Student Regard for Their Required Textbooks

Thomas H. GOETZ

INTRODUCTION

Over the period of an academic year, first year college students at Hokusei Gakuen University participated in a project that surveyed their regard for their required English Language textbooks. The textbooks surveyed were *English Firsthand One* and *English Firsthand Two*, *New Gold Editions*, Longmans. The purpose was to find out how they like their books. One may ask, "why bother with a survey?" The argument in favor of avoiding student surveys at first may seem to have merit in that if a few teachers simply sit down at a table and relate their successes and failures in light of the text in question, then areas of need and successful insights not only get discovered, but shared and supposedly passed on. Students ought to benefit. Also, one may ponder, "what do students know? Especially college freshmen?" While students may lack expert knowledge of the field they are learning, they do, nonetheless, have a keen sense for like and dislike, for that which is useful and useless, for ease and difficulty, and for that which is interesting and boring. Therefore, realizing that student attitudes are worthy of collection and investigation, professors of Hokusei Gakuen University's Cross Departmental English Language Program developed and carried out one such survey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of research pertaining to surveys is, to say the least, a wide one. Within the area of second and foreign language education, survey studies tend to fall into two groups: teachers evaluating ESL/EFL textbooks, and administrators evaluating ESL/EFL programs. In all cases, the writers pay particular attention to current intents and uses of surveys in programs and classrooms, however, attention to interpreting the survey data tends to fall short of the attention given in this present study.

When teachers evaluate textbooks, they often place themselves in a qualitative research environment as active participants, determining not only textbook selection, but the criteria for assessing, and reasons for giving a certain book the rating they feel it deserves (Goetz 1997). An example of this is found Thomas Adams' *An Analysis of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Textbooks Published in the United States from the 1950s through the 1980s* (Thomas Adams 1996). By highlighting the incidental but pervasive social messages

contained in their content, including restriction to middle class populations and values, Adams tracked stereotyped sex roles, lack of visibility of minorities, negative messages about minority groups, and treatment of some socially sensitive topics such as divorce, over a span of the thirty years.　His textbook survey showed substantial cultural changes, most of them positive, in the content of ESL textbooks.　The method of item analysis was qualitative, typical of cultural content surveys.　The main point was that the content of the texts need to be up to date and salient with respect the lives of the students who use them.

In another textbook survey, *A Review of the Four Most Widely-Used ESL Texts by LLA/LVA Affiliates* (Spelleri 2002) makes the point that not all students are equal and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) textbooks, need to be selected carefully through a particular process. The process included analyzing texts on: linguistic rather than communicative competence; giving adult learners the language skills needed to function in society; grammar-based texts that focus on oral grammatical accuracy; and overall fluency through an expanded vocabulary.　Four books were considered, each showing their strengths.　The emphasis was on creating criteria for selecting the right book for the right learner.　Such an approach suggested an ideal setting in an otherwise neutral world.

Hong Kong has never been a neutral place, linguistically nor politically.　One such textbook survey done before Hong Kong's return to China viewed, in historical perspective, the shifting preference for EFL textbooks.　Lee and Adamson discuss the role of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) textbooks in Hong Kong schools.　They first examined the social and historical contexts, reaching back more than a century up to an including the newly revised public school curriculum (Lee and Adamson 1994).　They viewed textbooks from three perspectives: curricular (socio-political); instructional (as an educational tool); and economic (as a commodity).　Then they considered the major historical periods of English language teaching in Hong Kong: classical humanism (1878-1952); reconstructionism (1952–1995) and progressivism (post-1995).　They argued that the use of textbooks during each of these periods is indicative to what the leaders needed from the learners, a highly trained workforce that can function in a multilingual society.　They concluded on a positive note that in the new Hong Kong educational scheme, published ESL textbooks and complementary materials (workbooks, audio and video tapes) will be world class by promoting progressive values, thus contributing the economy's durability and flexibility.　All of their data is qualitative and their conclusions are qualitative as well.

When politics are either implied or directly addressed, textbooks, and those who select them, often get analyzed.　In a study from Iran, Mojgan Majdzadeh discusses the disconnection between language and culture in a case study of Iranian English textbooks (Majdzadeh 2002).　She says that lack of cultural knowledge related to English among Iranian students who pursue advanced education abroad affects their English language proficiency.　Whether the disconnection between the English language and the culture of that language embodied in Iranian English textbooks hinders students' knowledge and use of the English language was investigated.　Similar to Japan, after seven years of studying English in public schools,

students still feel the need to attend private language classes to increase their English language skills. In Japan, the purpose for attending private language classes, is mainly for getting extra help so as to enter a good university. In Iran, it is for academic and/or job related purposes domestically or abroad. The data collected came from a content analysis of twenty one lessons from eighth and ninth grade public school textbooks and twenty four lessons from the same level textbooks in a private language school.

