

Elc1013 unit 1

Linguistics, Language



How often do PolyU students use English outside the classroom? Because many people think PolyU students don't use English much outside of class, I wanted to find out the answer to this question so I decided to do a survey. I worked out a questionnaire and then handed it out to lots of students from eight 5 departments. The students filled in the questionnaire and then gave it back to me. I did the survey in April 2011. A total of 707 students took part in the survey, which is a really huge sample. In fact, this is the biggest survey of its kind ever done in Hong Kong which is terrific! The questionnaire asked the students to say how often they use English when they talk to friends, parents, etc. When they filled in the questionnaire, the students had to circle a number from 1 (never) to 6 (very often). If they circled 1-3, it means that they don't use English very much. If they circled the numbers 4-6, it means that they use English fairly often. As you can see, I've put all the data about speaking in English in Figure 1.

Let's now talk about the data in Figure 1. First and foremost, it's crystal clear that students don't have many opportunities to speak English outside the 20 classrooms. This is not surprising because, as we all know, old people in Hong Kong can't speak English. That's because the education system wasn't very good in the past. But, you can see that there are a few situations (overseas holidays and so on) where students do get a golden opportunity to use their English, even though this is not really very often. In a nutshell, then, the data in Figure 1 prove that PolyU students don't speak English much outside the classroom. Note down the style problems you found in the box below. For each problem, you identify, write an appropriate solution.

Improve the style of the following sentences.

- a) Has China been affected by the financial tsunami? She'd appear to be managing quite nicely.
- b) And it's high time we started to think about the wealth gap.
- c) Some business leaders make some bad business decisions.

Avoid 'Run-on' expressions Limit the use of 'run-on' expressions such as etc., and so on in academic writing. Use the term such as to inform the reader that not all possible examples are given. Do professionals often need to write reports, memos, etc. at work. ? Professionals often need to write documents such as reports and memos at work.

Then match the error to the style issues in the box below. Most sentences have more than one problem. emotional/subjective colloquial expressions vague/everyday cliché contraction/negativity personal reference sentence starter

- a) The problem of air pollution has become more and more serious in recent years.
- b) In the past decade, a lot of research has been done into indoor air quality.
- c) The results let everyone see that the quality of service in Hong Kong restaurants is bad.
- d) Hong Kong companies value employees who have good communication skills.
- e) And language policy in secondary schools has been a hot topic for many years.
- f) We all know that students learn better when they are taught in their mother tongue.

- g) The students didn't encounter any problems finding good data for their projects.
- h) Ensuring a big sample of subjects for a questionnaire survey is a must.
- i) Researchers got their data by doing telephone interviews.

The following essay is a more appropriately written academic essay than the draft analyzed in Activity 1. Discuss with a partner the ways in which this passage is more academically appropriate than the earlier Activity 1 version.

Students' use of English outside the university

- (A) This essay investigates the perceived problem of Hong Kong students' lack of English use outside the university. The data reported below were derived from a questionnaire survey of a substantial sample of first-year undergraduates from eight departments at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
- (B) The survey was conducted between 12 and 23 April 2011. The subjects completed the questionnaire during their English for University Studies classes under the supervision of a research assistant. A total of 1, 283 questionnaires were distributed and 707 correctly completed copies were returned and subsequently analyzed. The questionnaire required the respondents to indicate the frequency with which they speak, listen, read, and write in English outside the formal setting of the English-medium classroom.
- (C) The first section of the questionnaire asked the subjects to indicate on a six-point scale how often they speak in English in a range of non-academic situations. On the evidence of the findings presented in

Figure 1, it would appear that tertiary students in Hong Kong generally have little need to speak in English outside the classroom.

- (D) The evidence suggests that undergraduates rarely communicate with their parents or grandparents in English. This finding is perhaps not surprising as census data indicate that the overwhelming majority of people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese [1]. In the intimatefamilydomain, young people understandably have little need or desire to speak English, apart from special circumstances such as preparing for English language examinations.
- E) The results indicate that the situation in which tertiary students use English least is in interactions with their grandparents. When interpreting this finding, it is worth noting that recent surveys have revealed that English is less widely known among Hong Kong people in their sixties and seventies than among those in the 4060 and 20-40 age groups [2]. This largely stems from the fact that the provision of English medium secondary education was limited in the 1940s and 1950s [3]. The majority of citizens in the 60-70 age group are likely to have received only a Chinese-medium primary education [4].
- F) While the data in Figure 1 suggest that tertiary students tend not to speak English very frequently outside class, there are apparently several situations where spoken English has some degree of importance in the subjects' lives. As might be expected, the situation where the subjects need to speak the language most is on overseas holidays. As Cantonese is not widely spoken outside China, it is

perhaps understandable that students need to communicate in English on trips to Europe, North America, and other parts of Asia.

