Language Awareness, 2015
Vol. 24, No. 1, 15–37, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2013.873803

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Grammar myths[1]

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(*Received 10 May 2012; accepted 27 November 2013*)

This paper looks at the continued survival of 'myths' about English grammar, for example, the statement that in negative and interrogative sentences *any* should be used instead of *some*. It is based on a survey of 195 Hong Kong students majoring in English, in five different cohorts, which found that such myths are quite prevalent; with choices of 'true', 'false', 'don't know' and 'partly true', the true option was chosen in over 50% of cases. Differences between subjects are identified and discussed, as well as changes across time from the first to the last cohort. Then the individual myths are discussed and explained one by one. A number of possible sources for the myths are suggested, and the means of combatting them are discussed, along with the reasons for their resilience.

Keywords: explicit knowledge; grammar; misconceptions; myths; rules

Introduction

The context for this paper is research into language learners' awareness of form – in particular, in terms of the explicit knowledge that they possess about English grammar. Since the claim by Stephen Krashen in the 1980s (e.g. Krashen, 1985) that explicit knowledge (or 'learning' in his terms) generally did not lead to implicit knowledge (or 'acquisition') – and that therefore any explicit focus on form was largely a waste of classroom time – much energy has been expended on investigating the relationship between the two types of knowledge, with the majority verdict seeming to be for the 'interface' position whereby explicit knowledge can become implicit (e.g. Ellis, 1994); meta-analyses of research draw the same general conclusion (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010). For a full discussion of the nature of implicit and explicit learning and knowledge, see Ellis (2004, 2009).

The specific focus here is related but somewhat different: whether and to what extent learners' explicit knowledge is accurate. Clearly, if explicit knowledge is to become implicit, presumably it should reflect reality. However, as Ellis (2009, p. 12) notes in reference to learner rules: 'In the case of explicit knowledge, learners' knowledge is often fuzzy'.

The question(s) therefore might be phrased as follows: 'What do FL learners know explicitly about the language they are studying, and how much of it is correct?' Given the emphasis on communicative methodology in language teaching over the last 30 years or so, one might expect the answer to the first part to be 'very little'. In fact, as research shows, learners know a lot, although precise evidence about what they know and do not know is scarce, hence the need for studies such as this.

[1]A preliminary version of this paper, based on limited data, was presented at the 15th World Congress of AILA, Essen, Germany, August 2008.

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In this paper the focus is on the rules of thumb and other similar statements that are presented to learners by teachers. (There are, of course, many other ways of focusing on form in language teaching.) In a previous study, I looked at the metalinguistic terminology that learners have learnt. From that study, and from an earlier study into misconceptions about grammar, two things are clear:

(1) students are full of explicit knowledge about English grammar, despite the move away from grammar teaching; and the data about terminology and rules of thumb revealed in these studies possibly only represents the tip of the iceberg of their knowledge;
(2) there is a big discrepancy between this explicit knowledge and what might be called the grammatical 'reality'.

Regarding metalinguistic terminology, in many cases students (first-year English majors in Hong Kong) claimed to know a term but were unable to exemplify it, or they confused terms with others (e.g. definite and indefinite article). In other words, what learners know and what they ought to know is not the same. (Of course, knowledge of terminology is not of the same order as knowledge of rules of thumb, in that no case could be made for the former becoming implicit.)

The main motivation for carrying out the current study was the author's realisation that after 20 years of teaching introductory courses in English grammar to university undergraduates (many of whom go on to become teachers), the same misconceptions about English grammar were still current, for example, the belief that the first time something is mentioned the indefinite article is used and the second time the definite article. Clearly such misconceptions are not going to wither away as the result of one lecturer's university course or even a non-grammatical syllabus in schools. Their resilience seemed to warrant their being accorded the status of myths, or 'urban myths', as Grundy (2010) has termed them.

Myths, language and learning

Dictionaries and academics tend to define 'myth' in two basic ways. The Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1996) gives five definitions; the first two relate to gods and heroes, while the fifth refers to popular misconceptions:

> an unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution

Leeming (2001) likewise makes a distinction, but relates the two, deriving the popular definition above from a more cultural/anthropological one:

> We commonly use the word 'myth' to mean a generally held belief or concept that is clearly untrue or merely fanciful. . .This definition of myth as false belief develops naturally enough from the more accurate understanding of the word as a fabulous and obviously untrue narrative of the deeds of gods and heroes. . .. (2001, p. 8)

The popular definition can be taken as a starting point for the research here – if we can accept language teaching, in particular grammar teaching, as a 'social institution'. There would be little disagreement with the notion that rules of thumb constitute a 'collective belief'. Another aspect of myth, which elevates it above mere popular misconception, is

tenacity (Segal, 2004, p. 6, commenting on the use of 'myth' by the historian William Rubinstein). Myths are deeply entrenched and hard to root out.

Within the context of this definition, there has been some interest about language myths in general recently. Przedlacka (2005) discusses the myths that surround the notion of standard English. On a wider scale, the excellent collections edited by Bauer and Trudgill (1998) and Anderwald (2012) address popular misconceptions about language that have widespread currency. Two of them in particular, described by Cheshire (1998) and Bauer (1998), deal with topics that are close to the grammatical concerns of this paper: double negatives and 'It is me' vs. 'It is I', respectively. Indeed, one of the reasons for extending the questionnaire was to see whether such prescriptive notions have much currency in pedagogic circles.

Meanwhile, from a pedagogic perspective, the University of Michigan Press has recently published a valuable series of books discussing various myths that affect the teaching of second languages, e.g. Folse (2004) on vocabulary, Reid (2008) on writing, Johnson (2008) on language in general, and Brown (2011) on listening. As examples, two of the myths focused on are as follows: 'The use of translation to learn new vocabulary should be discouraged' (Folse, 2004) and 'Academic writing should be certain and assertive' (Hyland, 2008). The unifying philosophy of these books is that there are certain widely held pedagogic beliefs and practices that are pernicious towards language learning and which are unsupported by research. Moreover, these beliefs, the claim is, are deeply entrenched and need to be 'rooted out' by vigorous action, or 'unlearnt'.[1]

It is a philosophy that is shared by this article, although the myths decried there relate to pedagogic practices (and therefore could apply to the teaching of any language) rather than to the actual nature of one particular language, as is the case with the myths investigated here (although there is a certain overlap, as with attitudes towards descriptive/prescriptive approaches). Another difference is that those myths are held principally by teachers (and materials writers), whereas the ones in this paper are shared by learners as well as teachers.

