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LECTURER PERCEPTIONS, PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE LECTURES

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of an investigation into native-English-speaking lecturers lecturing to non-native-English-speaking students at a university in Hong Kong. The study is a follow-up to an earlier investigation on students' perceptions, problems and strategies in attending lectures in a second language (Flowerdew and Miller 1992). The data was collected by means of pre- and post-course interviews, lecturer logs, field notes, observations of lectures, and students' written comments on their lectures. The findings of the investigation are compared with the previous research in the field to provide further insights to support learning and teaching in English.

Introduction

English is increasingly being used as the language of instruction at tertiary level. In spite of its shortcomings, the lecture remains the principal medium of teaching in universities and other tertiary institutions of learning. As a result of this increasing use of English in lectures, considerable attention has been given to the problems of non-native-English-speaking students who receive lectures in English. Research has been undertaken into second language academic listening comprehension (see Flowerdew 1994, for review) and a wide range of pedagogic materials designed to improve students' listening skills has been developed (for example: Lebauer 1988, Roguski and Palmberg 1990, and Beglar and Murray 1993). The focus of research and pedagogy, however, has been almost totally focused on the student. Very little attention has been given to the other side of the lecture equation, that of the lecturer. This paper investigates lecturing in English as a second language from the lecturer's point of view and as such is a first attempt to redress this balance.
The paper reports on the experience of 10 native-English-speaking university lecturers lecturing in English to non-native, Cantonese-speaking audiences in a university in Hong Kong. It describes how the lecturers perceive the lecturing experience, the problems they encounter, and the strategies they use to overcome these problems. The paper is a follow-up to an earlier study (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992) which considered the second language lecture experience from the perspective of a group of students receiving their first course of lectures in English. The research site for both studies was City University of Hong Kong (CityU) (formally City Polytechnic), which is an English-medium university. This paper, like its predecessor, is based on the premise that the knowledge derived from these investigations will provide insights to support learning, teaching, and curriculum planning.

Previous Related Studies

To date, to our knowledge, only two papers have investigated how lecturers lecturing to non-native-speaker students perceive the task and how they go about it. Whereas the present study is directed at audiences made up completely of non-native (Cantonese) speakers of English, these two papers reported studies directed at faculty in the U.S., where audiences would have consisted of both native and non-native-speaker listeners.

In the first of these studies, Powers (1986) surveyed graduate and undergraduate faculty in the United States in order to determine what they considered to be the most significant academic demands related to listening for both native and non-native speaker students. Using a questionnaire deriving its questions from a literature review which identified various parameters underlying listening comprehension, Powers found nine listening skills (out of the 21 suggested), in particular, to be rated by faculty as more important than others for academic success. These skills are as follows:

- identifying main themes or ideas
- identifying relationships among major ideas
- identifying the topic of a lecture
- retaining information through notetaking
- retrieving information from notes
- inferring relationships between information
- comprehending key vocabulary
- following the spoken mode of lectures
- identifying supporting ideas and examples

Not surprisingly, native-speakers were perceived as having less difficulty with each of the skills surveyed than non-natives. In addition, non-natives were seen as having disproportionately greater difficulty with the following activities:

- following lectures given with different speeds
- comprehending key vocabulary related to the topic of a lecture
- deducing the meaning of words from the context in which they appear
- understanding informally structured lectures
- identifying the role of discourse cues
- following different modes of spoken lectures
- following different modes of audio lectures
- recognizing irrelevant matter
- recognizing the function of such features as change of pitch and sentence stress

Mason (1994) interviewed lecturers at Georgetown University in the United States as part of a broader study into lecture comprehension on the part of first year foreign graduate students. Lecturer interviews were used to provide a context in which to consider student perceptions of the lecture comprehension process. In general, Mason found that lecturers were aware of the difficulties of their foreign students and that they made special efforts to help them, particularly with regard to their oral participation (asking and answering questions), which was viewed as one of their weaknesses, especially in the case of Asians. Lecturers also made available to their non-native-speaker students copies of outlines and notes which they had used in their lectures and which, presumably, they would not normally provide for their native-speaker students.

