

**A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision**

**A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
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摘 要

我國一般大學生能以英語與外籍人士交談者大有人在；國際貿易書信的撰寫，許多非外文系畢業者亦能應付裕如；英文系學生更能與英美友人暢談西方文學、哲學及政治制度。而令人不可思議的，對於耳熟能詳的話語，如「我視力 1.2」、「你眼鏡幾度？」「他眼睛老花」，據筆者調查發現，甚多專攻英語的大學生竟不知如何以英語表達。英語教學的目標不祇訓練學生能以英語討論國外問題，也要能談國內現象。由於臺灣近視率高居世界之冠，有關視力問題在日常生活中常被談起，對於這方面常用辭句的英語說法也一直困擾著我國大學生。很遺憾地，坊間英語教科書均欠缺相關的教材。針對此一英語教學的死角，本文以英語裏有關視力的詞句做有系統地探討、介紹，希望能對國內英語教學有所裨益。

1. Introduction

The principle of immediate pay-off value has been considered a most crucial criterion in selecting teaching materials for ESL/EFL students. Sentences most useful to the learner or most relevant to his daily life should be taught first so that he can use them right after class in everyday life. This will not only enhance immediate reinforcement but also make teaching activities more meaningful and rewarding. In Taiwan, a great number of students have visual defects (about 40% of sixth-graders in elementary school, 70% of ninth-graders in junior high school, and 85% of college-bound high school seniors). By the time students go to college, approximately 90% of them are nearsighted and many of them suffer from astigmatism. Consequently, to talk about their visual problems or their eyeglasses has always been a common topic in our students' daily conversation.

The other day I was astonished when I overheard a senior English major asking his girlfriend with a new pair of glasses, "How many degrees do your glasses have?" — a direct and nearly verbatim translation of the Chinese expression "你眼鏡幾度?" Surprisingly enough, many college students in Taiwan, especially English majors, are able to express their ideas in English on Shakespeare's plays, Thoreau's transcendentalism or American political philosophy, but are unable to describe such an everyday topic as their own eyesight. Based on my many years of teaching experience, I have found that a large number of students majoring in English do not know how to say in English such familiar Chinese expressions as "我視力 1.2," "我右眼近視," "你戴幾度的眼鏡?" because no one has ever taught them. Part of the problem resides in our textbooks. Although there are many up-to-date good dictionaries and hundreds of modern English textbooks (including those directly imported from Britain and the U.S.A.) on the local market, the aforesaid common expressions hardly exist in any of them. Therefore, a systematic presentation of some important expression on vision will be beneficial to students of English in Taiwan.

2. Vocabulary on Vision Puzzling Chinese Students

The Chinese expressions *chin-shin* (近視), *yuan-shih* (遠視), *san-kuang* (散光), and *lau-hau-yen* (老花眼) used to describe common disturbances of vision occur very often in daily conversation in our society. What are the English equivalents? What is the difference between *nearsighted* and *shortsighted*? How about *farsighted* and *longsighted*? Does *shortsightedness* also refer to a person's inability to see clearly what is distant? These are questions constantly baffling Chinese students.

2.1 A study of "nearsighted," "shortsighted," "farsighted," and "longsighted"

To solve the problems above, this section presents a comparative study of all the definitions of these words in four well-known and popular dictionaries. To ascertain the similarities and differences between American usage and British usage, two dictionaries from each category have been chosen for this study. The following are the dictionaries and their corresponding abbreviations which will be used in this paper:

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

Dictionary	Abbreviation
<i>Oxford American Dictionary</i> (1980)	OAD
<i>The Random House College Dictionary</i> (Revised Edition, 1984)	RHCD
<i>Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English</i> (Revised 3rd Edition)	OALD
<i>Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English</i> (New Edition, 1987)	LDCE

2.1.1 “**Nearsighted.**” Except in OAD, which just defines this word as “shortsighted” without specifying its meaning, the other three dictionaries describe *nearsighted* as “myopic”¹ (seeing distinctly at a short distance only). LDCE states clearly that *nearsighted* is an expression used in American English.

2.1.2 “**Shortsighted.**” Each of the dictionaries presents two definitions – the literal meaning “myopic” and the figurative meaning “lacking in foresight.”

2.1.3 “**Farsighted.**” Both the literal meaning “hyperopic” and the figurative meaning “having great foresight” are listed in the two American dictionaries and OALD. LDCE, in addition to listing the figurative meaning, indicates that when referring to “hyperopic,” *farsighted* is especially used in American English, *longsighted* is especially used in British English.