By comparing the two, she found that the government approved books are better for learning grammar, and the private school lessons are better for learning communication. In both cases, the textbooks are written with great respect for the Iranian national character, which is the Islamic tradition. Her conclusion was that the objectives of learning English cannot be reached without providing ESL materials to meet the criteria of teaching a second and/or foreign language. Such a conclusion seems to fall short of criticizing the Iranian state for emphasizing Iran's culture to the exclusion of others, hence offering no other explanation for an English speaker's disconnection when outside of Iran.

From surveying textbooks, teachers and administrators also apply surveys to EFL/ESL programs. Couto and Towersey, in *The Brazilian EFL Learner: A Profile Influencing Curriculum* surveyed two hundred seven students of English as a Second Language, aged eleven to fifty seven and at all proficiency levels, in a Brazilian English institute to derive a student profile for curriculum development (Couto and Towersey 1992). The subjects were questioned concerning: motivation for starting and continuing English language study; perceptions of the language lessons in terms of activity types, interaction types, and degree of student and teacher control; and sources of English language and cultural input. Results indicated that the students' primary motive for beginning to learn English was to understand films, songs, and other aspects of popular culture, but their motive for continuing study was employment-related. In general, students pursued English instruction for professional advancement, to take advantage of spoken and visual media, for travel, and because they perceive it as part of a good education.

Observations made included that the students' favorite classroom activities appear to correlate with motivations, but writing and grammar were not generally enjoyed. Most favored paired and group work over individual work. Students also preferred teachers to have control over classroom interaction. Teacher and textbooks were the desired sources of input. Indicative of their interpretation of their data was simply constructing histograms. In fact, no mention of any statistical analysis was made. The main point is that with many surveys, the interpretation of the data is often just as easy as filling out the survey. One limitation is that if a program is under consideration for funding or the curriculum is under question, a quantitative approach in interpreting the survey results would be necessary.

In another program level survey, Chacon and Alvarez (2001) set to find the relationship between critical pedagogy and English as a foreign language (EFL) in Venezuela. Their main point was that Venezuelans need: to develop their own textbooks and materials and not just rely on texts imported from the United States, Britain, Canada, or Australia and; to

encourage life-long learning.   They surveyed Venezuelan teachers for level of education, years of service, travel and or study in an English speaking country, and self rated proficiency in English.   The last item was offered in a four point LIKERT type scale.   The results were set all in percentages.   Given the number of participants, fourteen, it seems hard to see how their conclusions can be so far reaching.

Carolyn Turner, in her study, *Evaluation of an In-Service EFL Teacher Training Project across Costa Rica* (Turner 1999), reported on the evaluation process and results of an in-service training program for English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) teachers in Costa Rica. The program was developed in response to new public policy concerning EFL instruction. The project was to evaluate and examine participants' expectations, perceptions, and reflections on the program's success, and provide information useful in improving the program and informing stakeholders of its effectiveness.   Students were tested using an English language measure and writing samples and both instructors and students completed a course evaluation questionnaire.   The statistics used to process the data collected by way of a five point LIKERT scale was to present the mean scores for each item.   At this point of observation, the researcher must wonder as to why one would select that procedure in light of the fact that the survey generated ordinal data, not continuous.   An Ordinal Logistic Fit Model seems to have been appropriate.

Conclusions from the literature.   The desire to survey is great, but the know how by which one needs to interpret survey data appears lacking.   In this study, careful attention is paid to selecting most appropriate method for a meaningful interpretation of the data.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The design of this project is both qualitative and quantitative.   Qualitative in collecting survey data from students as to their regard for their required textbooks, and quantitative when processing and interpreting the survey results.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The Research Question is the null hypothesis, that none of the X variables, or chapter components, have any influence on the probability that the Y variable will be effected - the extent to which they like, in this case, Unit One of English Firsthand One, New Gold Edition.