So far the attitude has been that myths are 'a bad thing'. However, to accept this viewpoint uncritically would be to ignore the other definition of 'myth' given above, that is, in the field of anthropology, where myths are seen as important cultural artefacts and where their veracity is unimportant (Segal, 2004, pp. 4–6). In this context, language 'myths' can be seen as an attempt to make sense of a mysterious world. And the very positing of the question can be seen as an advance in awareness and thought. For example, the 'Tower of Babel' myth can be regarded as an attempt to explain the diversity of languages in the world, and whether it is correct or not, or even plausible as a theory, is irrelevant. What is important is the light that it shines on human nature and thinking processes of the time. Moving on to modern-day linguistics, the whole field of folk linguistics (see e.g. Niedzielski & Preston, 1999) is predicated on the claim that folk beliefs about language are of value, even though they may not coincide with those of linguists. Therefore, it is perhaps wise to keep an open mind on the issue of whether the grammar myths discussed here have a positive as well as negative function.

No particular stance on the teaching of grammar is taken in this paper. It is merely noted that despite the existence of a largely communicative syllabus in Hong Kong (and elsewhere), grammar still plays an important role in the classroom. Equally, there is no blanket criticism of the use of rules of thumb and other form-focused pedagogic devices; many are useful. The main point is that where grammatical information is deemed necessary, it should be, amongst other things, accurate (Swan, 1994). However, these myths trade too much accuracy and as a result may have a negative effect on teaching and learning, as will be discussed below.

The questionnaire

In order to investigate learners' knowledge of rules of thumb, a questionnaire containing 20 statements about English grammar was given to 195 first-year English majors in five cohorts (from 2007 to 2011) at a university in Hong Kong. It was administered at the start of their university studies, before they received a formal course in English grammar. The text of the statements can be found in Figure 1 and the 'Item analysis' section.

These students were following two programmes: one, a three-year BA in contemporary English studies; the other, a four-year programme in English and education that followed the same route for the first two years after which the students moved on to another institution for two years' training as teachers. The vast majority of this latter group was expected to join the teaching profession as was a significant proportion of the former (via a postgraduate qualification). Table A1 in the Appendix shows the make-up of the respondents.

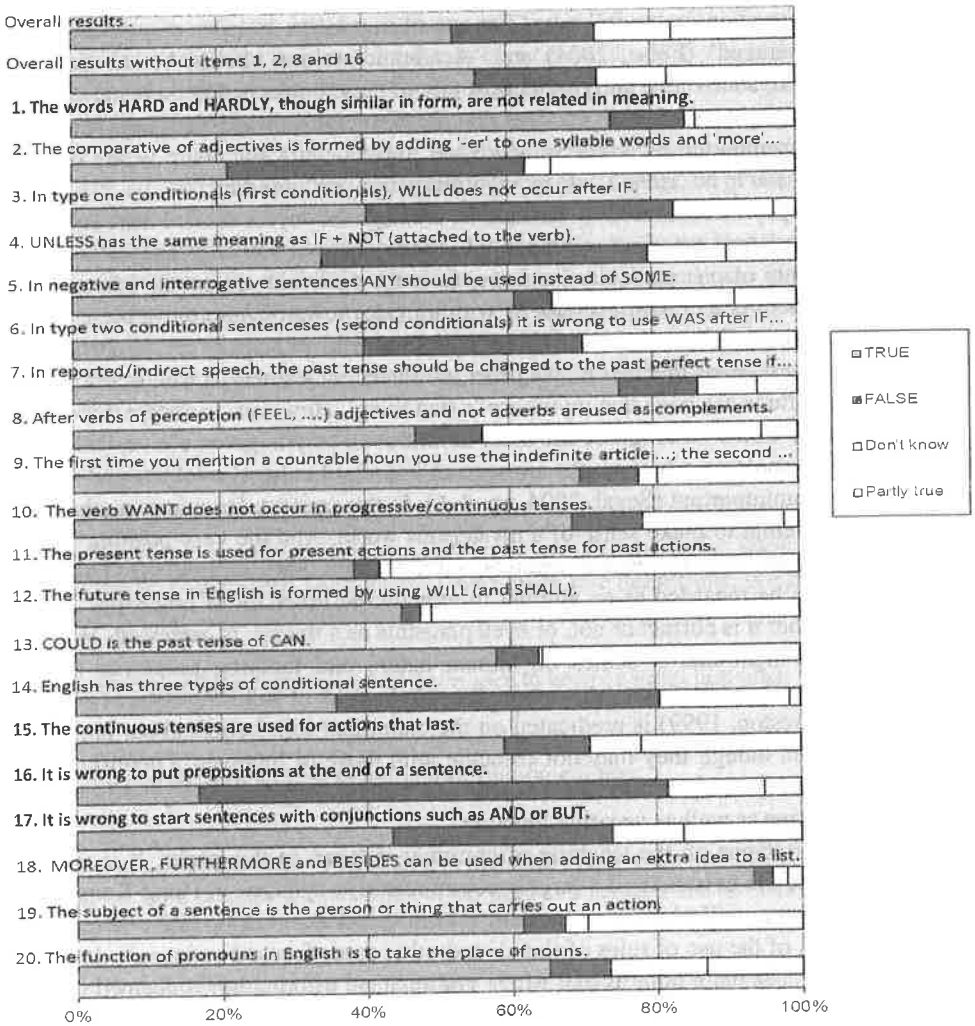

Figure 1. Overall item scores.

The questionnaire was an extension of one containing 10 statements that had been given to groups of fourth-year English majors at universities in Poland and Hungary. For this study, a further 10 statements were added. The original version included three distractors which were carried over into the current study:

- one which was obviously true – no. 1;
- one which should be identifiable as partly true or false – no. 2;
- one which, with its arcane terminology, was expected to evoke many 'don't know' responses – no. 8.

This was done principally to prevent participants from suspecting the purpose of the research and the 'dubious' nature of the other rules. (The 'Item analysis' section contains a discussion of the results.)