2.1.4 “**Longsighted.**” The same two aspects of definition as “farsighted” are given in OALD and RHCD. The word *longsighted* does not appear in OAD. LDCE defines it as hyperopic (as opposed to myopic) and shows that it is a word predominantly used in British English.

Discussion. Although the four dictionaries mentioned above are all famous dictionaries of international recognition compiled by distinguished linguists, scholars and lexicographers, each dictionary has its own unique feature. The word *longsighted*, mainly a British expression, is listed in RHCD, but not in OAD, because the former intends to presents an all-embracing vocabulary of the English language, while the latter attempts to present up-to-date American English only. OALD and LDCE are two popular British dictionaries geared to the special

needs of ESL/EFL students with special features on sentence patterns and usage. These unique features, together with American spellings, pronunciation and meanings, make the two British dictionaries the most practical reference books for students in Taiwan. A comparison of the definitions listed in the four dictionaries reveals that in searching out the difference in meaning between *nearsighted* and *shortsighted*, *farsighted* and *longsighted*, LDCE definitions are most helpful to our students.

Since every living language is constantly changing, a slight discrepancy between the dictionary meaning and current usage might exist. To verify that what is stated in this paper is accurate and up-to-date, several native speakers of English who are trained in EFL have been consulted before reaching the conclusions below. The meanings, differences and relationships of the aforesaid expressions on vision can be summarized as follows:

Type of English meaning	American English	British English
myopic (近視)	nearsighted (esp. Am. E.)	shortsighted (esp. Br. E.)
lacking foresight (淺見)	shortsighted	shortsighted
hyperopic (遠視)	farsighted	longsighted (esp. Br. E.)
having great foresight (遠見)	farsighted	farsighted

With reference to "myopic," the word *nearsighted* is most commonly used in American English; *shortsighted* is mainly used British English. Whereas, *shortsighted* in British usage also has the same American concept of lacking foresight.

“The Government’s policy is shortsighted.” (OALD 1984:1077)

“It’s very shortsighted not to spend money on repairing your house.”
(LDCE 1987:969)

2.2 How to say “san-kuang” (散光) in English?

Another common expression concerning visual defect is *astigmatism*, a defect in an eye or lens preventing proper focusing. Due to the high frequency of the Chinese expression *san-kuang* (散光) in the students’ native language, there is every reason for them to know its English equivalent. Fortunately, the word *astigmatism* does not have different shades of meaning as *shortsighted* or *farsighted*. It is listed in each of the dictionaries previously mentioned and it conveys the same explicit, clear-cut information, i.e., a defect in vision due to an aberration of a lens or optical system that causes lines in some directions to be focused less sharply than lines in other directions. To a person with astigmatism, one line on an object may appear to be two lines. *Astigmatism* is not a difficult technical term of ophthalmology. Through my daily contact with my American friends, I have found that almost everyone who wears glasses knows what it is and can use it to describe his visual impairment.

2.3 How to say “lau-hua-yen” (老花眼) in English?

It is inevitable for a person with normal eyesight to become farsighted after middle age. The Chinese expression *lau-hua-yen* used to describe the above-mentioned visual defect is a very common utterance. Is there an English equivalent for it? There are two English words for it, which will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1 “Farsightedness.” To laymen or ordinary people who do not care to give a precise statement, the word “farsightedness” is the answer. *The Encyclopedia Americana* says, “Farsightedness often occurs with advancing age, when the accomodative power of the lens decreases” (p. 37). A middle-aged man has a hard time reading the newspaper without glasses because he is *becoming farsighted*. There are several alternatives to describe failing eyesight after middle age in daily conversation, such as:

“The old man’s eyesight is dim.”

“His eyesight has become weaker with age.”

2.3.2 “Presbyopia.” Since *farsightedness* has several meanings, and very often is interpreted as “hyperopia,” a special term *presbyopia* is used to describe a form of farsightedness that comes with old age. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Second College Edition) defines *presbyopia* as “the inability of the eye to focus sharply on nearby objects, resulting from hardening of the crystalline lens with advancing age.” The term *farsightedness* when applied to young people refers to hyperopia; whereas, the same term when applied to old people actually refers to presbyopia. An old man with presbyopia often needs bifocal or even multifocal lenses to enable the eye to focus at various distances, but a young person with hyperopia doesn’t wear bifocals – although they are farsighted.

In short, *farsightedness* is a rather ambiguous term which implies hyperopia, great foresight, or presbyopia; *presbyopia* conveys an unequivocal meaning for the Chinese expression *lao-hua-yen*, a defect of vision incidental to advancing age.

