



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ATTRITION OF EFL
TERTIARY STUDENTS IN CHINA OVER A
TWO-MONTH BREAK**

YU ZHONGGEN

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UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

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CHINA OVER A TWO-MONTH BREAK**

By

YU ZHONGGEN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Philosophy**

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Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ATTRITION OF EFL TERTIARY STUDENTS IN
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January 2011

Chairperson: Professor Chan Swee Heng, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

This study aims primarily to identify if participants experience attrition in speaking, speed and in-depth reading comprehension, short conversation and passage listening comprehension and writing abilities over a two-month holiday. Another research objective is to identify the attrition in vocabulary knowledge. Taking into consideration research practicability and efficiency, different numbers of participants took different tests. Three hundred and forty tertiary students from Nanjing University of Posts & Telecommunications (NUPT) were randomly selected to participate in the reading and listening tests before and after the holiday, 50 participants took part in the tests of writing, and 121 participated in the vocabulary tests.



A questionnaire was administered to 340 tertiary students and it included numerous variables in relation to language attrition such as self-assessment of speaking skills, motivation and social activities. The data collected from the tests and questionnaire were analyzed via nonparametric and parametric tests using SPSS. Cronach's alpha coefficient and MFRM (Multi Facets Rasch Model) were used to validate the reliabilities.

The results of the tests indicated that participants' short conversation listening comprehension scores gained significantly ($p=.05$) over the holiday period, showing improvement. However, no statistical significance was found in the passage listening comprehension scores, thus indicating no presence of significant attrition or improvement. In addition, the results did not indicate any statistically significant attrition in both modes of reading comprehension though a slight increase was found in speed reading comprehension scores and evidence of slight attrition was obtained in in-depth reading comprehension. No significant gender differences were found in speed and in-depth reading, short conversation listening and passage listening conversation scores. The results also showed that participants experienced a statistically significant level of attrition in not only overall writing skills but also specific writing skills such as *pertinence*, *coherence*, *clarity* and *grammar* over the holiday period. Females suffered a higher level of attrition than males in all tested specific writing skills except for *grammar*. Significant



attrition was also found in vocabulary knowledge.

The results of the questionnaire showed that participants believed that their overall English proficiency (including speaking skills) attrited over the holiday period although the listening and reading test results did not reveal any statistically significant attrition. Participants showed a lower level of positive motivation and fewer social activities for studying English language during the holiday than before the holiday and this could have contributed to the attrition in some of the linguistic abilities.

The findings suggested that attrition was not an overall phenomenon affecting all language skills. Thus, it might point to students having different threshold levels in learning and maintaining the language skills learnt. Institutions would need to initiate measures that address attrition in order that the problem be minimized. A low level of attrition would lead to graduates having a better language ability to serve the China economy that is fast expanding. More proficient graduates in English would help to realize the economic goals and to participate more efficiently both locally and globally.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
Sebagai memenuhi keperluan ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**HAKISAN DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS SEPANJANG TEMPOH CUTI
DUA BULAN DALAM KALANGAN MAHASISWA EFL DI NEGARA CHINA
SELEPAS DUA BULAN REHAT**

Oleh

YU ZHONGGEN

Januari 2011

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Penyelidikan ini terutama sekali bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti sama ada responden mengalami hakisan bahasa dalam pertuturan, kelancaran dan pemahaman dalam bacaan, perbualan pendek dan mendengar petikan pemahaman juga kemampuan penulisan sepanjang tempoh cuti dua bulan. Selain itu, objektif lain adalah untuk mengenal pasti hakisan dalam pengetahuan kosa kata. Demi kepraktisan dan keberkesanan penyelidikan, terdapat perbezaan responden dalam mengambil ujian yang berlainan. Seramai tiga ratus empat puluh mahasiswa dari Universiti Pos dan Telekomunikasi Nanjing telah dipilih secara rawak dalam ujian bacaan dan mendengar sebelum dan sesudah cuti. Lima puluh responden telah terlibat

dalam ujian penulisan dan seramai 121 peserta mengambil bahagian dalam ujian kosa kata.