Directly related to the present study is our earlier investigation into students' perceptions, problems and strategies in attending lectures in English (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992). The following summarises the key findings of this earlier study.
Students’ perception of the lecture experience

Many students were unsure as to the main purpose of a lecture: to provide facts, to put over points of view, or a combination of both. They were aware of some of the lecturer’s lecturing strategies but as they had very little experience of attending lectures prior to their university education they were unfamiliar with the event. Although most students claimed to understand their lectures fairly well there was evidence to suggest that their comprehension was, in fact, quite poor.

Problems encountered by the students

There were three main problems for the students when they attended lectures: speed of delivery; coping with new vocabulary and concepts; and maintaining their concentration.

Strategies adopted by students

Several strategies were adopted by the students to help them cope with the lecture event, these included pre- and post-reading; getting help from their peers during and after the lecture; and marking their books or notes.

The Research Site

The study reported on here took place at CityU. CityU is a relatively new tertiary-level institution (10 years old) and is undergoing rapid expansion in response to the Hong Kong government’s policy of expanding tertiary education in general. CityU is situated in a six-year-old, purpose-built building in Kowloon. The lectures commented on here took place in either large classrooms or lecture theatres.

The Lecturers

The academic staff at CityU is made up of approximately 75% local Cantonese speakers, with English as their second language, and 25% English-speaking expatriates.

Ten native-English-speaking (British, American, Australian and Canadian) lecturers at the university took part in this study. They were non-randomly selected so as to provide a representative cross-section of native-English-speaking lecturers in the institution.
subject areas were included: Accountancy, Business Management, Building & Construction, Computer Science, Electronic Engineering, Economics and Finance, Public and Social Administration, and Professional Legal Education.

There were seven male and three female participants. The positions they held ranged from Lecturer to Reader and their lecturing experience varied from one to over 20 years. All the participants had experience of teaching Chinese students, although in some cases the extent of this experience was less than one year. Of the 10 participants, three held formal teaching qualifications. Eight participants had experience of learning a foreign language, but none had experience of learning in a foreign language. Three of the participants had some knowledge of Cantonese, described as ‘survival Cantonese’, but none of them used Cantonese in their lectures.

For the purposes of this research the lecturers were asked to keep a log and comment in particular on one specific lecture course (see “Methodology” below). These courses were at a variety of levels, both undergraduate and postgraduate, and all but two of them had been taught by the lecturers before.

The Students

The students lectured to by the participants in this study were Hong Kong Cantonese speakers. The background of the students is similar to that described in our earlier study (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992). Briefly stated this is that the students have gone through the Hong Kong secondary school system where a mixed mode of instruction, English and Cantonese, is used. As far as listening and interacting orally are concerned, students’ pre-CityU experience will have been largely Cantonese. As Pennington, Balla, Detaramani, Poon and Tam (1992) discovered, students at CityU have little or no exposure to English at home.

The students attending the lectures commented on in this study would all have sat for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE) English exam. To gain entrance onto a course at tertiary level students must have gained at least a grade ‘E’ in their use of English exam. A grade ‘E’ correlates to around 450 on the TOEFL test (Hogan and
Chan 1993). Generally, students admitted onto science courses have a grade ‘D’ (TOEFL 498-503) in their HKCE English exam, while those on Business related subjects or Law will have ‘C’ (TOEFL 530-540) or ‘B’ (TOEFL 550-560) grades. As a point of comparison, most U.S. universities have an entry level of around 550.

The Methodology

The data analysed in this study was collected in a number of ways, as follows: Pre-Course Interview, Lecturer Log, Post-Course Interview, Field Notes, Observations of Lectures, Student Comments. A pilot study with one lecturer from the Engineering Department was also conducted prior to the research proper.

*Pre-Course Interview:* Each of the participants in the study was interviewed prior to beginning a new lecture course. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that the interviewer (one of the researchers) worked through a prepared set of questions, but additional questions were included depending upon the responses of the interviewees. In addition, questions were added and deleted to the questionnaire as the research progressed and as new hypotheses developed. Interviewees were encouraged to speak as freely and at as great a length as they wished. The interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes.

