BRIDGING THE GAP: ACADEMIC ENGLISH FOR PRE-INTERMEDIATE — INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS
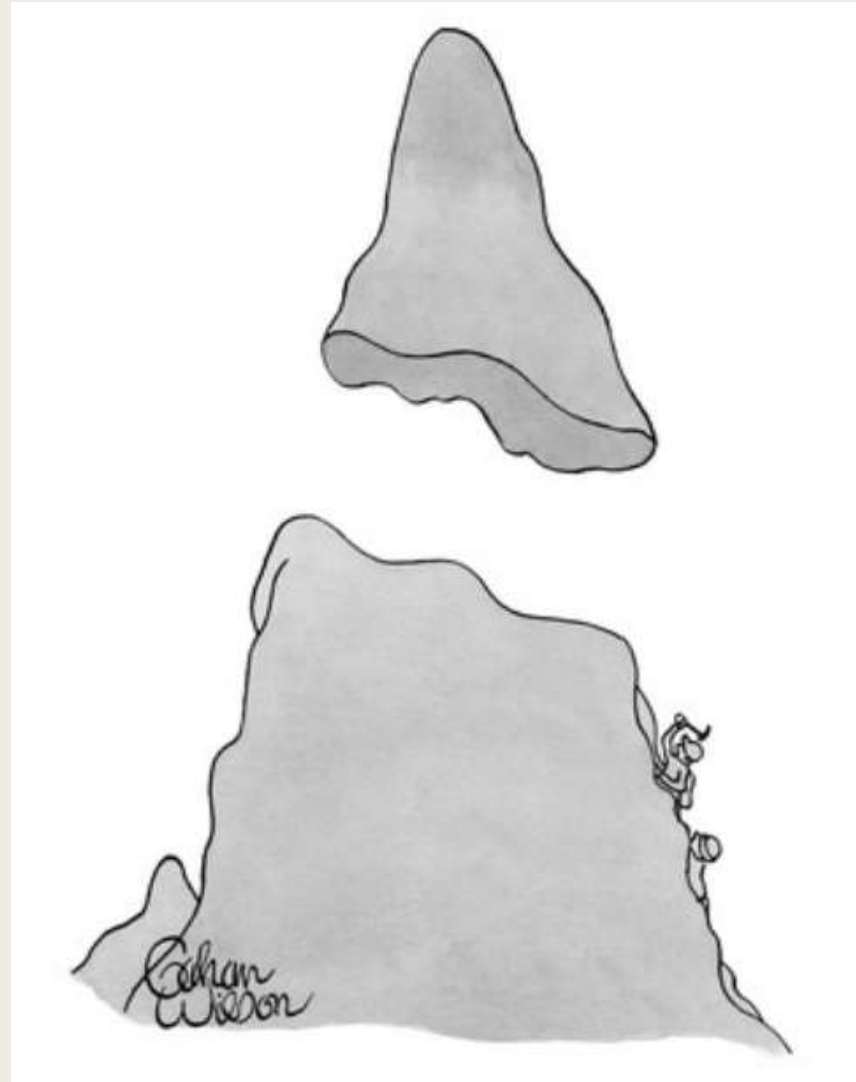
Approaches, hacks and fast-tracks

RE-ENVISIONING ELT
ALTOGETHER, ALL TOGETHER
FEBRUARY 19-28, 2021
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"Here comes the really hard part."

Stakeholders in EAP courses

- Learners
- Parents
- Other sponsors
- Current institutions
- Instructors in the target disciplines
- Peers in the target disciplines
- Future tertiary institutions
- (testing agencies)

Deep-end EAP vs. The Proportional Syllabus (or "building-block" method)

■ "An EAP course is needs driven rather than level driven. Its main focus is what the student is trying to do in the future– join the (academic) tribe – rather than what the student can do now. Often, language level is less important than a student's maturity and expertise in the subject discipline. The stakes for the student are high and the time is limited. Therefore, every minute of teaching and learning has to count, and the rationale for every activity has to be clear. A teaching approach which is seen as enabling rather than gate-keeping is essential." (Alexander, O., Argent, S. & Spenser, J., 2008: 27)

What can lower-level students gain from deep end EAP approach?

- "It is often believed that EAP can only be taught at advanced levels and that lower level students need a course in general English **before** they start their EAP course.   ...(however)

  - ...it may not be motivating for the learners to learn grammar that is unrelated to their specialisms;

  - ...some of the language taught in general English may be used differently in EAP and the learners' specific fields of interest;

  - ...the learners might waste time studying aspects of the language that are not necessary for their use."

- Gillert, A. (2012). *Using English for Academic Purposes.net. http://www.uefap.net/blog/?p=42*
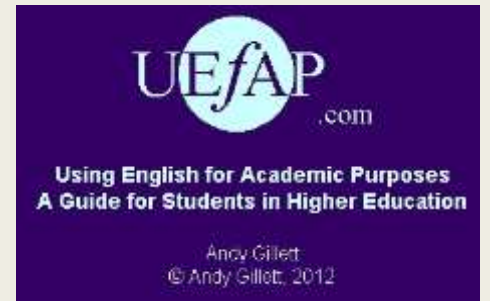
EAP teaching and teachers

■ "English for Academic Purposes is an approach to language education based on a close identification of the specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target academic groups, and which recognizes the particular subject-matter needs and expertise of learners." (Hyland, K., 2006).