In this version of the questionnaire some more general statements about grammar were included, and the boundaries of grammar were 'bent' somewhat in order to include statements that refer more to discourse and writing. And one statement, no. 16 (a prescriptive rule) was included, although it was not expected to be familiar to Hong Kong learners. It was therefore excluded from the overall count of mistaken items, along with the distractors.

All the remaining 16 statements were considered by the author to be incorrect (and, moreover, to be widely known to be incorrect in descriptive, as opposed to pedagogic, circles); explanations of their 'incorrectness' can be found in the 'Item analysis' section. (Only one, no.10, could be considered a pedagogically sound simplification in that the exceptions to it are limited.) Also, they were statements suspected to have a broad currency worldwide.

Respondents were asked to react to the statements in one of four ways: true, false, don't know, and partly true. This last option was included to allow respondents to show that while they were familiar with the statement, they were aware of exceptions. If they chose this, they were invited to say briefly why or give an example; some such comments are included in the individual profiles and 'Item analysis' section. The 'don't know' option allowed for the possibility that students had been exposed to little or no focus on form during their language education.

It could be argued that the statements do not necessarily tap explicit knowledge because learners could use implicit knowledge, but this is only plausible in the case of simpler statements such as 1 (a distractor) and 10; elsewhere the complexity of the notions, the associated terminology, and the general nature of the rules tends to preclude the students working out the rules on the spot by reference to their intuitions.[2] In any case, the preference for the incorrect option suggests that most were not referring to their intuitions.

The main aim was to investigate how prevalent these myths are in Hong Kong by seeing how many of the subjects selected the 'true' option. If more than 50% did for each statement, then it was deemed to be a serious problem. A subsidiary measure was whether the total for 'true' exceeded that for 'false'. A further aim that emerged during the process was to track any changes across time.

Results

Overall results

Figure 1 shows the overall results for each item. The full results (distinguishing between the different cohorts as well) are shown in Table A2.

Overall, for the 16 key statements, 'true' was selected in 56% of responses. When compared to the result for 'false', 17%, this is highly significant. Nine of these statements were considered to be true by more than 50% of respondents: nos. 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 20. Of these no. 18 (that *moreover*, *furthermore* and *besides* are simply ways of adding items to a list) was the most widely held (at 93%). Numbers 7 (regarding reported speech), 9 (regarding the use of articles) and 10 (regarding *want*) all passed the two-thirds mark.

Another four items, while below 50%, were above 40% in terms of 'true' responses: nos. 3, 6, 12 and 17, while the remaining three (4, 11 and 14) were all above 30%, suggesting that all the selected statements have some currency. Indeed, if the 'don't know' option is discounted, three (statements 3, 6 and 17) would also reach the 50% criterion. Of the key items, only in three cases, statements 3, 4 and 14, did the choice of 'false' exceed that of 'true'; an exceptional explanation for no. 14 is offered in the 'Item analysis' section.

The responses to the distractors were encouraging, suggesting that they were doing their job properly. For statement 1, 84% chose 'true', whereas only 23% did so for statement 2. As regards statement 8, exactly one-half chose 'don't know', which suggests that respondents did not feel pressured to guess answers.

Changes across time

The study was not designed to investigate changes across time. However, over the years a gradual decrease in the choice of 'true' for all items can be seen, from 59% for the 2007 cohort to 52% for the 2011 cohort. Whether this is part of a definite pattern is hard to say; it would be necessary to establish a larger decline over a longer period with a larger sample. A partial credit Rasch analysis confirmed that there was no significant difference between the two groups.

Equally, it is not clear whether the cause for any such decrease would be an increase in awareness of these statements as myths or a decline in the use of rules of thumb by teachers. However, the percentage of 'false' choices went up by an equivalent amount during the same period (from 14% to 21%), while the percentages for 'don't know' and 'partly true' stayed basically the same, so it may be that learners are getting wise to these rules.

In fact, some of this 'decline' can be attributed to a change in attitude towards particular statements, for example no.12 (about *will* as future tense), for which the choice of 'true' declined from 59% in the first cohort to 28% in the last, and no. 14 (about conditional sentences), which fell from 39% to 21%. However, while in the latter there was a corresponding swing to 'false' (which increased from 39% to 66%), in the former there was a swing from 'true' to 'partly true (which increased from 38% to 62%). Using a chi-square test, the trend for item 12 was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), while that for 14, though close, was not ($p > 0.05$). Explanations for these phenomena are suggested in the 'Item analysis' section.

Individual profiles

The overall results above and individual item results below do not present the whole picture; in particular they mask great variation between different students. There is no space here to go into a full analysis of this dimension; it will perhaps suffice to examine a few

extreme cases taken from the 2009 cohort. (The overall figures for this cohort were 53% for 'true', 18% for 'false', 10% for 'don't know' and 19% for 'partly true'.)

At one extreme, one student chose 'true' 17 times. The only three exceptions were statements 12 (about *will* as future tense), where 'partly true' was selected (with a comment about *is going to*), 14 (about conditionals), where 'false' was chosen, and 19 ('the subject is the thing or person that carries out an action'), where 'partly true' was again chosen, with a reference to the 'passive voice'.

Another student was at the opposite end of the spectrum, with only four ticks for 'true': nos. 7 (about backshift in reported speech), 10 (about *want* in the progressive), 17 ('wrong to start sentences with *and* or *but*') and 18 (about *moreover*, etc.). This student might be considered a 'sceptic' by nature and has perhaps received a more sophisticated instruction on form at school, but even then these four statements would be better classified as 'partly true'. Nevertheless, four is well below the average of 11 ticks for 'false' for this cohort.

There was also wide variation in the selection of 'don't know' as an option. Several students did not select it at all, while one chose it seven times (against an average for the cohort of two out of 20), indicating a large difference in exposure to these statements. Nonetheless, this is still a low level of 'ignorance', suggesting that a focus on form is still prevalent in all Hong Kong classrooms.

Item analysis

All 20 items (i.e. including the distractors) are discussed individually in the following. A brief account on why the statements should be considered false (or at best partly true) is given, but a fuller picture may be obtained by consulting one of the large descriptive grammars of English (e.g. Biber, Johannson, Leach, Conrad, & Finnegan, 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leach, & Svartvik, 1985).