*Lecturer Log:* The participants were asked to keep a log of their lecture course, with an entry for each lecture. In the log lecturers were asked to provide a narrative of how the lecture went and/or comments on their feelings about the lecture. The log also recorded equipment used during the lecture and style of lecture (“chalk and talk”, i.e. a more or less uninterrupted monologue, “give and take”, i.e. a participatory style of lecturing with more opportunity for question and answer, and “report and discuss”, i.e. a format in which the lecturer initiates topics/problems for group discussion and then asks students to report their discussion to the group as a whole), as well as any activity the students were required to do prior to attending the lecture and students’ participation during or after the lecture. At various times during the period of the lecture course the researchers contacted the lecturers to monitor progress on their logs. In some cases lecturers were given examples of log
entries from the pilot study to guide them in the sorts of things to report on.

Post-Course Interview: Once the participants had completed their course of lectures they were invited to a second interview. Again this interview was semi-structured. The participants were asked to re-read the comments they had made during the first interview before attending the second interview. The post-course interview lasted between 30-50 minutes.

Field Notes: As the researchers had easy access to the participants in this study - all departments in CityU are within the same building and staff often see each other in informal situations - comments made by the participants in passing and in telephone conversations before, during, or after their lecture course were noted down.

Observation of Lectures: Both researchers attended a range of lectures as observers, to observe lecturer and student behaviour for the purposes of triangulation with lecturers' comments.

Students' Comments: Further triangulation with the lecturer-focussed data was obtained by asking students to provide written comments immediately following eight of the lectures. Further student comments were elicited by means of interviews with ten students selected at random from three of the classes.

Lecturers' Perceptions

For reasons of space our report of lecturers' perceptions will be relatively brief. This will leave more room later for us to report in greater detail on our data concerning problems and strategies, data which turned out to be much richer.

The data on lecturer perceptions shows that most lecturers were in general positive in their attitude and experience in lecturing at CityU. When asked how important they felt the lecture medium to be in relation to other forms of instruction, such as tutorials, reading assignments, and laboratory practicals, the majority of lecturers felt lectures to be very important. Lecturers were mixed in their perceptions of what the
purpose of a lecture was; several of them talked about developing their students' own judgments or thinking skills and one lecturer felt that the purpose of the lectures was to relate theory to practice; others were less ambitious and just felt their role to be to get over the basic facts. The data show that all of the lecturers consistently used the chalk and talk style of lecturing, either because that is their preferred style or because they feel this suits the background of Hong Kong students and it would be difficult to break down this established practice. However, several of the lecturers commented that they would like to use a more interactive and participatory style. Many lecturers reported that group size affected the way they lectured, with smaller groups offering more flexibility, allowing more eye contact, and hence enhancing attentiveness on the part of the students and creating less organizational problems.

In describing the students' main strengths, the lecturers made comments on students' attentiveness, desire to learn, and ability to work hard. When asked to mention students' main weaknesses most of the lecturers singled out linguistic problems. Lecturers were unanimous in perceiving speed of delivery as the main linguistic problem for students. Vocabulary and specialist terminology was another weakness mentioned by various lecturers.

Although lecturers mostly mentioned linguistic problems when talking about student weaknesses, when asked whether they thought their students' problems to be mainly linguistic or conceptual, most lecturers felt this to be a combination of the two, some finding it difficult to distinguish one from the other. The difficulty of distinguishing between a linguistic and a conceptual problem was highlighted when one lecturer explained how he had recently marked a paper in which the student wrote something which was wrong followed by an example which was correct. As regards non-linguistic problems, lecturers felt students to be handicapped by weaknesses in two particular areas, their expectation of a "transmission" model of learning and their inability or unwillingness to actively participate and ask questions. On this point there was a general feeling that students expected their lecturers would present them with a body of information and that they would learn it to be regurgitated later in an exam. This attitude on the part of students was ascribed by lecturers to the learning environment in which students have been brought up. One lecturer (LA), for example,
referred to the students’ inability to analyze and synthesize because they have always been told the answer before.