Inasmuch as the word *presbyopia* is not frequently used by people other than medical professionals, whether students of English should learn it or not is debatable. I consider it unnecessary to introduce this word to beginners or intermediate-level students. To advanced learners of English or ESL/EFL teachers, the necessity to learn it depends on the frequency of the expression in their native languages. Since the Chinese expression *lau-hua-yen* occurs very often in everyday life, it’s English equivalent is certainly worth learning. Furthermore, the word *presbyopia* is easy to learn because it is a combination of “presby” (Gk. *presbys*, old) and “opia” (Gk. *ops*, an eye). Anyone who knows the word *presbyterian* can easily acquire this new vocabulary item in a minute. To a Chinese college student, it is even easier because of the identical word order in this expression.

presbyopia	=	presby	+	opia
		(old, old man)		(eye)

老花眼		老		眼
<i>lau-hua-yen</i>	=	<i>lau-hua</i>	+	<i>yen</i>

3. Sentences on Vision Baffling Chinese Students

This section deals with twenty common sentences on vision, which present a learning problem for advanced EFL students in Taiwan. In spite of the

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

relatively high frequency of these expressions in the students' native language, many of our college students do not know how to say them in English. In order to find out the actual learning situation, an investigation was recently made at National Chengchi University, in which thirty junior English majors were asked to translate these twenty sentences from Chinese into English. As expected, not many of our college students could write the sentences correctly, because few EFL textbooks teach expressions related to vision despite the need for such a unit. The following is a list of twenty familiar Chinese sentences on vision and the students' original translations that represent certain typical mistakes in grammar and usage.

Some Typical Errors in Translation

- (1) 你視力好嗎?
 - a. *How are your eyesights?
 - b. *Do you have a good sight?

- (2) 你視力有多好?(你視力多好呢?)
 - a. *How good is your degree of vision?
 - b. *How well is your eyesight?

- (3) 你視力多少?
 - a. *What is the degree of your eyesight?
 - b. *What degrees does your vision have?
 - c. *How many degrees is your eyesight?

- (4) 你戴幾度的眼鏡?(你眼鏡幾度?)
 - a. *How many degrees do your glasses have?
 - b. *What are the degrees of your glasses?
 - c. *What degrees are your glasses?

- (5) 我視力很好。
 - a. *My degree of vision is very good.
 - b. *I have good eyesights.

(6) 我視力很差。

- a. *My see-sight is poor.
- b. *I have a poor vision.

(7) 我視力越來越差。

- a. *My eyes' condition is worse.
- b. *My eyesight becomes bad and bad.

(8) 他年紀越大，眼睛越老花。

- a. *He is getting old-sighted with age.
- b. *As he grows older, he has an aged eyesight.

(9) 我右眼近視。

- a. *I have short eyesight in the right eye.
- b. *I have a near-sight in my right eye.

(10) 我右眼視力1.2。

- a. *The degree of my right eye is 1.2.
- b. *The degree of my right eye vision is 1.2.
- c. *The right side of my eyes is short-sighted.

(11) 上星期我到眼鏡行去配一副眼鏡。

- a. *Last week I went to the glass store to buy a glasses.
- b. *I matched a pair of glasses at the glasses' store last week.

(12) 他戴隱形眼鏡已經有15年了。

- a. *He has worn the contact lens for 15 years.
- b. *It has been 15 years since he wore invisible glasses.

(13) 自從1971年以來，戴隱形眼鏡的美國人顯著地增加。

- a. *Obviously, the Americans who wear contact lens have increased since 1971.
- b. *Since 1971, the number of the American who wear eye-contacts has remarkably increased.

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

(14) 你有沒有近視？

- a. *Do you have a near sight?
- b. *Do you have short eyesight?

(15) 我有近視。

- a. *I have a near sight.
- b. *I have got a short eyesight.

(16) 你有沒有遠視？

- a. *Do you have a farsight?
- b. *Have you got a long eyesight?

(17) 我有遠視。

- a. *I have a farsight.
- b. *I have got a long eyesight.

(18) 你有沒有散光？

- a. *Do you have a spreading eyesight?
- b. *Are you scatter-sighted?

(19) 我有散光。

- a. *I have a spreading eyesight.
- b. *I am scatter-sighted.

(20) 由於老花眼，他不戴眼鏡無法看書、寫字。

- a. *As a result of aged eyesight, he cannot read or write without glasses.
- b. *Since he is old-sighted, he cannot read or write without glasses.