(1) 'The words HARD and HARDLY, although similar in form, are not related in meaning'.

TRUE 145	FALSE 20	DON'T KNOW 3	PARTLY TRUE 27

This item was intended as a distractor as it is indisputably correct as a rule of thumb.

The high proportion of 'trues' (almost three-quarters, at 74%) shows that it was largely successful in this role.

(2) 'The comparative of adjectives is formed by adding '-er' to one syllable words and 'more' to words of two or more syllables'.

TRUE 42	FALSE 80	DON'T KNOW 7	PARTLY TRUE 66

This statement was included as a distractor because it was felt that the relatively sophisticated participants would be aware of its limitations and select either 'partly true' or 'false' rather than 'true'. This is largely borne out by the results.

Many two-syllable – even three-syllable – words may have inflectional '-er' comparison: *easier*, *unlikelier* (not to mention one-syllable words which can take more: *You couldn't be more right*). As one student who chose 'partly true' commented: '. . .not all the words of two syllables are bound to add *more*. . . e.g. *sleepy*'.

(3) 'In type one conditionals (first conditionals), WILL does not occur after IF'.

TRUE 79	FALSE 83	DON'T KNOW 27	PARTLY TRUE 6

This rule was chosen because it is quite demonstrably false. Counter-examples, where *will* indicates willingness or determination, are not hard to find:

If you'll wash the dishes, I'll dry.

If you will go out without a coat, it's no wonder you get a cold.

The participants divided almost evenly between those who thought it true and those who thought it false; there were very few in the 'partly true' camp. This may reflect the fact the rule has less relevance in Hong Kong than elsewhere, i.e. in countries where the L1 has a future tense. In such cases, errors such as the following may occur due to L1 interference:

If it will rain, I will stay at home.

In this case, it could be claimed the rule may have some value by preventing such errors, even though it lacks accuracy. However, its presence in Hong Kong should be of concern.

(4) 'UNLESS has the same meaning as IF + NOT (attached to the verb)'.

TRUE 67	FALSE 88	DON'T KNOW 21	PARTLY TRUE 19

The result shows that the participants were not unduly influenced by this 'rule' (unlike those in Poland; see below). However clearly there was some familiarity with it.

A number of writers have pointed out the fallacy in this rule (see e.g. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, pp. 350–351). Even in cases where parallel sentences seem to mean the same, one can discern a slight difference of emphasis:

We won't go out if it rains.

We'll go out unless it rains.

Here in both cases rain will stop the excursion, but in the latter it is the only eventuality that will (whereas in the former other forms of inclement weather, such as snow or wind, might also). In other cases, the transformation makes absolute nonsense, as with the title of my earlier article:

Blackpool would be a nice place unless there were so many tourists. (A direct 'translation' from 'Blackpool would be a nice place if there weren't so many tourists'.)

The rule is an understandable attempt to explain one of the most difficult words of English, one which may have no direct equivalent in learners' L1s, by building upon a known word. Howdever, it is wide of the mark, and as Murphy (1994, p. 228) has shown, there is a better route, via 'except + if'.

(5) 'In negative and interrogative sentences ANY should be used instead of SOME'.

TRUE 119	FALSE 10	DON'T KNOW 49	PARTLY TRUE 17

Hardly anyone chose FALSE or PARTLY TRUE here, showing that few participants had any doubts about this rule. However, there was a relatively high number of 'don't knows' compared to other items (49). There are, of course, many 'exceptions' to the 'rule'. *Any* is found in positive sentences and *some* in negatives and interrogatives:

Any fool can tell you this rule is wrong.

We haven't stolen some of the money (we've stolen all of it).

Did you find some money?

The rule attempts to explain the use of *any*, a notoriously difficult word, in structural terms, as a suppletive variant of *some*. However, the difference between the two words is one of meaning; *some* asserts the existence of something while *any* does not (Biber et al., 1999, pp. 176–177).

(6) 'In type two conditional sentences (second conditionals) it is wrong to use WAS after IF; WERE must be used instead'.

TRUE 78	FALSE 59	DON'T KNOW 37	PARTLY TRUE 21

This seems to be a rare example of a prescriptive rule (aimed largely at native speakers) which has taken root in EFL/ESL contexts. Any examination of data will show that *was* is common in this situation (apart from the fixed expression *If I were you*) and that if anything it is *were* that is marked as a formal alternative.

(7) 'In reported/indirect speech, the past tense should be changed to the past perfect tense if the introductory verb is in the past tense'.

TRUE 147	FALSE 21	DON'T KNOW 16	PARTLY TRUE 11

It is well known in pedagogic circles that this 'rule' is not always applied, i.e.

I was walking along the street...

could become

He said he had been walking along the street...

or it could retain the same tense

He said he was walking along the street...

In fact, insofar as it can be established, it is rare to make this particular tense change (unless it is important to establish two different times).

However, this news has clearly not reached the large majority of students. For this misconception, the finger can be pointed squarely at school textbooks which often have a whole unit or page dedicated to this and other so-called 'back-shift' rules. However, there are numerous problems with this practice. Some writers (e.g. Willis, 1994, pp. 61–62) have even challenged the status of reported speech as a valid grammatical category, saying that tense use in these areas follows the same rules as elsewhere.

(8) 'After verbs of perception (FEEL, TASTE etc.) adjectives and not adverbs are used as complements'.

TRUE 92	FALSE 18	DON'T KNOW 75	PARTLY TRUE 10

Like nos. 1 and 2, this item was intended as a distractor as it is indisputably correct as a rule of thumb. And participants' awareness of this is borne out by the fact was 'true' was the most popular choice, far in advance of 'false' and 'partly true'. However, unlike item 1 there was a large vote for 'don't know'. This is almost certainly due to the technical wording of the rule, especially the use of the rather arcane, scientific term 'complement'. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that participants were not afraid to opt for this choice where appropriate.

(9) 'The first time you mention a countable noun you use the indefinite article (A, AN); the second time the definite article'.

