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## Using a Language Curriculum to Enhance Students' Linguistic and Non-linguistic Skills

Sutharat Puangsing<sup>1\*</sup> and Pimpaporn Dechvijankit<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Architecture and Design,

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand

\*Corresponding Author Tel.: 0851754475, E-mail address: sutharat04@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Recently, many ELT studies have shifted their focuses from traditional linguistic approaches to languaging curriculums which aim at encouraging learners to do things using English in the real world with the help of any available sources, especially abundant ones like online tools and platforms. This research examines 50 participants who are architecture and design students studying in an international program at a Thai university. It aims to investigate their opinions and attitudes in an English course, following the principles of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and languaging research areas. Also, the study questions on what skills the students acquire through learning this course since its focus is not on the linguistic aspects but on how students can achieve their goals by learning that they are able to do other things in English (Lado, 1979; Thibault, 2017). Each student was encouraged to do reviews on a product and a type of media in both text and video practices. Instead of 'learning' the English language, they used it and felt satisfied with the course due to their opinions and attitudes shown in questionnaires and reflection reports. Both linguistic and non-linguistic skills were also mentioned as acquired skills they achieved after being taught in this course.

**Keywords:** languaging, English as a lingua franca (ELF), real world English, linguistic approaches, linguistic and non-linguistic skills

### Introduction

English has long been used as the most popular language that people who speak different native tongues choose to communicate among them, resulting in it becoming the world people's first choice as their lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2005). Also, this has led to the conventional native-speaker norms and usages in non-English-speaking countries being shifted into bilingual or multilingual speakers (Jenkins, 2006; Pakir, 2009). However, only recently has it been an interesting issue among English language teachers and researchers (Cogo, 2012), making research studies on English as a lingua franca (ELF) still a vast area to explore.

One of ELF research areas is 'languaging' which can be explained as a "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (Swain, 2006, p. 98). In short, languaging is treated

as a verb, which means its focus is the process of learning English, rather than a product. Languageing curriculums therefore encourage learners to do things using English in real world situations (Lado, 1979; Thibault, 2017).

In general, it is undeniable that linguistic skills: listening, speaking reading, writing, and vocabulary, are the main focus of ELT. Learners expect and are expected to acquire these skills once they study in any English language class (Nunan, 1991; Brown, 1994; Ur; 1996). Meanwhile, several ELT studies also mention that learners have acquired non-linguistic skills e.g. analytical and critical skills, while studying ELT (Sayer, 2013; Ramli 2019). In addition, one major trend in ELT field is that teachers in the 21st century classroom also have to help facilitating learning and making an effective learning environment so learners can develop skills e.g. creativity, technology and collaboration for their future careers (Sun, 2014). However, for languageing curriculums, despite being an impactful new ELT paradigm, there are still quite limited numbers of studies in this area especially how learners view this approach and what they think they have acquired after being taught since the focus of languageing is not the language itself.

Hence, it is interesting to know what students perceive towards a languageing course, taught at a Thai university and what skills they acquire through this learning since its focus is not on the linguistic aspects but on how students achieve their goals through learning in this class.

## Method

This research was conducted by two instructors who teach LNG 222 The Review Course which is one of the fundamental courses of international programmes in the university that the researchers are working for.

The subjects of the study were 50 first-year students selected by convenience sampling method (Dörnyei, 2007). They studied the course for a semester of sixteen weeks. Their levels of English proficiency were ranged from intermediate to upper intermediate based on their scores of standardised tests they took before being admitted to the university.

To obtain data the researchers used two methods: a questionnaire survey and a detailed analysis of students' learning reflection reports. The questionnaire survey was conducted online through the Google Docs platform as the teaching and learning of this course were completely done online throughout the semester. This method was used to obtain data in terms of linguistic and non-linguistic skills the students acquired as well as their satisfaction for the Review Course. Furthermore, according to Jasper (2005), reflective writing has become established as a key component of reflective practice, and central to the notion of learning from experience. Therefore, students' learning reflection reports were explored in order to elicit information regarding their attitudes towards learning the course. The written reports were the tasks assigned to the students to have them critically reviewed their learning experiences and expressed opinions in an academic setting.