Exploring teacher beliefs in teaching EAP at low proficiency levels

Olwyn Alexander*

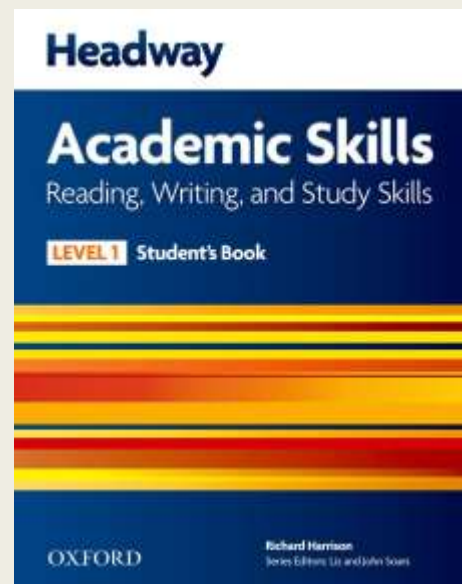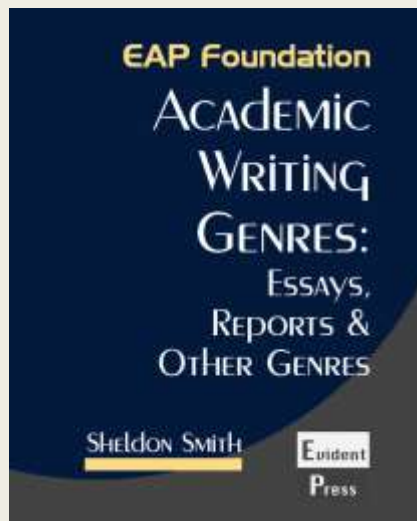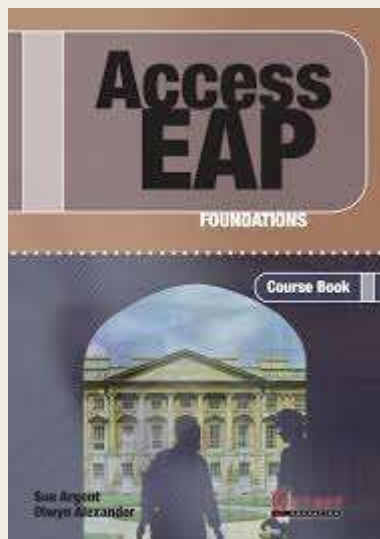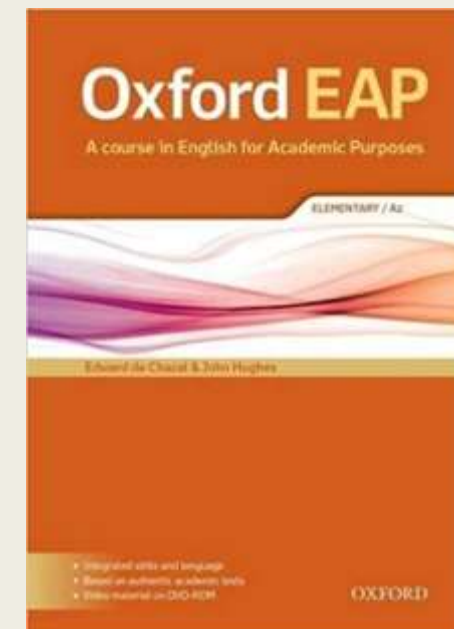School of Management and Languages, Heriot-WattUniversity, Riccarton, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) requires teachers experienced in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to acquire additional skills, abilities and approaches. Beliefs about CLT teaching may not be appropriate for teaching EAP, especially to low level learners. Making teachers aware of their beliefs is the first step in helping them to change. This study explored the beliefs of two teachers as they piloted and evaluated a new coursebook for low level EAP, which is based on a functional syllabus and supports

Oxford EAP
A course in English for Academic Purposes
ELEMENTARY / A2
OXFORD

Access EAP
FOUNDATIONS
Course Book
Sue Argent
Olwyn Alexander

EAP Foundation
ACADEMIC WRITING GENRES: ESSAYS, REPORTS & OTHER GENRES
SHELDON SMITH
Evident Press

Headway
Academic Skills
Reading, Writing, and Study Skills
LEVEL 1 Student's Book
OXFORD
Richard Harrison
Series Editors: Liz and John Soars

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge Academic English
An integrated skills course for EAP
Teacher's Book
Intermediate
Anthony Manning, Chris Sowton and Craig Thaine