SUBJECTS

Participants in the survey include all first year college students majoring in Economics, Social Welfare, and Communications.   While the total number of registered students exceeded seven hundred, the total number of survey cards processed suggest that six hundred eighty eight actually participated.   The mortality rate can be explained in that the surveys were

distributed intermittently and on just about any day, some students were absent for whatever reason. The rationale for subject selection was determined by considering the size of our research budget. Available funds were made for the purchase of all necessary equipment and therefore making it possible to survey all students. The manner of subject selection was done in accordance with class membership as determined by the registrar in light of a placement test given to all entering students after matriculation.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION

Please refer to the appendix for a copy of the survey. The survey was presented on B-4 paper, printed on one side. It asked students to fill in their class code, their book (either English Firsthand One or Two, New Gold Edition), and unit number. After that, they were faced with a twenty-seven item questionnaire by which they responded via a five point LIKERT scale. All responses were marked on mark sheets that were later read by a mark sheet reader. From the text file of the scanned cards, a database was constructed and shared with fellow researchers.

The survey asked on the outset three general questions what extent was the unit interesting, easy, and useful. This was followed by three more sections that probed the same thing, but according to each chapter's eight principle components. These components included: Listening Tasks, About You, Self Study, Conversation, Duet, Language Check, Ensemble, and Solo. The time necessary to complete a survey was observed to be between seven and ten minutes. Data were gathered over the period of an academic year, when a teacher finished a chapter, the surveys were distributed. There were twelve chapters to survey and twenty five classes total. In excess of 8,000 cards were processed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once the data were read by a mark sheet reader and a database constructed, the file was saved in Excel. Modifications were made to the database to make room for future research. Such modifications included indicating the gender of the teacher and nationality, and what level the class was based on the scores of a proficiency test given earlier. From there it was imported into JMP, a statistical software package.

The nature of the data collected was both Nominal and Ordinal. The descriptive data, class membership, book used, and unit studied constituted the nominal data. The other data that had students answer according to a LIKERT scale, was ordinal, in that the values were ordered, but of no numeric value.

1-Very Negative -2- Negative -3- Neutral -4- Positive -5- Very Positive.

While it might be tempting to treat the data as numeric, one would miss the opportunity to conclude with any certainty the likelihood that students prefer one aspect of their book

over another. Therefore, in order to meet this desire, an Ordinal Logistic Fit Model was selected.

Here below are the salient sections the read out for English Firsthand One, Unit One.

Chapter＝Ch01

Ordinal Logistic Fit for Unit Interesting

Whole Model Test

Model	-LogLikelihood	DF	ChiSquare	Prob>ChiSq
Difference	112.43766	32	224.8753	<.0001
Full	248.92369			
Reduced	361.36135			

A significant likelihood-ratio Chi-Square for the whole model, or Unit One, of 224.8753 with 32 degrees freedom has been observed, showing that there are preferences contained within the survey findings. We may proceed to the Parameter Estimates Section.

Parameter Estimates Section.

Parameter Estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	ChiSquare	Prob>ChiSq	Finding
Intercept[1]	4.73642321	1.5798882	8.99	0.0027	
Intercept[2]	8.7647387	2.0005231	19.2	<.0001	
Intercept[3]	12.3042064	2.0489943	36.06	<.0001	
Intercept[4]	15.3061399	2.0829487	54	<.0001	
LT Int[2-1]	-0.9895668	1.0471928	0.89	0.3447	Strongest
LT Int[5-4]	-0.8888416	0.6856481	1.68	0.1949	Strong
LT Int[4-3]	-0.5342566	0.3265719	2.68	0.1018	Mild
LT Int[3-2]	0.37349367	0.4621752	0.65	0.419	Weak
AY Int[4-3]	-1.2896148	0.4121308	9.79	0.0018	Strongest
AY Int[5-4]	-0.7330178	0.3476962	4.44	0.035	Strong
AY Int[6-5]	-0.6375927	0.6702184	0.91	0.3414	Mild
AY Int[3-2]	0.72373347	1.0137748	0.51	0.4753	Weak
SS Int[2-1]	-3.2341349	1.0213621	10.03	0.0015	Strongest
SS Int[5-4]	-0.289716	1.3902788	0.04	0.8349	Strong
SS Int[3-2]	0.11590409	0.452459	0.07	0.7978	Mild
SS Int[4-3]	0.11884863	0.4045924	0.09	0.7689	Weak
Conv Int[2-1]	-4.859439	1.5083326	10.38	0.0013	Strongest
Conv Int[5-4]	-1.2518329	0.5099585	6.03	0.0141	Strong
Conv Int[3-2]	-1.0685403	0.494323	4.67	0.0306	Mild
Conv Int[4-3]	-0.2213613	0.3201176	0.48	0.4893	Weak
Duet Int[5-4]	-1.0092241	0.4941504	4.17	0.0411	Strongest
Duet Int[4-3]	-0.5239596	0.3111683	2.84	0.0922	Strong
Duet Int[3-2]	-0.4895127	0.6435805	0.58	0.4469	Mild
Duet Int[2-1]	2.81769794	1.1666171	5.83	0.0157	Weak
LC Int[2-1]	-2.7371231	1.5666542	3.05	0.0806	Strongest
LC Int[4-3]	-0.5030025	0.3487158	2.08	0.1492	Strong
LC Int[3-2]	-0.3521589	0.3919145	0.81	0.3689	Mild
LC Int[5-4]	0.76247947	0.9045184	0.71	0.3992	Weak
Ens Int[5-4]	-1.0164376	0.5647752	3.24	0.0719	Strongest
Ens Int[4-3]	-0.4635894	0.3526598	1.73	0.1887	Strong