A number of lecturers referred to fear and a feeling of being threatened as a reason for students not asking questions. Some lecturers were obviously confused as to why the students did not challenge them more. One hypothesis was that the students were unused to expressing themselves in English and were afraid to embarrass themselves in the second language in front of their Cantonese-speaking peers. Another possible reason suggested was a cultural one, that in Chinese culture it was not the custom to challenge the teacher, as this showed lack of respect.

Although many of the lecturers mentioned poor English as a major weakness of their students, several of them were unaware of any strategies their students used to make up for linguistic deficiencies. Pre- and post-lecture reading was one strategy mentioned by three lecturers. A problem identified with this strategy, however, was that it led to learning by rote. Another strategy noted by two lecturers was for students to ask for help from their neighbours.

Problems Encountered by Lecturers

In this section and the one which follows on lecturer strategies, we will report in more detail on our data. Our approach here will, as far as possible, be to allow the data to speak for itself, by use of quotations:

Speed of delivery

Speed of delivery is something lecturers report having been told about by their students:

LH: (pre) I tend to talk quite quickly and they (students) tell me that I am too rushed.

Even where lecturers are aware of the general problem of speed of delivery, they can have problems monitoring themselves:

LB: (pre) I try (to control the speed of delivery) but... I sometimes forget myself.
Vocabulary and Specialist Terminology

Another problem lecturers reported was the large amount of vocabulary and, in particular, specialist terminology they had to introduce in their lectures and which they had difficulty with:

LG: (pre) I am quite often surprised at the words I use that they don't know.

LD: (pre) ... I may not define technical terms adequately.

LA: (pre) (in answer to the question, “What are the main linguistic problems of the students?”) ... technical terms that they would not previously have encountered for the type of work I am doing with them.

Constraining Effect of Student Learning Style

As already indicated in the section on lecturers' perceptions of student weaknesses, a number of lecturers felt frustrated by the students' non-critical learning style. Several indicated that their expectations of their students' learning style were at odds with the students' previous experience:

LC: (post) ... I find them passive, they rarely ask questions, they display little or no knowledge of how the world operates and they expect to be spoon fed like they were at school...

LD: They only experience a system which requires them to learn the 'right' answer and to regurgitate, the concept of evaluation, analysis etc. appears to be totally lacking or absent in their background.

This aspect of creative thinking is picked up by another lecturer:

LF (pre) In putting up ideas for design where there are alternatives. The students' requirement for the right answer is at odds for a balanced argument.

Cultural Problems

For the most part lecturers were alert to the potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding in their lectures:
LD: (pre) Of course I try to be as sensitive as possible, maybe oversensitive to this [cross-cultural issues] and almost avoid it as the plague. It doesn’t mean I use no jokes but I choose them with care perhaps unnecessarily careful with slang. Perhaps I over-explain cultural questions.

Several lecturers reiterated the point about the care with which they chose to use jokes:

LC: Jokes can go a bit flat but I don’t have lot of jokes in my lectures.

LJ: I’m very careful about jokes.

Others mentioned that they had given up using jokes altogether as they just did not work. One lecturer, however, was able to distinguish between particular types of humour, one type, self-deprecation, being possible:

LG: (pre) Any verbal jokes always fall flat but other forms of jokes like self-depreciation seem to be okay. They seem to understand those.

Several lecturers had problems with culturally-based illustrations and examples and emphasized the need to choose examples that are related to the students’ experiences:

LG: (pre) I have a lot of trouble with many of my illustrations.

LE: (post) Hong Kong students don’t know about fields and cows but they know about currency and share prices.

Attendance, Lateness, and Indiscipline

Poor attendance was a problem consistently reported by lecturers in their diaries and post-course interviews (attendance at lectures is not compulsory at CityU):

LD: (log) Attendance was poor.

LG: (log) The disappointment here [for this lecture] was the 50% attendance.
Another problem was lateness:

LI: (post) 9 a.m. starts all year, so start at 9:15 - 9:25.