Satu soal selidik telah diedar kepada 340 mahasiswa. Soal selidik ini melibatkan pelbagai pembolehubah yang berkaitan dengan hakisan bahasa seperti penilaian sendiri dalam kemahiran pertuturan, motivasi dan aktiviti sosial. Data yang dikumpul dari ujian dan soal selidik telah dianalisis melalui ujian bukan parametrik dan parametrik dengan menggunakan SPSS. Pekali alpha Cronbach dan Model *Multi Facets Rasch* (MFRM) digunakan untuk kesahan dan kepercayaan kajian ini.

Responden dalam ujian mendengar petikan pemahaman telah menunjukkan peningkatan dalam bahasa Inggeris, iaitu memperolehi skor yang signifikan ($p=.05$) selama tempoh bercuti. Walau bagaimanapun, tiada skor yang signifikan dalam statistik yang ditemui dalam aspek mendengar petikan pemahaman yang menunjukkan tanda hakisan mahupun pembaikan bahasa. Tambahan pula, keputusan kajian tidak menunjukkan sebarang hakisan dalam kedua-dua model pemahaman bacaan. Walaupun terdapat sedikit pembaikan ditemui dalam kelancaran bacaan dan sedikit bukti hakisan bahasa telah diperolehi dari pemahaman dalam bacaan. Tidak ada perbezaan gender yang signifikan dalam skor kelancaran bacaan,

mendengar perbualan pendek serta mendengar petikan pemahaman. Keputusan juga menyatakan bahawa responden mengalami tahap hakisan bahasa yang signifikan bukan sahaja dalam penulisan tetapi juga kemahiran tertentu seperti ketepatan, koherensi, kejelasan dan tatabahasa selama tempoh bercuti. Responden perempuan mengalami tahap hakisan bahasa yang lebih daripada responden lelaki dalam semua ujian kecuali aspek tatabahasa. Hakisan bahasa yang signifikan juga ditemui dalam pengetahuan kosa kata.

Keputusan dalam soal selidik menunjukkan bahawa responden percaya secara keseluruhannya kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris mereka terhakis (termasuk keupayaan bertutur) selama tempoh bercuti, walaupun dalam ujian mendengar dan membaca tidak mendedahkan hakisan bahasa dari segi statistik. Dapatan kajian mendapati responden menunjukkan tahap motivasi positif yang lebih rendah dan aktiviti sosial yang sedikit dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggeris semasa cuti jika dibandingkan dengan sebelum cuti. Situasi ini telah menyumbang kepada hakisan bahasa dalam beberapa aspek kemahiran linguistik.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa hakisan bahasa bukan fenomena yang menyeluruh dalam mempengaruhi kemahiran bahasa. Namun

demikian, ini mungkin menunjukkan responden mempunyai tahap yang berbeza dalam pembelajaran dan pemeliharaan kemahiran bahasa yang telah dipelajari. Institusi perlu mengadakan inisiatif untuk mengukur hakisan bahasa agar masalah ini dapat diminimumkan. Tahap hakisan bahasa yang rendah membolehkan para graduan memiliki kemahiran berbahasa untuk memberi sumbangan dalam era ekonomi negara Cina yang kian pesat berkembang. Lebih ramai graduan yang mahir dalam bahasa Inggeris akan membantu pencapaian sasaran ekonomi dan mengambil bahagian dengan lebih cekap sama ada tempatan mahupun global.



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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 10 January, 2011 to conduct the final examination of Yu Zhonggen on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “English Language Attrition of EFL Tertiary Students in China over a Two-month Break” in accordance with Universiti Putra Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degrees at University Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

Yu Zhonggen

YU ZHONGGEN

Date: 10 January 2011



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET- College English Test

CET4- College English Test Band 4

CET6- College English Test band 6

MFRM- Multi Facets Rasch Model

NUPT- Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications

SLA- Second Language Acquisition

SL- Second Language

FL- Foreign Language

EFL- English as a Foreign Language

ESL- English as a Second Language

IE- Integrated English

CLL- Common Language Law

LRGV- Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas

UTP- University of Texas-Pan

STARS- Nebraska's School-Based Teacher-Led Assessment and Reporting System



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