Ens Int[3-2]	-0.0204899	0.5378129	0	0.9696	Mild
Ens Int[2-1]	0.52452663	1.4925081	0.12	0.7253	Weak
Solo Int[2-1]	-0.6502963	0.7849923	0.69	0.4074	Strongest
Solo Int[5-4]	-0.4873753	0.8354125	0.34	0.5596	Strong
Solo Int[4-3]	-0.0833862	0.3602176	0.05	0.8169	Mild
Solo Int[3-2]	0.45781343	0.4184568	1.2	0.2739	Weak

To see the extent to which subsection within its component part is "interesting" in the eyes of the students, we are to look for the most negative parameter values for the strongest likelihood that students' selection on the survey effect on their overall interest in the unit. This is known as fitting with probable certainty.

FINDINGS

Students found the Top-Down sections of Unit One to be more interesting than the Bottom Up Sections. This observation is significant. Please see the chart below.

LT Int[2-1]	Bottom Up
AY Int[4-3]	Top Down
SS Int[2-1]	Bottom Up
Conv Int[2-1]	Bottom Up
Duet Int[5-4]	Top Down
LC Int[2-1]	Grammar
Ens Int[5-4]	Top Down
Solo Int[2-1]	Bottom Up

IMPLICATIONS

In light of the results, the next step is to examine again the Ensemble, Duet, and About You sections to see what they share in common. At this point, a qualitative look at these sections is warranted. Aside from the shared Top-Down structure of the exercises, all three include listening to and answering questions that may or may not have a correct answer. All sections include and or ask for personal information. Therefore, teachers should be sure to spend generous amounts of time on these sections in class, possibly assigning other less interesting parts as homework. When one thinks about these tasks as interesting, one has to imagine that for many students this is a first time when they successfully exchange meaningful information about themselves with another person in a foreign language.

As far as designing a curriculum, educational administrators should see that not all components in English Firsthand One New Gold Edition, Chapter One are interesting and should seek more information from the data.

DISCUSSION

As Michael Rost states in Freeing Up Free Conversation (Rost 2003), students who want

to speak out more often lack the vocabulary and idiomatic tools by which to achieve this end. Experienced teachers often sense that that merely asking them to talk with their friends leads to little meaningful language exchange. To meet the need for guiding students from structured to free speech, one must consider the Ensemble and Duet sections of his English Firsthand Series. In this study English Firsthand One, Unit One is being considered. The Top-Down sections of the unit ranked first as the most interesting aspect contributing to the unit's overall appeal to the students. What makes it interesting is that the students are in control of their conversations, albeit structured conversations. It is impossible for the teacher to monitor each one so the students are left to themselves to work on their own fluency. As the preliminary results show, this is what the students found to be most probable fitting aspects that constitute why the unit was interesting.
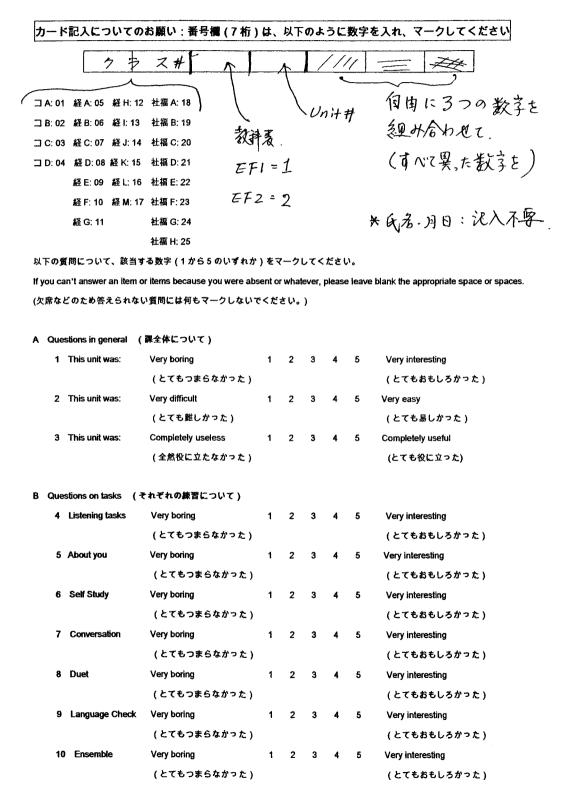