### Teaching and learning of LNG 222 The review course

The course required its students to accomplish four main tasks: writing two text reviews of a place and a product, creating a video review of a type of media (a movie or a game), and writing two learning reflection reports. In addition, each main task consisted of several minor assignments for the students to do step by step through the use of online resources such as Google Maps and various strategies such as creating a storyboard, shooting and editing a video, presenting their topics. The students were allowed to choose topics of their own choice. To do the tasks, they had to explore various online platforms related to their selected topics with the purpose to study existing reviews in both text and video formats as models for learning content, language, writing styles, as well as presentation methods and techniques. They also had to contribute their own reviews on some existing platforms they had selected.

### Results and discussion

In the following, Tables 1, 2 and 3 represent data collected from the questionnaires.

**Table 1** The rank of each language skill students gained after studying LNG 222

Language Skills	1 <sup>st</sup> Rank (No. of students)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rank (No. of students)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rank (No. of students)	4 <sup>th</sup> Rank (No. of students)	5 <sup>th</sup> Rank (No. of students)
Speaking	12**	12**	11	10	5
Writing	12**	20**	6	7	5
Listening	11	11	9	10	9
Reading	7	11	11	13*	8
Vocabulary	5	10	15*	10	10

Table 1 shows that both speaking and writing skills were main language skills students thought they gained from studying in this class as they were ranked the first and the second. This agrees with the course lesson plan as it encourages students to do things in English in real-world context. Vocabulary and reading skills were also mentioned as the third and fourth for the most gained language skills which concur with activities offered in class that needed students to do research and rely on these skills in doing so.

**Table 2** The non-language skills students gained after studying LNG 222

Non-language Skills	No. of students	Percentage
Presentation skill	43**	86**
Research skill	36*	72*
Online tools/technology skill	29*	58*
Time management skill	26	52
Self-study skill	26	52
Interaction skill	22	44
Analytical thinking skill	21	42
Problem-solving skill	18	36
Critical thinking skill	16	32
Team work skill	13*	26*
No gained skills	1*	2*

Table 2 presents non-language skills students thought they gained from studying in this class. The three most voted non-language skills that students thought they have acquired from this class are: presentation skill (43 students, 86%), research skill (36 students, 72%) and online/technology skill (29 students, 58%). These results also concur with activities and course design that needed students to apply different non-language skills in class to achieve its goals. On the other hand, team work skill seems to be the skill least gained as only 13 students selected it. This is because they felt the online platform was not a very proper learning environment as some group members seemed passive while doing those group activities. Only 1 student felt that he or she gained nothing from this class.

**Table 3** The satisfactory level in studying LNG 222

Satisfactory level	No. of students	Percentage
Very satisfied (level 5)	10	20
Satisfied (level 4)	22**	44**
Neutral: neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (level 3)	16*	32*
Dissatisfied (level 2)	1	2
Very dissatisfied (level 1)	1	2

Table 3 shows the satisfactory level in studying LNG 222, rated by the students. Most students were either satisfied (22 students, 44%) or very satisfied (10 students, 20%), meaning that around two-thirds

of students were pleased with this class. Meanwhile, almost one-third of students felt neutral towards this class (16 students, 32%). In brief, the average satisfactory level score is 3.78, meaning students in general were satisfied with the class. The reasons for student satisfaction mainly are 1) the variety of activities, 2) the interesting activity topics, 3) the relaxing learning environment, 4) the focus of studying on task-based, not lecture-based approach and 5) much gained knowledge and many practiced skills.

The following Tables 4, 5, and 6 are results obtained from the students' learning reflection reports.

**Table 4** The activities the students like the most

Activities	No. of students	Percentage
Presentations and speaking practice	14**	28**
Creating a media review video	11*	22*
Performing group work	8	16
Reading and analysing text reviews	5	10
Watching and analyzing review videos	4	8
Writing a product review	4	8
Writing a place review	4	8

According to Table 4, the most liked activities are presentations and speaking practice which were chosen by fourteen students (28%). There were several reasons the students gave to support their choice. First, the presentations and speaking activities gave them chances to practise speaking as they had to verbally communicate their ideas to classmates, and this helped them gain more confidence in performing public speaking. Furthermore, they could enhance their listening skill and gain new knowledge when listening to others' talking. The second most-like activity chosen by ten students (22%) is creating a media review video. The reason for choosing this activity was the task did not only encourage the students to practise language skills but also gave them a chance to learn new skills such as creating a storyboard, writing a video script, shooting and editing a video, and so on. Another activity that several students liked the most is performing group work. The reasons were that doing group work allowed them to practise speaking and exchange opinions with other people.