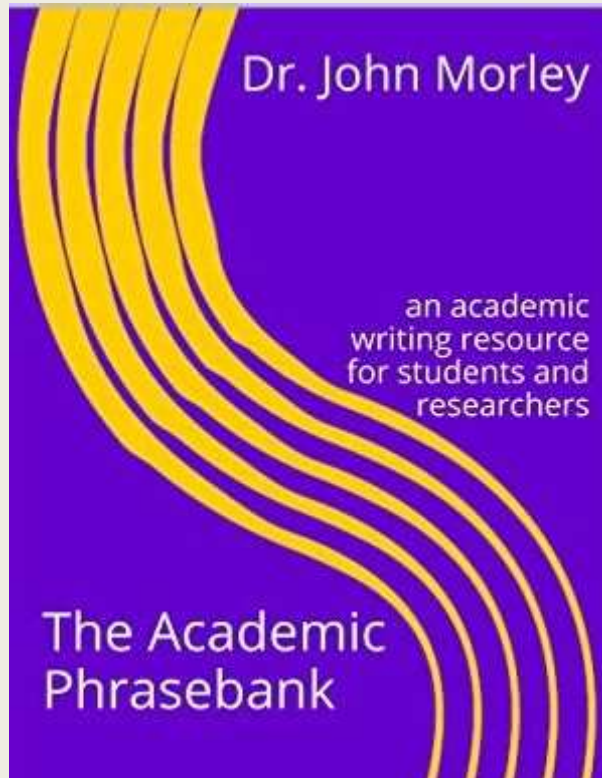# EAP for lower proficiency learners: goals, hacks and fast-tracks

- **Vocabulary** – Academic word lists, Teaching collocations/lexically

- **Grammar** – Form focus or function focus, accuracy versus range

- **Speaking** – Presentations, debates and Vivas, group projects

- **Listening** – Simulated lecturers and academic conversations, note taking, peer critique & response

- **Discourse** – "Appropriation ready" phrases for speech and writing

- **Reading** – Authentic vs. scaffolded texts, genre awareness, lexical barriers, "comprehension" tasks vs. transactional reading/ text-based research

- **Writing** – Using close corrective feedback, using models of the target genres, using graphic organisers, the role of drafting, writing from sources w/ citations, using pre-submission checklists

- **Academic literacy** – Critical thinking, authentic topics & disagreements, using discipline specific knowledge

Wordlists, "basic vocabulary", collocations and lexical priming

■ An EAP course is needs driven rather than level driven. Its main ***** is what the student is trying to do in the future– join the ****** tribe – rather than what the student can do now. Often, language level is less important than a student's ****** and ****** in the subject discipline. The stakes for the student are high and the time is limited. Therefore, every minute of teaching and learning has to count, and the rationale for every activity has to be clear. A teaching ******* *which is seen as* ******* rather than gate-keeping is essential

■ Created using the EAP highlighter: https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter/

Phrases, forms and functions

Dr. John Morley

an academic writing resource for students and researchers

The Academic Phrasebank

Describing previously used methods

To date various methods have been developed and introduced to measure X:

In most recent studies, X has been measured in four different ways.

Traditionally, X has been assessed by measuring….

Different authors have measured X in a variety of ways.

Previous studies have based their criteria for selection on ….

The use of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach in ….

This test is widely available, and has been used in many investigational studies.

Case studies have been long established in X to present detailed analysis of ….

Recently, simpler and more rapid tests of X have been developed.

Radiographic techniques are the main non-invasive method used to determine ….

A variety of methods are used to assess X. Each has its advantages and drawbacks.

Data were gathered from multiple sources at various time points during ….

■ The Manchester Academic Phrasebank © Dr. John Morley
http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/

Data collection methods:

- "Online surveys can access large and geographically distributed populations and achieve quick returns. ... Reaching the population sample remains a problem in online as well as in traditional data collection."