LH: (post) Always late. Disgusting! I continually told them I was going to start earlier and they kept telling me they were coming from a previous lecture.

A further problem was indiscipline:

LJ: (in answer to the question “Do you have any discipline problems in your lectures?”) Lots, lots. Students coming in 20 minutes late, pushing across to the centre of the row, sitting down and talking to people on either side and talking all the way through the lectures.

Lecturers’ strategies

In order to overcome some of the problems identified by lecturers in the previous sections, lecturers used a variety of strategies, as follows:

Use of Visual Aids and Handouts

Most lecturers reported making much more use of the various visual media than they would do with native speakers of English:

LC: (post) A tremendous amount more transparencies, a monumental amount more.

Another lecturer made more sparing use of the overhead projector, using this aid just to give the overall outline of the lecture:

LA: (pre) ... I provide them with a skeleton outline. Because of the second language it can be difficult for them to understand exactly where the lecture is going. If they see a skeleton outline they can see the sequencing.

As well as helping with comprehension, notes on the overhead projector were seen to fulfill an important role in helping with notetaking:

LC: (pre) ... I do put a lot of words on the screen and I know they copy a lot of those words. I hope they also put the comments that surround those words.
LD: (pre) [I use] slides, boardwork partly because it gives them a note they can take and partly because it slows me down. I expect my English national students to have some experience of notetaking. I don’t here.

Handouts were made use of by lecturers in a similar way to notes on the overhead projector, as a compensation for poor listening and notetaking comprehension ability. One lecturer described her use of hand-out notes as follows:

LI: (post) I produced extensive notes for each class and students find this useful...In the lecture this cuts down on questions...they don’t need to check for meaning.

However, the provision of extensive notes by means of handouts was seen by one lecturer as a restriction to the students taking part in the lecture:

LJ: (post) I don’t use handouts because then there is absolutely no action. Generally speaking giving detailed handouts restricts the students’ study habits.

Modification of Language

Lecturers made a range of adjustments to their delivery in order to facilitate communication with their non-native speaker audience. One adjustment was to slow down their speech rate and speak clearly, with repetitions:

LA: (post) I slow down and I pronounce words very precisely.

LC: (post) Slowed down with some repetition.

Most of the lecturers tried to modify their language by avoiding complex or unusual words:

LA: (pre) I try to avoid unusual English words.

LJ: (post) Keep it very uncluttered, very slow and deliberate and not stray too much from the facts.
However, modification of their use of language is by no means unproblematic for the lecturers. For one thing, a modified, slower delivery requires a lot of effort:

LE: (post) I think delivery is probably the main problem. I think I have to speak more slowly, more clearly ... it requires a lot of effort.

But several of the lecturers mentioned that they did not feel comfortable using simplified language and one pointed out that by doing so the students could be disadvantaged when they come to read the textbook which has been written in more complex language.

Use of Examples

One important lecturing strategy was the use of relevant examples to ensure student interest:

LC: (post) When I found them interested in what I was talking about I went through more examples.

LG: (log) This lecture went much better than expected. I was quite surprised as it is a bit tedious. The reason it went well was because my examples struck a chord with the students and I became more animated in response ... A surprising lecture but illustrates the importance of relevance of examples.

LH: (log) Given the “dry” nature of the material which I interjected with many examples to make it relevant, I felt the students were attentive...

In addition to ensuring relevance and creating greater interest on the part of the students, some lecturers saw the use of examples as an aid to comprehension:

LH: (post) ... what really helps them are the examples because they lack experience in the real world.

LD: (log) Students who did not know were struggling at times and needed extra examples and slower presentation.
Obtaining Audience Feedback

Lecturers used both verbal and non-verbal signals in monitoring their students’ understanding:

Verbal Feedback

Lecturers attempted to obtain verbal feedback on comprehension by questioning students, either in the lectures or the tutorial. However, this verbal feedback strategy was not usually very successful:

LJ: (pre) I try asking students in the tutorials, but you still don’t get enough feedback.

LB: (pre) ... I ask if people have understood. Normally I get no response.