TRUE 136	FALSE 16	DON'T KNOW 5	PARTLY TRUE 38

This rule is false for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that first mention with *the* is more common (because we know what we are talking about). A number of students who chose 'partly true' made comments showing awareness that there are exceptions along these lines. There are indeed situations (e.g. narratives) where an entity is introduced using the indefinite article, and thus established becomes definite; but then it is more common to use a pronoun than the definite article:

I watched a film last night; it bored me.

This rule is a perhaps valiant attempt to make sense of two of the most difficult and frequent words in English, particularly *the*, but it makes their use appear automatic when in fact it is a matter of meaning (which sometimes allows a choice for the user). Learners who apply it unthinkingly will make many mistakes.

(10) 'The verb WANT does not occur in progressive/continuous tenses'.

TRUE 134	FALSE 19	DON'T KNOW 38	PARTLY TRUE 4

The relatively large number of 'don't knows' testifies to the rather limited application of this rule (to *want* and other so-called 'stative' verbs, such as *like*). Nevertheless, the vast majority of participants (69%) were familiar with this statement. Indeed, it could be claimed that it is a valid simplification since exceptions such as:

I've been wanting to meet you for ages

are few and far between and seem to carry the idea of turning a state or condition into an action (or are associated with Indian English). However, this may change, as this particular usage seems to have attracted the attention of advertisers:

We're loving it!

(11) 'The present tense is used for present actions and the past tense for past actions'.

TRUE 75	FALSE 7	DON'T KNOW 3	PARTLY TRUE 110

This sweeping statement is of course a vast over-generalisation. The latter part may be said to have some validity in that the past tense rarely refers to other times (some exceptions being *Would you mind if I came a bit later?* and *It's high time you started earning some money.*), but the first part is highly debatable because the 'present' tense very often refers to general and future time:

It rains a lot in April.
We leave at 10.

Some grammarians have even suggested calling it the 'non-past' (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 176–177).

Several comments from students who chose 'partly true' alluded to these 'exceptions', in particular to the use of the present for facts. The problem is largely one of terminology: the use of such a transparent term as 'present' will inevitably encourage learners to associate it with present time.

(12) 'The future tense in English is formed by using WILL (and SHALL)'.

TRUE 88	FALSE 5	DON'T KNOW 3	PARTLY TRUE 99

This statement was included as a subtle way of identifying whether the participants accepted the existence of a future tense for English (in contradiction to the vast majority of modern grammarians); the high score for 'true' indicates that many do. However, several comments from the majority of participants who chose 'partly true' mentioned other ways of referring to future time, in particular *going to*. This awareness would seem to be the reason for the increase over time in participants who chose 'partly true' instead of 'true' (see above).

The issue here is not so much about the 'facts' of English grammar as about how to conceptualise it. It might be feasible to argue that a future tense is an acceptable pedagogic (but not scientific) concept for English, but then we run into the same tense = time fallacy as for the previous statement, in particular the numerous cases where *will* does not refer to future (*If you will stay out late at night...*), as well as those where futurity is expressed by other means. The strongest reason for not calling it the future tense is that we can simply refer to it eponymously as *will*, and treat it like the other modal verbs.

(13) 'COULD is the past tense of CAN'.

TRUE 119	FALSE 12	DON'T KNOW 1	PARTLY TRUE 73

The relationship between these two words is very different from that which pertains to the present and past of regular verbs (e.g. *see* vs. *saw*) and it is well known that *could* refers frequently to future time in offers and requests, as one student's comment pointed out:

> I could do it tomorrow.

Most grammarians nowadays treat these as independent modal verbs (along with the others such as *may* and *might*), but clearly most Hong Kong learners do not share this view.

(14) 'English has three types of conditional sentences'.

TRUE 70	FALSE 87	DON'T KNOW 35	PARTLY TRUE 3

If the results are to be trusted, this fallacy has less currency than expected; this was one of the few key items for which more participants selected 'false' rather than 'true'. English, of course, allows many more than the three traditional types of conditional sentences (*If we go, we'll...*, *If we went, we would...*, *If we had gone, we would have...*), for instance

> If you had told me I wouldn't be wasting my time.

However, one comment from a participant (who marked it false) indicated that the statement was wrong because there are four, not three, conditionals (the extra one being what is sometimes called the 'zero' conditional: *If he comes, I go*). While this may be an advance on the original, it is still far short of the truth. This may be the reason why many participants rejected the statement; and as shown above it appeared to be an increasing trend over time. If textbooks and teachers are now promoting four instead of three conditionals, then there is still a big problem. More than 20 years ago, Maule (1988) decried the blinkered attitude caused by the three-conditional approach; more recently Jones and Waller (2010) have done the same for the four-conditional approach. Such is progress.

(15) 'The continuous tenses are used for actions that last'.

TRUE 115	FALSE 23	DON'T KNOW 14	PARTLY TRUE 43

The reasons for using continuous (or 'progressive') forms are not simple to explain, even for grammarians, but this statement is a gross over-simplification. Non-continuous forms are also used for actions that last, and of the two may imply greater duration, e.g.

I've lived in Paris all my life.

I've been living in Paris all my life.

As Lewis (1986, pp. 86–88) points out, continuous forms refer to a limited time period and rather than duration seem to suggest an activity in progress. This is a reason why the less transparent term 'progressive' is preferable. Several comments from participants, however, did indicate awareness of the temporary nature of actions indicated by these forms.

(16) 'It is wrong to put prepositions at the end of a sentence'.

TRUE 33	FALSE 126	DON'T KNOW 26	PARTLY TRUE 10

This 'rule' was included because of its status as a prescriptive rule for native speakers (see e.g. Crystal, 1984, pp. 58–63; he attributes its invention to John Dryden). It was not expected to be well known. Descriptive grammarians have long debunked it, pointing out that the 'proscribed' structure is very common in English, and is of some antiquity (Crystal, 1984, p. 61). In one situation, it cannot be avoided, namely with the passive of prepositional verbs:

He was laughed at.

It was therefore gratifying to see that the rule had little currency in this EFL/ESL situation (though it could be claimed that the little currency it had is worrying).

(17) 'It is wrong to start sentences with conjunctions such as AND or BUT'.

