackle errors which are clearly the result of L1 transfer but also to diagnose learners’ knowledge and hypotheses and eradicate their misconceptions so as to ensure that their language use reflects not just their performance but also their competence.

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2 The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education examination aims to measure the attainment of students upon their completion of six years of secondary education and has been the only public examination in the new 3-3-4 education system in Hong Kong since 2012. 5** is the highest grade that students can attain for a certain subject, followed by 5* and 5.

3 The use of a mixed-code of Cantonese and English in participants’ explanation of their article choices should not have any impact on the reliability of the data about the effects of
Chinese, as only explanations which made explicit reference to the influence of Chinese were focused on in this paper.

4 A bilingualized dictionary (e.g. Oxford Advanced Learners’ English-Chinese Dictionary) is a dictionary with definitions and examples which have been translated in full or in part into the target language (e.g. Chinese), but there are also definitions and examples in the source language (e.g. English) (see Hartmann 1994; James 1994; Marello 1998).

5 The reasons for choosing a bilingualized dictionary instead of a monolingual dictionary are detailed in Chan (2017b): Because Chinese does not have structural equivalents of English articles and the countability of corresponding English and Chinese nouns is often different, the use of a bilingualized dictionary instead of a monolingual dictionary may yield more interesting results about learners’ judgements of English noun countability.
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