LG: (pre) I’m always asking them questions and I always stare at a particular student and you normally get some response. If there isn’t a response then I am pretty sure that they haven’t understood. Mind you, the response is very minimal.

This is perhaps not surprising when we consider the influence of the students’ secondary school background where they are expected to be deferential to their teachers and little emphasis is put on participation on the part of the student. However, on those rare occasions when students asked questions, this was a useful source of feedback for lecturers:

LA: (log) It was apparent that the students had grasped the contents of the previous lecture for they were able to ask appropriate questions, and give suitable answers when questioned... they seemed to enjoy this lecture, perhaps through being able to relate it to day-to-day [legal] practice needs.

LB: (log) The material is complex, but questions and disputes with the class show that they are on top of the work.

Non-verbal Feedback

Lecturers seemed to be more successful in obtaining non-verbal feedback than they were in obtaining verbal feedback:
LC: (pre) ... my teaching style is to look into their eyes to see if they are understanding and if I am getting a glazed blank stare I will see they are not understanding and I will go over it again.

LD: (log) Some students obviously knew the topics from the look on their faces.

LH: (log) Some students nod in agreement when they understand the relevance of some concepts to their own experience, others lean forward attentively, while some lose track.

LI: (log) Students were attentive and showed clear visual signs of understanding both the content of the material presented and the underlying issues and questions raised.

Empathizing

Although three of the lecturers said that they did not give any special encouragement to help students who had language problems, the others all reported making special efforts to show understanding of the burden placed on students of having to study in a second language:

LA: (pre) I encourage them from the point of view of telling them that I appreciate the difficulties of studying in a second language.

LF: (pre) With exams I tend to give them one word answers and diagrams just so that they can show that they understand.

LJ: (pre) I try to encourage them to speak up. I thank them if they ask questions and tell them how useful it is when they ask questions ...

LB: I am very sympathetic to their problem and certainly avoid making them feel embarrassed and urge them to regard tutorials as a chance to practise English at a high level.

And lecturers were wary of penalizing students for their English:

LA: ... one thing I first did in Hong Kong and I have long since abandoned is penalize students for their poor English either written or verbal ...
Comparison of findings with the earlier student-focussed study

We will now consider to what extent the findings of the present study compare and contrast with those of our earlier paper (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992), which focussed on CityU students in lectures. First, to what extent are the student perceptions in the earlier paper corroborated by the lecturer perceptions in this study? Students and lecturers are in agreement that speed of delivery is the main barrier to understanding, followed by difficulties with vocabulary. Both lecturers and students are aware of students' poor notetaking skills. In addition, the reluctance of students to ask questions is noted by both lecturers and students. Students and lecturers are in agreement, also, on the value of the use of visual support and frequent repetition as aids in lecture comprehension.

Turning now to the discrepancies between the earlier findings and those of the present study, in this paper we have reported the difficulties lecturers find with culturally-based references and in particular the use of humour; we have reported on the difficulties the lecturers have in using a more interactive teaching style and in obtaining verbal feedback from students; we have referred to the attempts by the lecturers to compensate for students' poor notetaking skills by the provision of handouts, overhead transparencies and use of the white-board; we have noted the sympathetic attitude and encouragement lecturers try to give to students in matters related to language ability. These are all areas which have been reported to us by lecturers, but which were not present in the student-derived data.

From the student data there are two areas in particular where lecturers did not demonstrate awareness of aspects of student behaviour. These are, first, the great difficulties students had in concentrating. No lecturers referred to this problem, or if they did, it was in passing. If lecturers had been aware of such a problem one would imagine that something would be done to break up the lectures, many of which lasted for two hours (with or without a break). Secondly, lecturers were not generally aware of strategies students used to compensate for limited English proficiency. The students in our earlier study reported making considerable use of peer help (although this was often seen as a disrupting influence in the lecture and not viewed
positively by many lecturers) and of marking up the textbook in Cantonese as aids in understanding. The fact that the English-speaking lecturers did not report being aware of these strategies when asked to describe students’ compensatory strategies in their interviews emphasizes the difficulty they experience in fully understanding their students’ learning style.