- Lefever, S., Dal, M. and Matthíasdóttir, Á. (2007: 574)
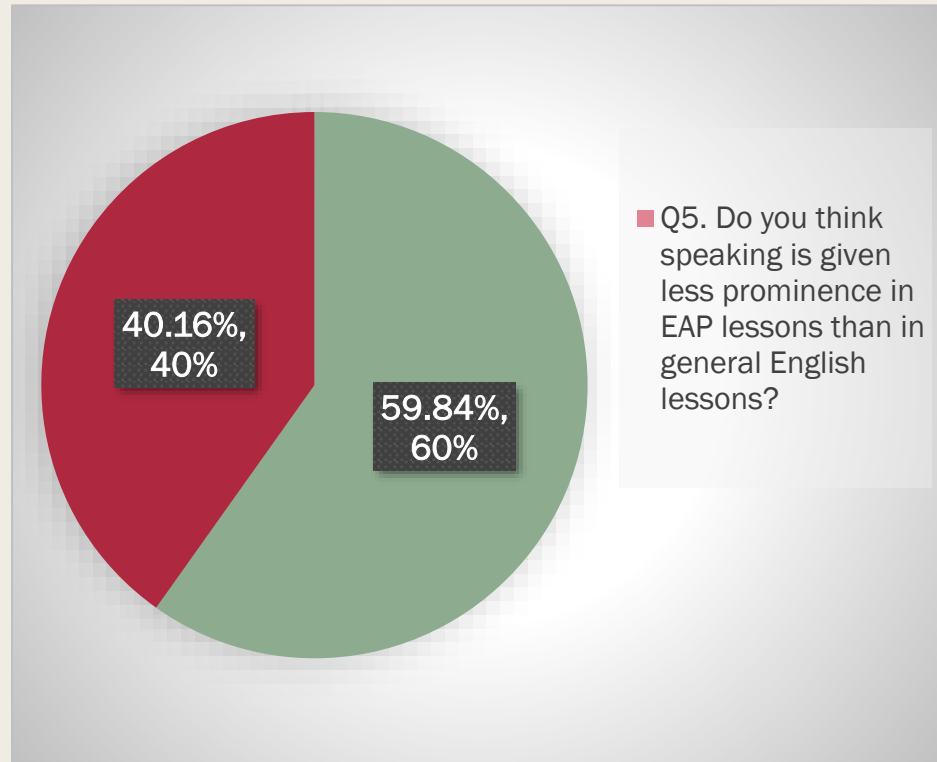
Results and Discussion
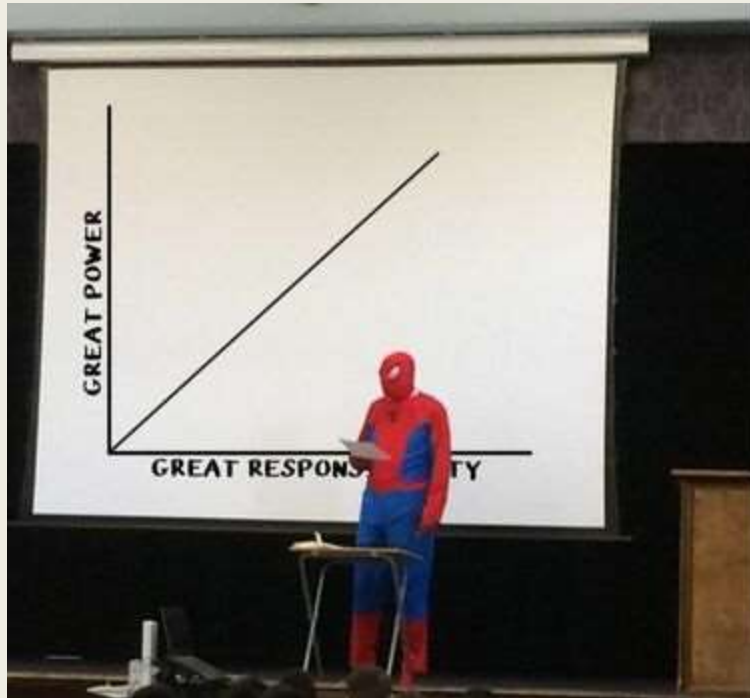
- **Themes from qualitative results**
- Rapid learner development
- Modifying or "hacking" EAP practice to better suit lower levels students
- Research ideas used in classroom practice
- Normative induction (= getting ready to be an engineer major etc.)
- Remedialism in EAP (language teaching to fill the gaps)

Speaking is overrated

Q5. Do you think speaking is given less prominence in EAP lessons than in general English lessons?
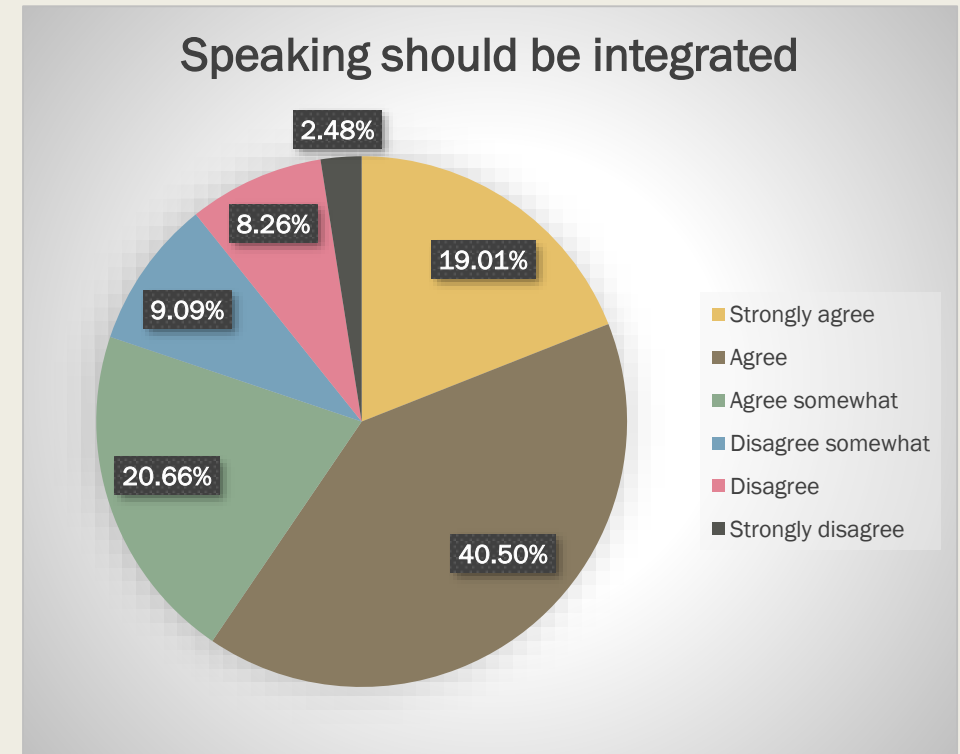
40.16%, 40%

59.84%, 60%

Using opinion gaps

- Low proficiency students clearly struggle in these activities, but based on my observation of my students, their frustration leads them to become more determined in learning new vocabulary, experimenting how to express their preferences. R 7

- I found the opinion gaps activities particularly useful for promoting students' critical thinking and language fluency, for example by actively engaging in conversations that involve the use of higher-order thinking skills such as persuasion, reasoning and problem-solving. R 30