A quick glance at the above English translations reveals that errors in diction, grammar, and usage prevail in these sentences, and they are predominantly a result of the students' native language interference; for example, "invisible glasses" (隱形眼鏡) for *contact lenses*, "spreading eyesight" (散光) for *astigmatism*, and the redundant use of the word *degree* to describe eyesight.

To help our students overcome this special area of difficulty, a systematic presentation of acceptable ways to express these common Chinese sentences in English is given below. (Students can test their English proficiency by using the Chinese sentence as a cue to elicit their responses.) There is no one rigid correct

answer. Any response grammatically correct and acceptable in usage is considered appropriate.

3.1 Questions concerning vision

- (1) 你視力好嗎？
 - a. How is your vision?
 - b. How is your eyesight?

- (2) 你視力有多好？(你視力多好呢？)
 - a. How good is your vision?
 - b. How good is your eyesight?

Discussion. *Vision, eyesight, and sight*, when referring to “power of seeing,” are all uncountable nouns. Common mistakes such as “your eyesights,” have a good sight” should be avoided. In daily conversation, *How tall are you?* but not *How short are you*, is used. Likewise, we usually say *How good is your vision/eyesight?* instead of *How poor is your vision/eyesight?* unless in a very specific situation.

- (3) 你視力多少？
 - a. What is your vision?
 - b. What is your eyesight?

Discussion. The sentence *What is your vision/eyesight?* sounds a little bit awkward to some native speakers of English, and based on their intuitive feeling, they consider it more natural to say *How is your eyesight?* or *How is your vision?* Theoretically speaking, “any utterance is governed by what came before it and governs what will follow it” (Hammonds 1980). If a speaker raises the question abruptly at the beginning of a conversation, it is unnatural or even confusing because the word *vision* has various meanings. However, if the same question is raised in a relevant linguistic context (e.g., with a preceding statement on vision), it is correct and acceptable by native speakers:

“I have 20/20 vision. What is your vision/eyesight?”

Further discussion: Are *vision* and *eyesight* interchangeable?

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

- (a) In discussing the sentences on vision, the first problem Chinese students encounter is whether there is a difference between *vision* and *eyesight*. Although each word has several lexical meanings, both *vision* and *eyesight* share one common meaning, i.e., the power or faculty of seeing, the ability to see:

“I have had my eyes tested and the report says that my vision is perfect.” (LDCE 1987:1176)

“Your vision is excellent; you have no need of glasses.” (Evans 1981:542)

In both sentences, *vision* refers to the power of seeing and can be replaced by the word *eyesight*. For pedagogical reasons, I have deliberately chosen many examples in which *vision* and *eyesight* are interchangeable in this paper.

- (b) Generally speaking, *eyesight* conveys a rather clear-cut message, i.e., the power of seeing, as in *a man with good eyesight, lose one's eyesight*. *Vision*, in addition to its literal meaning mentioned above, has several figurative or related meanings. In *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*, Bergen & Cornelia Evans (1981) define *vision* as “the act or power of perceiving what is not actually present to the eye, whether by some supernatural endowment or by natural intellectual means, or that which is so perceived (*Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*), and “an imaginative power to see the consequence in the future of present acts or trends, to look into the seeds of time.” Therefore, *a man of vision is a man of intelligent foresight*. *Vision* also refers to a person or thing of extraordinary beauty, as in *She was a vision of delight* (RHCD 1984).
- (c) In short, *vision* and *eyesight* are often interchangeable when referring to the same basic meaning, the faculty of seeing, as shown in the sentences listed in this section. Since *vision* has a wide spectrum of meanings, it cannot always be replaced by *eyesight*.

- (4) 你戴幾度的眼鏡?(你眼鏡幾度?)

What is the prescription for your glasses?

Discussion. Although the Chinese sentence is very common in daily life, few of our students majoring in English can say it correctly in the target language. The native language interference plays such a dominant role that most of them would say *How many degrees do your glasses have?* as mentioned at the outset of this paper. As a matter of fact, concave lenses are prescribed for a nearsighted person to correct his vision, and the prescription can be “-1,” “-2,” etc., depending on the degrees of impairment of visual acuity. Chinese people usually say 100 degrees for “-1” (concave lens) or “+1” (convex lens). When a Chinese says 200 degrees for his right eye, he cannot be understood by his English-speaking friends. Hence, the proper way to ask a question in this regard is *What is the prescription for your glasses?* (3.1.4), and the answer can be *It's -1.25 for my right eye, -2 for my left eye.*

3.2 Statements concerning vision

Apart from the reply to question 4, which has just been mentioned, appropriate replies to questions 1, 2, 3(3.1) and various other sentences related to vision are listed below:

(5) 我視力很好。

- a. I have perfect vision.
- b. I have perfect eyesight.
- c. I have good vision.
- d. I have good eyesight.
- e. My vision is perfect.
- f. My eyesight is perfect.