**Table 5** The activities the students like the least

Activities	No. of students	Percentage
Presentations and speaking practice	11**	22**
Performing group work	10*	20*
Reading and analysing text reviews	8	16
Writing a product review	6	12
None	5	10
Creating a storyboard	4	8
Miscellany	6	12

Table 5 shows the activities the students like the least. Surprisingly, the number one least-liked activity chosen by eleven students (22%) is presentations and speaking practice which are also the number one most-liked activity. However, the choices were made by different groups of students as each individual had their own preference. The main reason the students liked these activities the least was that they felt nervous when speaking in front of a lot of people. The second least-like activity was performing group work which was chosen by ten students (20%). They explained that when working in group, some group members did not actively participate in the work. Moreover, they often had communication problems as the tasks were conducted online, making it difficult to encourage members to share ideas.

The activity that was the third least like is reading and analysing text reviews which was chosen by eight students (16%). This activity required students to read and analyse three to four reviews relevant to the item each student chose to review. Some students did not appreciate this activity because they personally did not like reading long text. They also found that the reviews they read were full of difficult words and terminology, and they struggled to understand contents in the reviews.

**Table 6** The activities the students considered the most challenging or difficult

Activities	No. of students	Percentage
Presentations and speaking practice	17**	34**
Creating a media review video	7*	14*
Performing group work	6	12
Writing text reviews	5	10
Posting the product review on an online platform	3	6
Reading and analysing text reviews	3	6
Time management:	3	6
Technical issues	3	6
None	3	6

The result in Table 6 shows that the activities receiving highest votes as the most challenging or difficult are presentations and speaking practice. The students who chose this choice explained that it was very difficult for them to perform the activities well as they thought their speaking skill was not rather good and always felt nervous when speaking in front of a lot of people. Moreover, making a presentation took several steps of preparation to perform it effectively. The second most challenging task chosen by seven students (14%) is creating a media review video. The reason that made the students thought it was the most challenging was that they lacked skills in doing some activities relevant to the task such as shooting and editing a video. However, they also found the task entertaining as it provided them new experience of learning. In addition, performing group work was voted by six students (12%) as the third most challenging activity. The voters thought it was difficult to communicate among group members when doing group activities online.

When asking the students to name activities they thought should be removed, majority of them (31 students, 62%) said no activity deserved that, for all of them were beneficial for students. They could apply the knowledge and skills they gained from conducting those activities to other classes.

### Conclusion

From the results of questionnaires and learning reflection reports, it can be concluded that the students achieved both linguistic and non-linguistic skills after being taught in this course. For the linguistic skills, indeed the students were able to acquire it from doing various class activities. For instance, to write a place or product review, they had to read others' reviews and write their own. Also, when they made a video review, they had to watch media, write a script and speak to the audience as a reviewer in their video. Hence, doing things in the target language definitely encourages the use of all linguistic skills.



Non-linguistic skills were also acquired by students while being in this course. Students mentioned they acquired several non-linguistic skills through class activity participation such as presentation, research and technology skills. This result of course was expected as one of the learning outcomes was the real world use. When students do things in the target language, they need to rely on non-linguistic skills particularly in this languaging curriculum that urges authentic outcomes. For example, they make use of available tools and resources to search for information, to do self-study or to post their reviews. In general, these acquired skills are undoubtedly vital for them in the twenty-first century (Lai & Viering, 2012; Sun, 2014).

It seems that most students are satisfied with this class as the average satisfactory score was 3.78 which means most of them felt positive towards this learning approach that focused on using English rather than learning the language.

In conclusion, this languaging curriculum might be a learning approach suitable for learners in this globalization era as ELF has become the norm of the language learning and using of global citizens. Students should be urged to use the target language in real-world learning environments as they can get benefits both directly like linguistic skills and indirectly like non-linguistic skills from being enabled to do things in English (Thibault, 2017).

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