- Very dependent on culture of the students. R 45

- That's very EFL. R6

Integrating speaking into other work

■ *I believe in* *integrating skills**, e.g. for reading, the students have to do something with what they've read whether it's reading into writing or reading into speaking. Before writing something, they should discuss it and read more.* *They're all connected* *and I prefer not to teach skills separately.* R 16

■ *As for Q12, it really depends on how much scaffolding support and differentiated materials the teacher can provide for the lower-level EAP students* *when teaching debating activities. For example, lower-level students can be offered sentence starters and prompt cards before they engage in the debating activities**; in this case, the teaching will be more effective and the debate will also be more meaningful in this case. R 15*

Speaking should be integrated

2.48%
8.26%
19.01%
9.09%
20.66%
40.50%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Agree somewhat
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Listening

- What is the **maximum potential length** of a lecture-style comprehension listening text for EAP students at lower levels of proficiency?

- *1 minute* R11

- *45 Minutes* R15

- *It's not about length. It's about complexity of the ideas, language structure and vocabulary in the lecture. They need to be adapted for the lower levels*. R 25

- How many lexical items is the maximum you would pre-teach in a listening comprehension lesson?
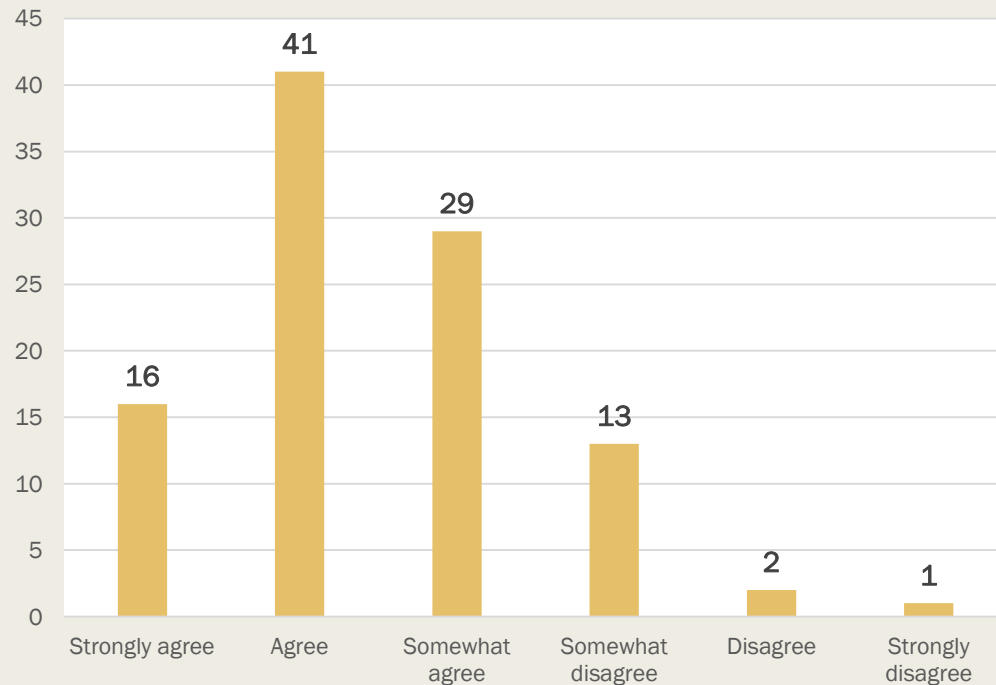
- *200* R4

- Do you think practicing note-taking skills while listening is useful or valuable for EAP students at lower levels of proficiency?
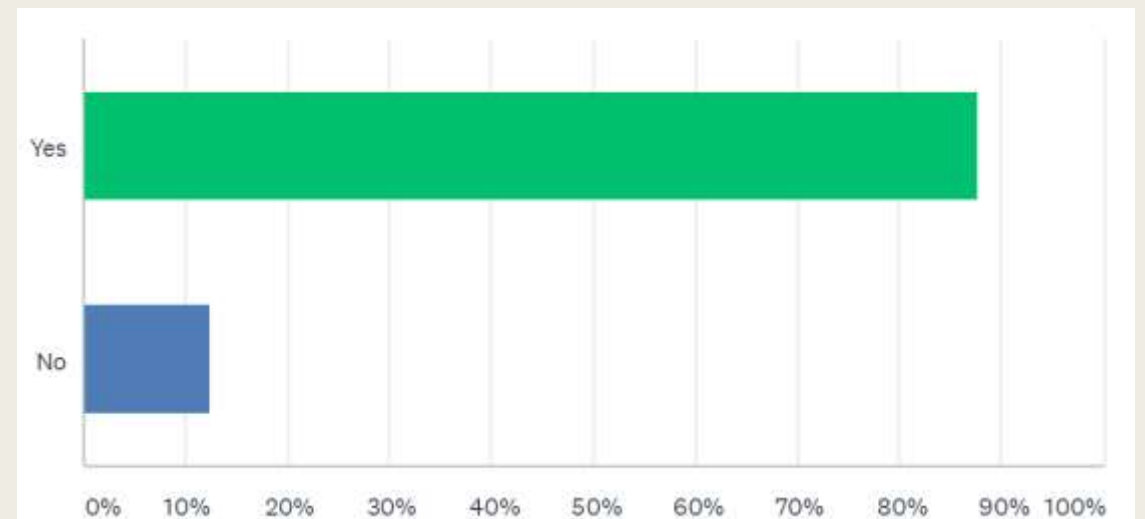
Reading: academic or simplified?