(6) 我視力很差。

- a. I have poor vision.
- b. I have poor eyesight.

(7) 我視力越來越差。

- a. My vision is getting worse.
- b. My eyesight is getting worse.
- c. My vision is failing.
- d. My eyesight is failing.
- e. My vision is deteriorating.

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision.

f. My eyesight is deteriorating.

(8)他年齡越大，眼睛越老越花。

- a. As he grows older, he gets more and more farsighted.
- b. He is becoming farsighted with age.

Discussion. Due to the rare occurrence of the word *presbyopia* (the best equivalent for the Chinese expression *lau-hua-yen* (老花眼)) in daily conversation, *farsighted* is often used instead to describe the failing eyesight after middle age (2.3.1 & 2.3.2). However, few Chinese students know how to use the word in a sentence to describe presbyopia vis-à-vis hyperopia. Sentences 8a & 8b can help them overcome this learning difficulty. *He is farsighted* may indicate a sign of hyperopia; *he gets more and more farsighted* or *he is becoming farsighted with age* apparently refer to one's presbyopia.

(9)我右眼近視。

- a. I am nearsighted in my right eye.
- b. *My right eye is nearsighted.

Discussion. People usually say *I am nearsighted in my right eye* instead of *my right eye is nearsighted*, which is even considered unacceptable by some native speakers of English. Nevertheless, two of my American colleagues with doctoral degrees consider the sentence correct and possible especially when preceded by a discussion on eyesight. However, *my eyes cannot see . . .* is certainly incorrect. A common mistake made by Chinese students is to use *my eyes cannot see . . .* instead of *I cannot see . . .*

**My eyes cannot see distant objects clearly, because I am nearsighted.*

(Wrong)

I cannot see distant objects clearly because I am nearsighted.

(Right)

(10)我(右眼)視力1.2。

- a. I have 20/20 vision (in my right eye). – in the U.S.
- b. I have 1.2 vision (in my right eye). – in Taiwan

Discussion. Since the eye chart used in the Orient is different from that

in the U.S.A., very few Chinese students are familiar with the expression *20/20 vision*. Inasmuch as it is frequently used in describing normal visual acuity, every advanced learner of English should learn it so that he can understand it when he encounters the expression in reading materials or in daily conversation with English-speaking people. In Taiwan, a person with normal eyesight has 1.2 vision; in the U.S., he has 20/20 vision. In the measurement of visual acuity, the Snellen Chart, commonly used for distance vision, is placed 20 feet from the patient, and the vision of a normal eye is 20/20 (Shirley 1987). "The chart, which contains rows of letters of diminishing size, is utilized. The letters at the top of the chart subtend 5 min of an arc at a distance of 200 ft. Thus, if the patient can see only the top letters at 20 ft. rather than 200 ft., his vision is 20/200; if he sees those at the bottom at this distance, his acuity is 20/20" (Victor and Adams 1977:101). With a little bit of ingenuity, a teacher of English can easily explain the expression "20/20 vision" to his students in the language of a layman. *You have 20/20 vision* means that an average person can see an object at a distance of 20 feet, you can also see it at 20 feet. *You have 20/40 vision* means that an average person can see it at 40 feet, you can see it at 20 feet, i.e., your eyesight is not as good as a person with normal eyesight.

The eye chart used in Taiwan, Japan, and some other countries in the Far East is marked with 1.2, 1.0, 0.8, etc. Therefore, it's absolutely appropriate to say *I have 1.2 vision* in these countries. Whether a speaker should use "20/20 vision" or "1.2 vision" depends on the person he is talking to. Since the purpose of language is communication, if the interlocutor is an American, "20/20 vision" should be used. In a conversation with a Japanese or Chinese, "1.2 vision" can communicate the idea more clearly.

(11) 上星期我到眼鏡行(眼鏡公司)去配一副眼鏡。

- a. I went to an optical store to have a pair of glasses made.
- b. I went to an optician's (an optometrist's) to have a pair of glasses made.