Comparison with studies conducted in the U.S.

How do the findings of this study compare with the findings of research conducted into second language lecturer attitudes and behaviour in other locations? Both Powers (1986) and Mason (1994) studied lectures given to mixed audiences of natives and non-natives in the United States, so, given this difference in the make-up of target audience and in geographical and social context, we would be prepared for considerable discrepancy between the findings of these studies and of our own. For example, in the U.S. studies the onus for understanding international and local American examples is placed on the students and little mention is made of lecturers trying to contextualize examples for specific groups of students. Lecturers in the U.S. studies often used give-and-take or report-and-discuss types of lectures and avoided the traditional talk-and-chalk style which most of the foreign students would have been used to, thereby putting the responsibility to change their lecture behaviour onto the students. A third area of discrepancy between Powers’ and Mason’s studies and our own is in student behaviour during lectures - no mention is made of peer help or indiscipline in either study, yet it is a focal point for the students and lecturers in both our studies conducted in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, there are a number of features which the findings of these studies have in common with ours.

In the case of Powers (1986) it is notable that, in line with our own findings, for both lecturers and students, speed of delivery and vocabulary were singled out as the most problematic areas. Following informally structured lectures was also identified as a significant problem, as it was in our case. For Mason, similarities between her findings and our own were the awareness on the part of lecturers of student problems in asking and answering questions (especially in the case of Asians) and the extra assistance lecturers gave non-natives by providing copies of outlines and notes. In addition, like our lecturers
in Hong Kong, Mason’s lecturers in the U.S. were very much aware of the special problems of their non-native students and made special efforts to help them.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how one group of lecturers in a particular cultural setting - but a cultural setting which exists also with lesser or greater differences in many tertiary institutions in many parts of the world - perceive the process of lecturing to non-native-speakers of English, the problems they encounter, and the strategies they use to overcome these problems. The findings from our previous study into student perceptions, problems and strategies (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992) are supported and added to by the present study. For example, native-English-speaking lecturers need to modify their language when lecturing to L2 speakers; speed of delivery and terminology pose difficulties for students and lecturers; and examples are an effective way of contextualizing lecture information. In addition, students need to become aware of the different functions of a lecture - to inform, explain, provoke, guide, and so forth - and that they can participate in a lecture and use the lecturer, as well as their peers, for help when there is misunderstanding.

Too often in second language lecture situations the blame for unsatisfactory lecture listening and the responsibility for improved success is put upon the students and their English teachers. It is the students’ poor English which is seen to be responsible for any problems and which needs to be improved. It is rare to suggest that lecturers might be the ones who could benefit from remedial action (although see Flowerdew, 1994, and Lynch, 1994). We would like to emphasize therefore the potential of the findings of this research, in particular, for lecturer training, an activity which too often, in our view, is neglected at the tertiary level in both first and second language contexts. When lecturer training does occur it is often at the level of planning and managing a lecture rather than addressing issues raised by the current research which are related to the second language dimensions of the lecturing enterprise. The following are some suggestions for more effective lecturing in a second language. These areas may prove useful starting points in informing lecturers about their lecturing, and may be used as the basis for lecture training workshops.
- introducing the students to different styles of lecturing:

As students are familiar with and expect a chalk-and-talk lecture format, lecturers would have great difficulty if they abandoned this type of lecture format completely. However, lecturers could slowly begin to introduce other types of lecture formats as ten minute segments of their lectures. For example, by clearly signalling to the students that the lecture is going to change for a short period and indicating what the lecturer expects the students to do, the lecturer may successfully break away from the chalk-and-talk format: Example: "Now I am going to stop speaking and I would like you to find the answer to the question I shall write on the board. Speak with the person next to you to think of an answer." The lecturer would then give the class an appropriate amount of time to discuss the question and may either ask for a few answers or continue with the lecture without asking for any answers.