The biggest problem lower proficiency EAP students have with reading is a lack of receptive vocabulary.

Bar chart data:
- Strongly agree: 16
- Agree: 41
- Somewhat agree: 29
- Somewhat disagree: 13
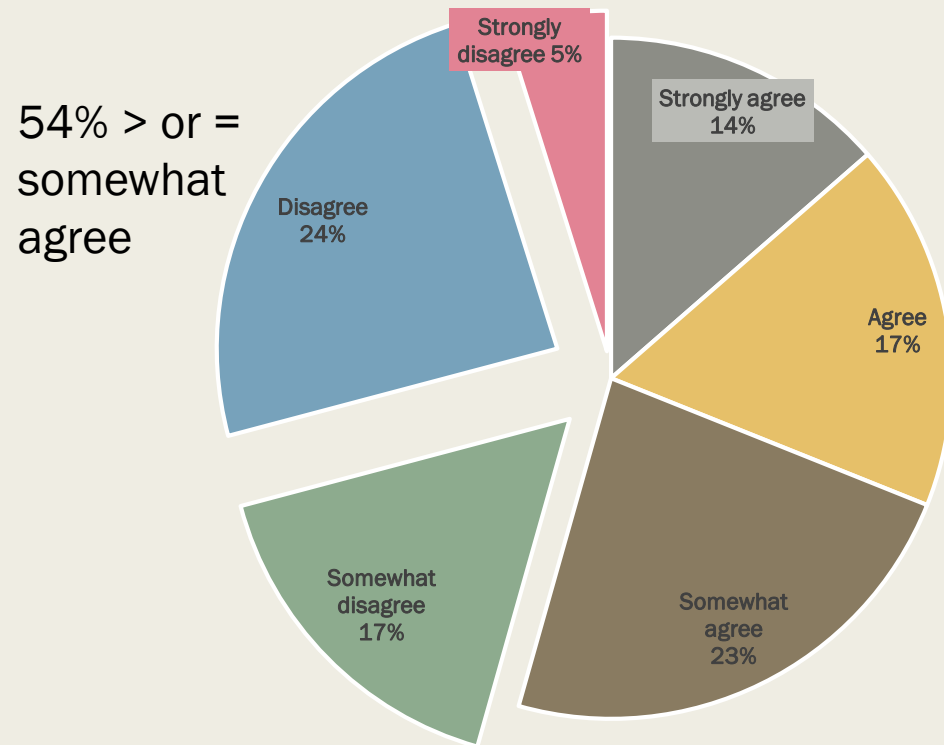- Disagree: 2
- Strongly disagree: 1

- Students should read <u>ONLY</u> academic text types: *NO!*

- EAP texts should have simplified vocabulary: *YES!*

- What else should they read:

- *Anything and everything. (R 52)*

- *Journalistic texts, graded input (R 83)*

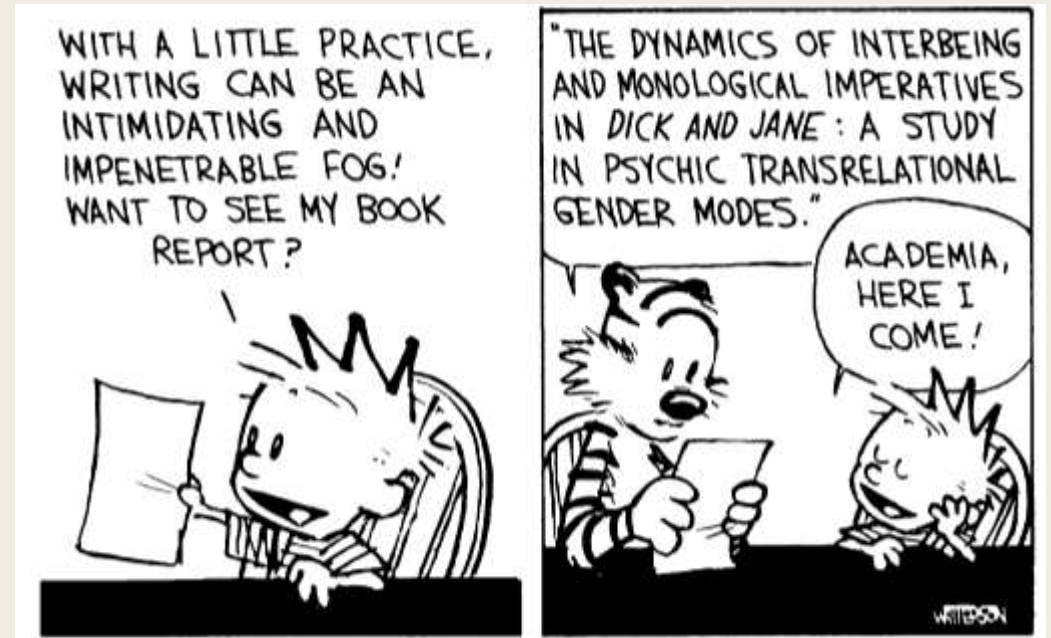# Reading: Translation dictionary use and increasing reading speed in the CR