Dissucssion. How to say *yen-ching hang* (眼鏡行) and *p'ei yen-ching* (配眼鏡) in English has puzzled many learners of English in Taiwan. A store selling glasses can be called an eyeglass store or, preferably, an optical store because an optician makes or sells optical instruments, especially lenses and eyeglasses. In connection with this, the terms *optician*, *optometrist*, *oculist* and *ophthamologist* are also confusing to many students, who do not know which one refers to an eye doctor. A brief explanation in the following might be helpful to them.

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision.

The word *oculist* is synonymous with *ophthalmologist*, a doctor of medicine specializing in medical science dealing with anatomy, functions and diseases of the eye.

an oculist = an ophthalmologist = an eye doctor

An optometrist is one skilled in optometry, the practice or profession of testing the eyes for defects of vision in order to prescribe corrective glasses.

An optician is one who sells optical goods or makes glasses for remedying defects of vision, according to the prescription of an optometrist or an ophthalmologist.

In Taiwan, better-educated and health-conscious people often consult an ophthalmologist first and then ask an optician to make their glasses in accordance with the prescription. Quite a few self-claimed optometrists are actually opticians without adequate professional training in optometry. Many people simply go to an optical store to buy glasses or ask the optician to prescribe and make glasses for them. *P'ei yen-ching* can be translated into *to have a pair of glasses made*, which indicates that a customer asks an optician to make his glasses according to the prescription.

(12) 他戴隱形眼鏡已經有15年了。

He has worn contact lenses for twenty years.

(13) 自從1971年以來戴隱形眼鏡的美國人顯著地增加。

Since 1971, the number of Americans wearing contact lenses has increased remarkably.

Discussion. For sentences 12 & 13, many Chinese students often say *wear contact lens* instead of *wear contact lenses*. An ESL/EFL teacher can point out that this expression usually appears in the plural form unless in a specific situation. It is rather unlikely that a person with faulty vision would wear a contact lens in his right eye and an ordinary eyeglass on his left eye.

The word *contacts* is the informal expression for *contact lenses*. (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, Second College Edition). Sentences 12 & 13 can be rewritten with *contacts* replacing *contact lenses*:

He has worn contacts for twenty years.

Since 1971, the number of Americans wearing contacts has increased remarkably.

A brief history of contact lenses might be helpful to our students in learning and retaining this expression. The year 1987 marked the 100th anniversary of contacts. In the September 17, 1987 edition of the China Post, UPI correspondent Gayle Young reported that “Leonardo da Vinci first thought up the idea of contacts, but it wasn’t until 1887 that a Swiss physician named Eugen Fick ground down a small glass disk and coined the term contact lens.” With the advent of soft contact lenses, the number of Chinese wearing contacts has steadily increased. Consequently, it is essentially for Chinese students of English to know how to use this expression correctly.

3.3 Some important expressions using technical words

Although the four technical words, *myopia*, *hyperopia*, *astigmatism* & *presbyopia*, do not occur frequently in daily conversation, they are very useful to Chinese students, especially to those wearing glasses. Linguists and language teaching scholars unanimously agree that the best way to learn a word is to learn it in context. For this reason, this section presents these technical words in a few common sentence patterns in which each of them can appear.

(14) 你有沒有近視？

- a. Do you have myopia?
- b. Are you myopic?

(15) 我有近視。

- a. I have myopia.
- b. I am myopic.

Discussion. A few common sentence patterns for the aforesaid technical words are listed below:

(a) For questions

- i) Aux.(do) + NP + V (have) + NP
Do you have myopia/hyperopia, etc.?
- ii) V(be) + NP + Adj.
Are you myopic/hyperopic, etc.?

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

(b) For replies

i) NP + V(have) + NP

I have myopia/hyperopia, etc.

ii) NP + V(be) + Adj.

I am myopic/hyperopic, etc.

To help students remember the sentence patterns for these technical words, an experienced teacher can introduce similar sentences of the same patterns concurrently for reinforcement, such as:

Do you have *a cold/a fever/high blood pressure/diabetes/myopia*?

I have *a cold/a fever/high blood pressure/diabetes/myopia*.

Although the word *myopia* has so far referred to its literal meaning, it must be noted that *myopia* (adj. – *myopic*) can also have a figurative meaning, lacking in foresight, as in “policies which are dangerously self-centered and myopic” (N.D. Palmer), “the myopic perspective of the specialist” (Erwin Schrödinger), cited in *Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary* (Unabridged).

(16) 你有沒有遠視？

a. Do you have hyperopia/hypermotropia?

b. Are you hyperopic/hypermotropic?

(17) 我有遠視。

a. I have hyperopia/hypermotropia.

b. I am hyperopic/hypermotropic.