TRUE 85	FALSE 59	DON'T KNOW 19	PARTLY TRUE 32

That this rule is seen by some as a rule of grammar is an evidence of the confusion surrounding the idea of correctness. For if it is a 'rule', then it is one of writing and not of grammar, and one that is often honoured more in the breach than in the observance by highly regarded authors. Descriptive grammars will simply note the fact that these words are commonly used to start sentences, although as conjunctions their main function is to join two clauses within a sentence. One student comment noted that initial 'and' and 'but' are acceptable in informal English.

(18) 'MOREOVER, FURTHERMORE and BESIDES can be used when adding an extra idea to a list'.

TRUE 182	FALSE 5	DON'T KNOW 4	PARTLY TRUE 4

This was the statement that had, at 93%, by far the greatest amount of 'yes' votes. Of course, this is more a statement about discourse than grammar, about expressing the relationship between ideas, and as such it is harder to explain or exemplify than grammatical rules; nevertheless, it does have a 'formal' bent to it.

Its popularity (in Hong Kong, and perhaps not elsewhere) may be attributed to an emphasis on argumentative and expository writing in secondary schools and to a tendency to list additive connectives without any attempt to differentiate them.

This leads to such 'mistakes' as

> Wear comfortable shoes and a hat. Moreover, don't forget to bring water.

when a simple additive conjunct such as *in addition* or *also* (or even *and*) would be appropriate. *Moreover* and *furthermore* seem to add an extra argument to a list which goes beyond previous ones, while *besides* seems to be used with afterthoughts, especially in a casual register. See Yeung (2009, p. 330) for more on this.

(19) 'The subject of a sentence is the person or thing that carries out an action'.

TRUE 120	FALSE 11	DON'T KNOW 6	PARTLY TRUE 58

This statement is associated with the idea that 'subject' is a semantic concept. And while animate actor, (or agent or doer) is one semantic role that is commonly ascribed to the subject, there are many others (see e.g. Berk, 1999, pp. 14–23), for example:

> The revolution terrified the king. (causer)
>
> The key opened the safe. (instrument)
>
> Joan saw some blood. (experiencer)
>
> The door opened. (patient)

Of course, the point is that 'subject' is a grammatical concept.

(20) 'The functions of pronouns in English is to take the place of nouns'.

TRUE 127	FALSE 16	DON'T KNOW 26	PARTLY TRUE 26

This is a widespread belief that is reinforced by the implication of the term. It is wrong first because pronouns, insofar as they can be said to replace something in syntax, actually take the place of noun phrases (*I like the red dress* but not **I like the red it*). While this is a somewhat technical objection, the second is not: that many pronouns stand on their own and not for something else, for example, all the indefinite pronouns, as in *Much remained unsaid*, or dummy *it* in *It is raining*.

The result shows that this is a very widespread belief. The best that can be said for it is that it is unlikely to cause much harm.

Discussion

Five main issues are relevant to the above findings:

(1) whether such findings are peculiar to Hong Kong;
(2) that such misleading rules are nevertheless useful pedagogically;
(3) the sources of such misconceptions;
(4) why such myths are so resistant;
(5) the possible solutions.

These are considered one by one below.

The generalisability of these findings

If these findings only applied to Hong Kong learners, this would still be significant. However, to be able to suggest that this is a global issue would render such findings more important. To establish this we can turn to the results of the earlier afore-mentioned study of similar students in Poland and Hungary. Table A3 shows the comparison.[2] Only the first 10 items were included in the original questionnaire, three of which were distractors; thus seven items constitute the data for comparison.

What we find is a similar picture overall, but with much inter-group variation. All three groups exhibited a high level of belief in these myths. Overall, Poland had the lowest overall average at 51.0% (as opposed to 56% for Hong Kong and 60% for Hungary), possibly because they had received less exposure to rules of thumb, or they had undergone a certain amount of 'unlearning' in the shape more sophisticated and accurate rules. Regardless, it would seem that myths are a global phenomenon.

However, as regards individual items, while some had similar scores across all three jurisdictions, there were some wide differences, in particular on statement 4 (*unless = if + not*), where the Poland score, at 98%, was 64% above that for Hong Kong (this is one misleading rule that appears not to have made inroads in Hong Kong), and statement 9 (regarding articles) where the Hungarian result was 50%/45% lower than the other two. (Hungarian has an article system and so this rule should not be needed.) For three other statements (nos. 3, 5 and 7, about conditionals, *any* and *some*, and reported speech, respectively) the Polish students had markedly lower scores than the other two.

Some of the differences can be attributed to the L1s of the learners, and their different grammatical natures. However, most must be attributed to different pedagogical cultures existent in those countries; one rule of thumb happens to be popular in one place and not in another for historical reasons. There is no other reason, for example, why statement 4 should have such widely differing scores.

The pedagogic value of rules of thumb

If we accept the interface position, namely that explicit metalinguisitic knowledge can become implicit (as outlined in the Introduction section), then a very important question forces itself upon us as a result of the above findings: how is this transfer possible if a lot of the explicit knowledge learners have is incorrect?

One possible argument is that rules of thumb and other similar statements help learners in the short term but are then discarded or backgrounded. This was a view expounded as early as 1979 by Seliger, with his concept of 'acquisition facilitators', and later on via Schmidt's (1990) 'noticing' hypothesis. Rules may have a certain pedagogical value in this sense by focusing learners' attention on features of grammar, but whether incorrect rules of thumb could be as effective as correct ones must be a subject of further research. Another more general argument in favour of their pedagogic value stems from the observation made even by opponents of the interface position (e.g. Krashen, 1985) that some learners feel more secure when given such rules; they expect them, perhaps because they have been conditioned by previous learning. However, if taken to its logical conclusion in a 'reductio ad absurdam' argument, this would mean that any information, no matter how incorrect, would be acceptable.

Another counter-argument to the 'useful but then discarded' hypothesis is, as the results of this study suggest, that learners do not discard such beliefs; indeed, they seem to retain them in an all too concrete a form. And while the methodology of the study did

not require the students to articulate the rules themselves, there is evidence that they are able to when requested (Berry, 1989).

There is another way, however, in which these rules may have an effect, on the level of explicit knowledge, namely as a 'monitor' (Krashen, 1985) of performance. In informal discussions some students reported applying these rules successfully in this way, while others admitted that their application had led to mistakes which had been corrected by teachers, with confusion resulting. A receptive parallel of this would be cases where counter-examples are identified, which may equally lead to confusion or a loss of confidence in the teacher. Maule (1988) reports such findings relating to the so-called third-conditional rule (no. 14 above).