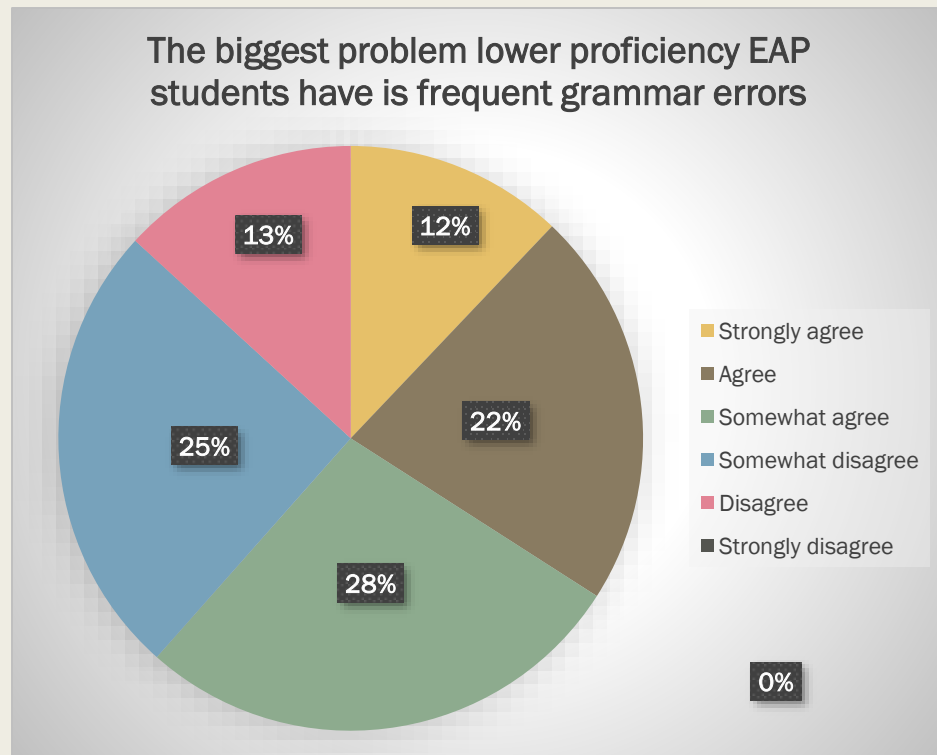- Students should NOT use translation dictionaries.

54% > or = somewhat agree

Pie chart:
- Strongly disagree 5%
- Strongly agree 14%
- Agree 17%
- Somewhat agree 23%
- Somewhat disagree 17%
- Disagree 24%

- Do you specifically teach strategies for increasing speed for lower proficiency EAP students? Yes 65%.

- **General comments re: reading**

- *Reading and writing can be integrated and some aspects of speaking as well.* R 10

- *Insisting on formal "academic" grammar and vocabulary is not useful until the students have reached an advanced level of skill in the language. It is a barrier that slows acquisition and is more a matter of academic elitism than a communicative necessity.* R 28

Writing – Highlights of the results

- Model texts are a good idea (96.7%)

- Writing should get more class time than other skills (75% >/= somewhat agree)

- Genre/ text-type specific checklist (pre submission) are a useful tool

- Drafting is necessary for the writer's development as an academic

- Close, corrective feedback is common

- Written feedback is best accompanied with an FtF meeting to consolidate the fdbk.

- Teaching from negative examples is more popular (81%) than expected

- Teaching phrases and function is hot (68%)

- Use grading schemes/ rubrics as an awareness raising tool (95%!).

