

Can the Output of Self-transcribed Speaking Activities Provide Useful Data for a Learner Corpus? An Evaluation of Reflective Transcription Tasks for Learners as a Means of Corpus Creation.

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Large numbers of Chinese learners study university degrees in English and they form a substantial proportion of the international student body in English-speaking countries. Within China, there has also been an increase in international cooperative universities and colleges, and it is becoming more common for higher level universities to provide courses wholly or partly delivered in English (Huang, 2006). Yet, despite interest in other approaches, time constraints in Chinese high schools and a heavy emphasis on examination results mean it is difficult to overcome the view that the majority of time should be spent explaining English using Chinese and working on grammar and translation activities (Zheng & Adamson, 2003). Within some English medium HE institutions, however, there are many highly motivated students, keen to improve their spoken and written English, spending a significant number of study hours on credit-bearing EAP modules. Efforts are made to engage them in a broader range of language activities inside and outside the classroom so as to ease the transition from high school. Tutors at one such institution looked for a way to channel some self-study time into activities promoting a focus on form for their speech. Self-transcription exercises have been shown to be motivating and usefully foster fruitful attention to form (Lynch, 2001, 2007). A framework was established whereby learners would record short talks and transcribe their own speech. They would then make revisions to the transcript and submit both the original and revised versions to their tutor.

The development of software to assist learners in the transcription process and guide them through various script editing activities coincided with a planning meeting about a learner corpus. In recent years, there has been growing interest in learner corpora, with the number of specialist written and spoken corpora on the increase (Krishnamurthy & Kosem, 2007). At this university, the costs of professional transcription seemed to prohibit the inclusion of spoken data, but since the learners were already involved in transcribing speeches the question was raised as to whether, with their consent, this could provide useful data for the corpus. Since the self-study task required learners to demonstrate time and effort by revising or extending the limitations of their original speech, there was a built-in incentive to transcribe any errors or unsuccessful utterances so that these could be improved in the edited version rather than corrected or ignored in the original transcription. However, it was unclear to what extent the self-transcription would be a faithful record and therefore which features could be safely investigated through the corpus they would generate. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the consistency between self-transcribed and recorded learner speeches. By looking at the frequency and types of omissions and insertions an attempt is made to

establish guidelines for how such a transcript data-bank could be analysed by teachers and researchers.

References

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