Overall then, it is not clear whether and how such misconceptions are transferred to implicit learning, if at all. Indeed, I have found, when discussing them with tutorial groups, that after a fair amount of awareness-raising some students' intuitions can be brought to bear and overrule the rule. It would seem, then, that these rules exist side by side with, and independently of, a growing implicit knowledge of the structures concerned.

There are other problems associated with such rules of thumb:

(1) some learners – a large proportion in this case – will go on to become teachers and perpetuate these myths;
(2) students may be reluctant to use structures when a rule appears to prohibit them (e.g. the use of present tense for future time) or reject them when presented with them;
(3) teachers may correct perfectly good sentences on the basis of such statements[3];
(4) (and most importantly) teachers and learners may see the learning and memorising of them as the target of language learning.

The sources of such misconceptions

Obviously, on an initial level, teachers, textbooks, and basic grammars all play their part in establishing these myths, all reinforcing each other. It has been suggested that tutorial schools – a ubiquitous institution in Hong Kong – are particularly responsible through the materials that they produce. However, beyond this there are a number of interlocking factors involved in the generation of such myths. (This is an expanded list based on Berry, 1994.)

(1) Pedagogical expediency: According to this principle, new items are taught based on previously learnt ones. It is a building-block, behaviourist approach. Thus *unless* is taught as the negative of *if*; *any* as the negative and interrogative counterpart of *some*.
(2) A focus on form to the exclusion meaning. Related to (1) is the notion that grammatical words can be taught without any reference to their meaning, when this is precisely what distinguishes them; this applies again to *some* and *any* and to statement 7 (regarding reported speech). These statements suggest a straightforward formal relationship between words and forms when it is meaning that is paramount.
(3) False translational correspondences. For example, *unless* is given as the equivalent to a Polish word (which is equal to *if* plus *not*).
(4) Backwash from testing. When such simple correspondences are established they become easy fodder for testers, and because they are tested they have to be taught. Thus a vicious circle is constructed.

(5) Prescriptive notions about language that are transferred from the L1 to the L2 arena, as discussed above. Huddleston and Pullum (2002, pp. 6–11) decry such notions as have become entrenched in native-speaker culture, but the extent to which they have influenced L2 teaching is debatable. As we saw, one such 'rule', no.16, (about not putting prepositions at the end of sentences) found little favour, as expected (at 17%). However, two similarly prescriptive rules, nos. 6 ('*were* not *was* after *if*') and 17 ('wrong to start sentences with *and* or *but*') did have some currency at 40% and 44% respectively.

(6) Historical language change. Not all grammatical changes get registered in pedagogic grammars. Both this and point (5) may be responsible for the rule about using *were* not *was* after *if*.

(7) Latinate grammar. By this English was force-fitted into the framework of Latin; if the latter had a structure (e.g. the tenses) then an equivalent in English had to be found, e.g. the identification of *will* as a future tense.

(8) Misleading terminology. For example, statements about the '*present* tense' suggest to learners that it refers only to present time.

(9) Poor pedagogic processes, whereby writers of pedagogic grammars refer to other pedagogic grammars and not to scientific/descriptive sources. As Lee and Collins note, based on a study of Hong Kong materials: 'Both textbook and grammar book writers need to pay more heed to the insights presented in the influential and authoritative descriptive grammars of recent years' (2009, p. 51).

(10) A fixed canon of grammar (largely Eurocentric). Over the years textbooks have established a fixed set of structures (based on contrasts with the major European languages). Thus each course has to have its lesson on the present simple, etc. The globalisation of EFL publishing has then spread this around the world, extending to places where some points are irrelevant as well as wrong (e.g. statement 3, about having no *will* after *if*).

(11) Pedagogical over-simplification. This is the crucial issue: how far is too far? I have claimed that all 17 of the non-distracting items are too far from the truth to be pedagogically defendable (with the possible exception of no. 10). All of them, it seems to me, are either simply wrong or contain too many exceptions. In other words, in the search for simplicity (see Swan, 1994), they trade too much accuracy.

These 11 factors do not apply to every statement. However, usually more than one is involved in the creation of a myth. For example, the myth about backshift in reported speech may well be a result of the combination of several factors, such as an excessive focus on form (2), backwash from testing (4), misleading terminology (8) (the 'direct'/'indirect' dichotomy suggest that they are alternatives, which they are not), poor pedagogic processes (9), and the influence of a eurocentric grammar canon (10) (since tense usage in some European languages differs from English in this area). Similarly, the same factor may crop in several myths. The preference for a formal explanation when a semantic one is appropriate (factor (2) above) occurs not only in the myth of reported speech but in statements 5 (*any* vs. *some*) and 9 (first mention *a*, second mention *the*).

The reasons for their tenacity

I would like to suggest that there are four characteristics of myths which are essential to making them resistant (cf. Segal, 2004):

(1) Simplicity: it might be seen as simplistic to suggest that such rules should be simple, but in fact it is essential that their formulation be within the learners' linguistic and conceptual competence; no new terms or ideas should be introduced (see Swan's (1994) criteria of simplicity and conceptual parsimony when talking about rules of thumb).
(2) Timeliness: they are provided at the right moment, when learners are confronted with some 'mysterious' artefact of the foreign language which requires explanation.
(3) Plausibility (or undeniability): they seem to make sense, and examples can be easily adduced to show that they are 'correct'; learners do not have the evidence to refute them (such as advanced grammars or authentic language data), even though their intuitions may be at odds with them.
(4) Authoritativeness: they come from authoritative sources such as teachers and textbooks (unlike many urban myths).

These rules are useful because they can provide a crutch for teachers who are lacking in confidence about their competence in, or understanding of, the language. And learners need them because of the context in which they learn languages: in secondary schools, where all the other subjects provide content knowledge. Grammar provides this for language classes, far more than other areas of form (e.g. pronunciation) do.

Rules of thumb provide the illusion of certainty in a sea of uncertainty, and in this sense approach the idea of myth as a useful cultural phenomenon. However, there is a difference. Myths about heroes and gods, or those about the origin of language and languages, have origins which are lost in pre-history and therefore challenging them is pointless or unproductive. However these myths – like urban myths – are about current facts and are therefore ultimately deniable.