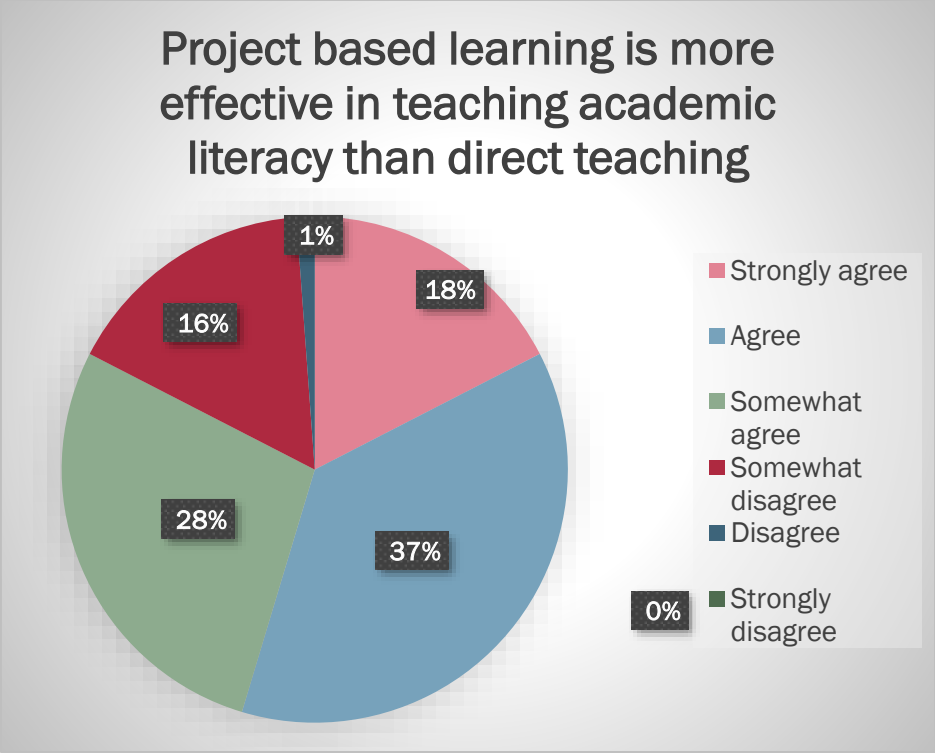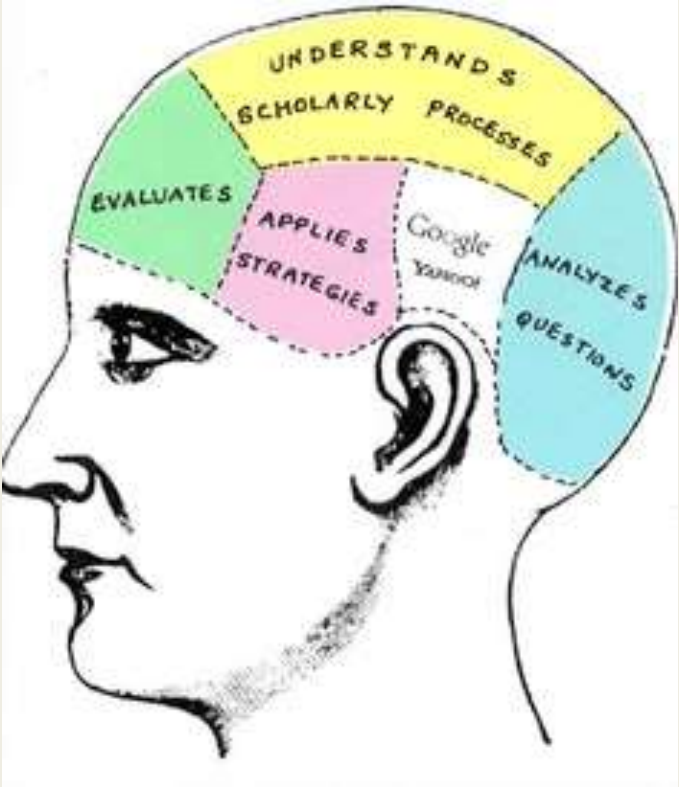# Writing problem #1 : Grammar errors BUT teaching grammar is not priority

The biggest problem lower proficiency EAP students have is frequent grammar errors

- Strongly agree — 12%
- Agree — 22%
- Somewhat agree — 28%
- Somewhat disagree — 25%
- Disagree — 13%
- Strongly disagree — 0%

- *Commenting on Q60, it is a frequent problem that lower-level students make grammatical mistakes in their writing, but this problem is not the "biggest" or most worrying; rather, the "biggest" problem to me would be that they lost confidence or interests to even engage in the learning context or to want to achieve more.* R 6

- *Teaching students to organize the presentation of the information is the most important aspect for me.* R 12

Vocabulary development and teaching academic lexis

- Teachers self-report using the AWL (64%) but mostly as self-study tool
- Teaching collocations is considered superior to teaching individual words (92%)
- Learning strategy training and self-study tools such as learning diaries as part of an EAP course are popular for lower proficiency students
- Test vocab. direct 50% yes/ 50% no

- *Unless you're dealing with very high level students, it's a mistake to teach them to use a lot of academic vocabulary. Students who have been taught to do that usually end up producing texts that are hard to understand. Getting their points across clearly is the most important thing. If they have good ideas and get them across clearly, they will do well in university. If they produce a lot of academic jibberish, they will fail no matter how good their ideas are.* R 26

Academic Literacy and TEAP

Project based learning is more effective in teaching academic literacy than direct teaching

- Strongly agree — 18%
- Agree — 37%
- Somewhat agree — 28%
- Somewhat disagree — 16%
- Disagree — 1%
- Strongly disagree — 0%

The upshot – You are not alone!

■ Do

- Teach collocations
- Recycle vocabulary
- Integrate lesson targets
- Teach phrases and functions
- Give language based feedback
- Use model texts and grading rubrics as teaching tools
- Use projects for developing academic skills and academic literacy

■ Don't

- Kill the learners' confidence when giving feedback
- Use only academic types of input
- Be afraid of 'artificial' task-types
- 'Teach' critical thinking, give learners the chance to practice it.
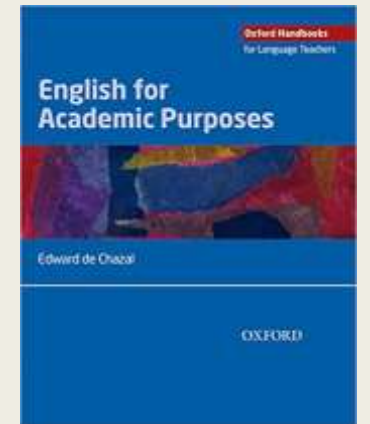- Forget what you learned about ELT when you're teaching EAP.

Thank you for your time

- If you wish to contact me: jeremyphillips@ift.edu.mo

  - Useful web links:

- www.uefap.com

- https://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist

- https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter

- http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/index.html

- http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk

- https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/campaign_page/cambridge-papers-elt/

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