CONCLUSION

In the world of education, eventually discredited methods of teaching make their come-back. But, this need not be the case. When teachers and administrators structure surveys that genuinely seek information without restriction, the hardest part has been accomplished. Selecting the most appropriate method of interpreting the data is then the next logical step. Some, not all, of the articles reviewed showed signs of a lack of knowledge in statistics, but a sincere desire to improve local conditions. To conclude that the students of this survey find their textbook interesting would be too early. What can be said is that they found the Top Down sections to be interesting within a single unit. And that in and of itself raises more questions for further research.

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Survey on *English Firsthand 1 & 2* (*English Firsthand 1 & 2* に関するアンケート)

カード記入についてのお願い：番号欄（7桁）は、以下のように数字を入れ、マークしてください

クキズ#

コ A: 01　経 A: 05　経 H: 12　社福 A: 18
コ B: 02　経 B: 06　経 I: 13　社福 B: 19
コ C: 03　経 C: 07　経 J: 14　社福 C: 20
コ D: 04　経 D: 08　経 K: 15　社福 D: 21
　　　　　経 E: 09　経 L: 16　社福 E: 22
　　　　　経 F: 10　経 M: 17　社福 F: 23
　　　　　経 G: 11　　　　　　社福 G: 24
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　社福 H: 25

Unit #

教科書．
EFI = 1
EF2 = 2

自由に3つの数字を
組み合わせて．
（すべて異った数字を）

※ 氏名・月日：記入不要．

以下の質問について、該当する数字（1から5のいずれか）をマークしてください。

If you can't answer an item or items because you were absent or whatever, please leave blank the appropriate space or spaces.

(欠席などのため答えられない質問には何もマークしないでください。)

A　Questions in general　(課全体について)

1　This unit was:　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

2　This unit was:　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　　Very easy
　　　　　　　　　　（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

3　This unit was:　Completely useless　1　2　3　4　5　　Completely useful
　　　　　　　　　　（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

B　Questions on tasks　(それぞれの練習について)

4　Listening tasks　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

5　About you　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

6　Self Study　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

7　Conversation　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

8　Duet　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

9　Language Check　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

10　Ensemble　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　　Very interesting
　　　　　　　（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

11　Solo　　Very boring　　1　2　3　4　5　Very interesting
（とてもつまらなかった）　　　　　　　　（とてもおもしろかった）

C　How were the following?　（難易度について）

12　Listening tasks　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

13　About you　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

14　Self Study　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

15　Conversation　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

16　Duet　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

17　Language Check　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

18　Ensemble　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

19　Solo　Very difficult　1　2　3　4　5　Very easy
（とても難しかった）　　　　　　　　　（とても易しかった）

D　On improving my English knowledge　（英語力の向上について）

20　Listening tasks　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

21　About you　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

22　Self Study　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

23　Conversation　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

24　Duet　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

25　Language Check　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

26　Ensemble　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

27　Solo　Completely unhelpful　1　2　3　4　5　Completely helpful
（全然役に立たなかった）　　　　　　　（とても役に立った）

E　Your comments　（この課について意見がありましたら、自由に書いてください。）

[Abstract]

Student Regard for Their Required Textbooks[1]

Thomas H. GOETZ

This paper will introduce an on-going research project being carried out by members of Hokusei Gakuen University. The aim of the study is to find out how students regard their required English Language textbooks. A twenty seven item survey was devised to solicit student responses as to their preferences, or lack thereof, regarding their proscribed textbooks. The textbooks under consideration for the survey were *English Firsthand One, New Gold Edition* and *English Firsthand Two, New Gold Edition* published by Longman. A five-point LIKERT-type scale was employed. Group classification included department, class, and book. What the students say by way of the survey is of primary importance, implications apply not only to future instruction but for curriculum design as well. Preliminary results to be discussed in light of current research.