Discussion. Both *hyperopia* and *hypermotropia* are technical terms for farsightedness. *Hyperopic* and *hypermotropic* are their adjective forms. Students may learn these words just for recognition. This might enhance their reading comprehension when they encounter these words in context. In conversation, people prefer the more common expression *farsightedness* to *hyperopia*, *nearsightedness* to *myopia*, for example:

He is near-sighted/farsighted.

He has nearsightedness/farsightedness (less common).

(18) 你有沒有散光？

- a. Do you have astigmatism?
- b. Are you astigmatic?

(19) 我有散光。

- a. I have astigmatism.
- b. I am astigmatic.

Discussion. Since *astigmatism* (also called *astigmia*) is a common defect of vision many Chinese students suffer from, a college English major is handicapped if he cannot describe this visual problem in English. To talk about the “blurred image in one’s eyes” is a rather inconvenient, roundabout way of describing the problem; nor is it as clear or precise as the expression *I have astigmatism* or *I am astigmatic*. For reinforcement in an EFL class, useful expressions such as *astigmatic eyes*, *astigmatic lenses* can also be introduced, preferably in context. An example follows.

Astigmatism can be corrected with astigmatic lenses.

Figuratively speaking, *astigmatism* may indicate incapacity for observation or discrimination, especially when resulting from prejudice, such as:

“an *astigmatic* approach to his work”

(*Longman Dictionary of the English Language* 1984)

“Their subjective observations were colored by their own mental *astigmatism* and provincialism.” (E.J. Simmons)

(20) 由於老花眼，他不戴眼鏡無法看書、寫字。

- a. As a result of presbyopia, he cannot read or write without glasses.
- b. As a result of presbyopia, he needs to wear glasses when reading or writing.

Discussion. The sentence patterns mentioned above for *myopia*, *hyperopia*, and *astigmatism* can also apply to the word *presbyopia*. Since *presbyopia* rarely occurs in daily conversation, it should be taught mainly for recognition. For production in spoken English, the more common expression *farsightedness* should be used (3.1.8). To help our students effectively learn the word *presbyopia* and

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision

a few related important expressions such as *presbyope* (a presbyopic person), *bifocals* and *multifocal lenses*, several more practical examples are given below:

Presbyopia becomes noticeable at around age 40.

Presbyopia usually occurs with advancing age.

Bifocals or trifocals are very useful to people with presbyopia.

A presbyopic person often needs multifocal lenses to enable the eye to focus at various distances.

Thousands of presbyopes all over the world are now wearing the so-called "progressive addition lenses."

Like the word *astigmatism*, *presbyopia* is almost unknown to Chinese students. The previously-mentioned empirical study based on the replies of 30 English majors indicates that none knew the word prior to taking the test. Nevertheless, they have expressed a strong desire to learn the word because it is the best equivalent of the common Chinese expression *lau-hua-yen*.

In brief, the aforesaid technical words for certain visual defects are not intended for intermediate learners of English; but advanced learners of English would do well to learn these terms, particularly considering their usefulness in Taiwan.

4. Conclusions – Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogically speaking, what does the study presented in this paper imply to ESL/EFL teachers and students? What is the role of English in non-native-English-speaking cultures? Should students of English in Taiwan possess the ability to describe Chinese culture in English? What should be the paramount objective in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language? Several aspects of these issues will be discussed in this section.

4.1 English as an international lingua franca

Teachers of English unanimously agree that English has become an

international lingua franca used by people of different nationalities around the world. A special article entitled "The English Language Out to Conquer the World" (U.S. News & World Report, Feb. 18, 1985) states that although "English is the native language in 12 nations, it is regarded as an official or semiofficial language in 33 other countries and Puerto Rico.² 345 million people use English as their first language and an additional 400 million as their second." According to the report, 745 million people (one out of every seven people in the world) know English or use English to some extent. Today English is no longer the exclusive property of the British, Americans, Canadians and Australians. Randolph Quirk (1968) claims that "notions such as English is the Englishman's gift and the language remains fundamentally 'ours' etc. are parochial and naive" and that "they do not even remotely correspond to linguistic realities." English has become a universal language belonging to everyone in the world who uses it – including the French, Japanese, Chinese, etc.