- (G) As noted above, students rarely talk to their immediate family members in English. However, it is interesting that some of the subjects apparently have some need to communicate with their relatives in English. One possible factor behind the use of English in this situation is that their relatives live in an English speaking country. In the case of younger relatives (e. g. cousins), it is possible that they have no knowledge of Cantonese, while older relatives (e. g. uncles, aunts) may feel more comfortable using their adopted language.

Improving academic style

Use the academic writing advice above to complete the following exercises.

1. Skim through the Activity 6 essay and find formal verbs with similar meanings to the following informal phrasal verbs. The paragraph is given in brackets to help you. filled in (B) handed out (B) _____ looks into (A) _____ found out (E) _____.
2. Find words in the Activity 6 passage which have similar meanings to the following vague, everyday words: done (B) _____ later (B) _____ big (A) _____ got (A) _____.
3. To avoid repeating the words students and findings, the writer uses a number of synonyms. List the synonyms used. students: findings: _____.

4. How does the writer avoid using informal negative forms? Underline one example in the passage in Paragraph D.
5. The draft that you read in Activity 1 included the following inappropriate sentences: This is not surprising because, as we all know, old people in Hong Kong can't speak English.

Situation For a course that you have been doing at university, you have been researching whether the consumption of organic produce can affect the health of a population. You are also interested in whether a subject's positive opinion of their well being* has an effect on their general level of health. The area that you are investigating for an assignment is whether Hong Kong subjects also feel better about themselves after consuming organic produce. In Table 1 below, the results of the two surveys are presented. First, a large scale survey was conducted by Wallace and Welbeck [1] among 4619 students in the UK about the consumption of organic produce and self-health ratings. The questions were adapted by your group to survey 89 students at the Polytechnic University. In the survey, subjects were asked to say whether they felt the following illnesses would increase or decrease on a scale from 0 (increase a great deal) to 3 (no effect) to 6 (decrease a great deal) after the consumption of organic produce. Xuan Xuan 13' reproduced with kind permission of Li Wei *Note: "well being" describes the state of feeling healthy and happy

Unit 1- Achieving an Academic Writing Style (IEEE / Vancouver) Section 3 Hedging in academic writing One of the main problems in the Activity 1 text is the writer's use of assertive (overly strong or sure) language when discussing the data. Examples of assertive language are highlighted below.

Let's now talk about the data in Figure 1. First and foremost, it's crystal clear that students don't have many opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. You can tell this because all the means are under 3.00. Clearly, PolyU students don't have any need to speak to parents, etc. in English. This is undoubtedly because their family members are Cantonese speakers. Obviously, there's no point in speaking English when everyone can speak Cantonese. As you can see, PolyU students never speak to their grandparents in English. This is not surprising because, as we all know, old people in Hong Kong can't speak English. That's because the education system wasn't very good in the past. You can see, though, that there are a few situations (overseas holidays and so on) where students do get a golden opportunity to use their English, even though this is not really very often. In a nutshell, then, the data in Figure 1 prove that PolyU students don't speak English much outside the classroom. Expressing opinions or making claims in overly strong language leaves you open to attack by critical readers. Such statements will often be doubted by readers thereby reducing your power and authority as a writer. A reader who does not believe a writer will rarely read on. To avoid such a situation, when stating ideas or discussing data you should use tentative rather than assertive language. You should avoid expressions such as: clearly undoubtedly obviously definitely without a doubt there is no doubt that certainly absolutely Be very careful about using words like always (very common in Chinese), never, ever and all because these suggest absolute certainty, which is inappropriate, and often incorrect, in many situations.

Compare the following sentences:

1. The Hong Kong economy will grow next year. (Too strong! The writer is open to criticism if the Hong Kong economy does not grow next year)
2. The Hong Kong economy might grow next year. (Ok. The writer is hedging by using the modal verb ‘ might’)
3. Some economists believe the Hong Kong economy will grow next year.

Use hedging verbs

The following ‘ hedging’ verbs are often used in academic writing: suggest indicate estimate implies The results indicate that the situation in which tertiary students use English least is in interactions with their grandparents. The verbs appear and seem are used to ‘ distance’ the writer from the findings (and therefore avoid making a strong claim and be subject to criticism from readers). On the evidence of the findings presented in Figure 1, it would appear that tertiary students in Hong Kong generally have little need to speak in English outside the classroom.