- introducing new terminology

Students reported having difficulty not only with new terminology, but also with the general language of lectures. In this case, lecturers have two tasks. Firstly, they must consider the language level they use. This can be done by audio-taping a few of their lectures and listening to them later. Transcribing parts of a lecture is also a useful technique as most lecturers have never seen their lecture written down and are surprised at the complexity of vocabulary they used when they see a transcription. Both these techniques help sensitise lecturers to the general language level they use when lecturing. Secondly, when preparing a lecture lecturers should pay special attention to the terminology used and not assume that the students will know everything. Lecturers could mark points on their lecture notes where new terminology occurs and make sure the new words or concepts are clearly explained with examples. They might also consider distributing glossaries at the beginning of lectures to ensure that students have some brief explanation of the terminology which will be used in the lecture.

- controlling the speed of delivery

Pacing of any lecture is vital if we wish to convey information successfully. Here we make three suggestions. 1) Lecturers can again
make use of an audio-tape of a few lectures to sensitise themselves to their speed of delivery. 2) A colleague could be invited to attend a lecture and asked to make notes to see how successfully they could cope with the speed of information. This peer feedback may be useful not only to gauge the speed of delivery but to monitor other aspects of the lecture also: clarity of visual aids; vocabulary load, student difficulties; student behaviour; etc. 3) Lecturers can deliberately introduce pauses into their lectures. For example, rather than having everything on overhead transparencies the board can be used from time to time. This slows down the pace of the information being given to the students and gives them more time to absorb the information.

- making use of examples

Examples are vital in gaining a clear understanding of issues or concepts, therefore the lecturer should strive to find clear examples, and if possible relevant local examples. It may be the case that new lecturers need to use the experience of their local colleagues. Checking examples for clarity and relevance to the local context may go a long way to providing a better context for students’ learning and create more rapport with students by demonstrating local knowledge. And as examples are obviously very useful for the students’ understanding they should be used as often as required.

- making use of handouts and visual aids

There seems to be some controversy over how many handouts to give students and how much detail to include. Students do appreciate it when a lecturer gives out notes and so some sort of handout is advisable. However, if lecturers tell their students what they expect them to do with the handout it may not need to be so detailed. Example: “In this handout I have left many spaces. The spaces are for you to fill in your own notes of the lecture.” In the first few instances of using this type of handout the lecturer may decide to dictate some notes for the students to write down. In this way the students receive a good example of what is expected of them. Students may also be encouraged to look at each others’ notes from time to time in the lecture to see what type of information they are writing down. In this way everyone may be able to keep up with the lecture content and peer help is encouraged.
Visual aids are also very important in guiding students through a lecture. One of the best pieces of advice from a lecturer in the study was to put an outline of the lecture onto an overhead transparency, and constantly refer to where the lecturer is during the lecture. In this way, the staging of lectures can be controlled by lecturers and they will not go off at tangents, which could confuse or distract the students. However, we should bear in mind that as a study by King (1994) has shown, when presented with a visual, students concentrate on copying the visual and usually stop listening to the lecturer. Therefore, it is advisable for lecturers to pause when presenting a new visual to give the students time to copy the information down.

- encouraging student participation and feedback

If the above mentioned techniques were used by lecturers the students might become more aware of the content of a lecture and hence more motivated to become involved in answering questions and giving feedback. However, given the shy nature of many students and the desire not to be seen by their peers to be different, it may be more effective to ask students to work in small groups at various points in a lecture and then give some feedback. Example: “Now talk with three or four of the people sitting near you. Try to solve problem X. I am going to ask for your answers in a few minutes”. The lecturer might take this opportunity to mingle with the students to see what type of answers they are coming up with. Then in the feedback session the lecturer can ask students in particular groups for their feedback, or comment on some of the answers overheard. In this way the responsibility for taking part in the lecture is shared among the group and more interesting suggestions or answers may emerge.

With more discussion as to how to maximize the effectiveness of lectures at university all stakeholders in the educational process will benefit - lecturers will feel more confident and at ease with the lecture event, students will understand more easily and fully the content of their lectures, and the university will produce more confident graduates, both in terms of their knowledge and language ability.

Notes
1. There is a third study (Arden-Close, 1993), but this focusses solely on lecturers’ problems with vocabulary.
References