4.2 The ability to describe Chinese culture in English

Since English is regarded as a world language – not only a language of the United States, but also a language of Singapore and China, the rationale for learning English has also changed. Nowadays people learn English not to become Americans but to acquire the ability to interact successfully with people of other linguistic backgrounds – native English speakers as well as non-native English speakers (Tsai 1980). With this in mind, the role of cultural aspect should be redefined. During the past years, the importance of introducing the cultural component of the target language has been overemphasized; as a result, many English majors do not have sufficient ability to explain and discuss their culture with foreigners in English, although they might be able to converse with their American friends on American literature and philosophy. For this reason, the cultural aspect of the target language and the native language should be equally emphasized in foreign language instruction. "The use of English is always culture bound, but it is bound to the culture of the particular user, not to any other English can be used to express any culture or ideological point of view" (Smith 1985). If our students can talk about Plato's *Republic* in English, they should also be able to explain Lao-tze's philosophy or Confucianism in English. To extend the ability of our students to communicate their own ideas and converse about their own culture with foreigners is a very important goal in learning English. Advanced students of English in Taiwan certainly need to be able to discuss with

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision.

proficiency in English the same topics they frequently deal with in Chinese social intercourse. In Taiwan – the so-called “kingdom of glasses” due to its high percentage of myopic citizens – conversations about visual problems have become a common topic in everyday life. Therefore, conscientious learners of English should consider their learning incomplete until they have mastered these useful expressions pertaining to vision.

4.3 The importance of academic competence

Academic competence as well as communicative competence should be emphasized in teaching English as a foreign language. Although various oral approaches have been stressed in ESL/EFL programs during the past years, many college students study English with more serious purpose – not just to make friends with Americans or to enjoy a more colorful sight-seeing tour in an English-speaking country. Their ultimate goal is to be proficient in the four skills of language (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing) so that they can become well-informed intellectuals through their knowledge of English. They would like to do effective reading in their fields of interest, such as literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology, etc. This requires academic language skills rather than the language of everyday communication. Most ESL/EFL textbooks in use today are geared to improving students’ social communicative language skills, and not intended to develop their academic language skills. This situation is not better in the United States. Chamot & O’malley (1987) report that none of the modern approaches in ESL programs “focuses specifically on developing the English language skills used in content-area subjects, such as science, mathematics, and social studies.” To help our students improve their academic language competence, an ingenious and responsible teacher should take the initiative in collecting and compiling his own teaching materials suitable to his students’ needs from a variety of academic fields – literature, economics, computer science, medicine, etc. A report on recent economic reforms in Taiwan or an article on students’ visual problems would be as useful as a literary work in broadening their intellectual horizon. Consequently, a freshman reader based on this principle is much more valuable than a reader composed of only short stories, essays, and poems.

Today, Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language has become an extensive area of interdisciplinary research, and advanced learners of English (college students) are often challenged with a vast array of professional

literature that uses technical terms from sociology, economics, science, and so on. Therefore, an appropriate introduction of technical terms in a freshman English class is indispensable in enhancing the students' ability in reading textbooks, English newspapers, or magazines that comprise almost every plane of life. Technical terms that occur frequently in students' native language should be introduced in advanced EFL classes in Taiwan. Words such as *classicism*, *romanticism* (in literature), *cholesterol*, *arteriosclerosis*, *myopia*, and *astigmatism* (in medical science) are certainly common to our students in their native language. This is the rationale for including some technical terms on vision in this paper. It is hoped that an advanced EFL student in Taiwan, especially an English major, will be able to acquire academic competence in English in due course. In addition to the language of everyday communication, he can also read a variety of literature in English, including his doctor's prescription, business reports relevant to his career, and articles on recent political & economic developments. This should be the paramount goal of Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language.

Notes

1. In order to present a clear and unambiguous meaning, the words *myopia* and *hyperopia* (or their respective adjective forms *myopic* and *hyperopic*) mentioned in this paper refer only to their formal meanings in ophthalmology, unless otherwise specified. *Myopia* indicates a person's inability to see distant objects due to a condition of the eye in which parallel rays are focused in front of the retina; *hyperopia* pertains to the ability to see distant objects more distinctly than near ones because parallel rays are focused behind the retina.
2. The 33 countries in which English is regarded as official or semiofficial language are as follows:

Africa

Botswana	Cameroon	Ethiopia	Gambia
Ghana	Kenya	Lesotho	Liberia
Malawi	Mauritius	Nambia	Nigeria
Sierra Leone	South Africa	Sudan	Swaziland
Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia	Zimbabwe

Asia, Pacific

Bangladesh	Burma	Fiji	India
Malaysia	Pakistan	Philippines	Singapore

A Special Area of Difficulty for Advanced Learners of English in Taiwan:
Some Important Expressions on Vision .

Sri Lanka

Tonga

Western Samoa

Mideast, Mediterranean

Israel

Malta

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