Solutions

This leads on to the final question: what to do about the situation? There are four possible courses of action.

(1) The simplest would be to get rid of rules of thumb entirely, along with any focus on form. However, it does not look like this is going to happen, at least not in Hong Kong, where such a focus has managed to survive alongside an overtly communicative syllabus.
(2) Another possibility would be to use a different, more inductive approach to grammar, whereby learners are encouraged to arrive at the rules themselves (Swan, 2013). This would invest the rules with less authority and make it less likely that they would achieve monolithic, mythic status. And it would give learners more confidence to trust their own intuitions over inaccurate rules. A methodology for this might include the study of samples of language such as are found in concordance lines; a methodology for this exists in the notion of 'data-driven learning' (Cheng, 2012; Johns, 1991).
(3) The third option is to formulate better rules in terms of accuracy and applicability, using the criteria proposed by Swan (1994); it may be that the number of such rules is quite limited. Associated with this are attempts in Second Language Acquisition studies to identify which areas of grammar are amenable to explicit instruction (e.g. Ellis, 1994). The meta-analysis by Spada and Tomita (2010) suggests that, counter-intuitively, complex rules can also lead to implicit knowledge as well as simple ones. Regardless of the level of complexity, consideration needs

to be given in such studies to whether the instructional methodology is sound before conclusions about lack of learnability are drawn.

(4) Finally, and perhaps most practically, at least in the short term, teachers can accept that their learners have been fed false, though perhaps temporarily useful, information and try to work with the situation by developing more advanced rules (or explaining 'exceptions'). There are problems with this, however. Firstly, teachers seem to be as enamoured of these myths as their learners, so they are hardly equipped to be the agents of progress. Secondly, as has been shown above in the 'Item analysis' section, many if not all of the rules are too far from the truth (or have too many exceptions) to provide a solid basis for development. Thirdly, this solution assumes that there are more accurate, yet comprehensible, rules available; this may not always be the case, and if it is, where are teachers to find them? Fourthly, teachers will be dealing with heterogeneous classes where some learners have been exposed to many rules, and others to few (cf. the 'Individual profiles' section), so how do they know where their learners stand? Nevertheless, perhaps in combination with option (3), this does offer a way forward.

Conclusions

Overall it can be concluded that learners of English in Hong Kong are awash with explicit knowledge in the shape of rules of thumb about English grammar and that a lot of this knowledge is mistaken. With more than half of the key statements, over 50% of participants thought them true. Despite a communicative syllabus and the attempts of educators, myths about grammar seem to be well entrenched, though more so among some learners than others.

The results also suggested tentatively that there might be a slight decline in belief in some of these myths over time. It may be that the battle is being won in some areas, but slowly. However, this conclusion needs to be taken with a pinch of salt given the small size of the samples compared and the limited period involved. And in one case the loss of confidence in one myth was possibly due to it being replaced by another.

Measures need to be taken to counteract these myths, such as those suggested above. However, before any of them can be implemented, there is a need to deal with the current situation. Trainee-teachers and students transferring to university to study English will have to undergo a good deal of 'unlearning'. Alongside this, they need to acquire a different set of attitudes to rules of grammar; they need to be shown that such rules are usually not matters of right and wrong, but of tendencies. And they need to realise – through awareness-raising activities – that they can access intuitions which can temper or even override such misconceptions.

Whether such rules are nevertheless useful or not in leading to implicit knowledge has not been the aim of this study, which is essentially about the extent and accuracy of learners' explicit knowledge. However, a possible avenue for future research might involve a study of a small number of incorrect and correct rules of thumb in order to investigate whether they have a deleterious or positive effect on learners' implicit knowledge and performance (e.g. do learners avoid using *some* in negatives?).

It would seem that language learners in formal contexts have a certain need for 'myths', regardless of their effect on performance, to help them get through the difficult situation in which they find themselves. However, surely what teachers and textbooks supply them with should be correct 'myths'. There is a well-known saying that 'a lie is half way round the world before the truth has got its trousers on'. In future the lie must not be allowed to start, while for the present the truth must not give up the pursuit.

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Notes

1. However, it should be noted that the pervasiveness of the 'myths' discussed in these books has not been established through surveys of their potential 'believers' and are therefore open to the accusation of being 'straw men', set up by their critics to be knocked over easily.
2. It must be remembered that the Polish and Hungarian students were at a later stage of their studies, and the time gap adds another variable, so any comparison must treated with great caution.
3. When I was Chief Examiner for an exam paper on teachers' ability to correct and explain mistakes, I encountered numerous cases of this.

Notes on contributor

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Appendix 1.

Table A1. Subjects.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
English studies	29	30	30	28	29
English and education	27	22			

Note: Intakes on the English and Education programme were discontinued after 2008.

Table A2. Overall results for Hong Kong.

	07 ($n = 56$)	08 ($n = 52$)	09 ($n = 30$)	10 ($n = 28$)	11 ($n = 29$)	Total ($n = 195$)	
1							
True	47	37	19	17	25	145	74%
False	3	6	5	4	2	20	
Don't know	2	–	–	1	–	3	
Partly true	4	9	6	6	2	27	

(*continued*)

Table A2. (*Continued*).

	07 ($n = 56$)	08 ($n = 52$)	09 ($n = 30$)	10 ($n = 28$)	11 ($n = 29$)	Total ($n = 195$)	
2							
True	13	7	8	6	8	42	22%
False	23	21	13	7	16	80	
Don't know	1	1	3	2	–	7	
Partly true	19	23	6	13	5	66	
3							
True	26	20	12	11	10	79	41%
False	18	25	11	14	15	83	
Don't know	9	6	6	3	3	27	
Partly true	3	1	1	–	1	6	
4							
True	18	18	16	9	6	67	34%
False	19	31	11	11	16	88	
Don't know	10	–	1	6	4	21	
Partly true	9	3	2	2	3	19	
5							
True	36	32	15	18	18	119	61%
False	2	2	3	1	2	10	
Don't know	12	14	7	7	9	49	
Partly true	6	4	5	2	–	17	
6							
True	25	19	14	9	11	78	40%
False	13	21	7	8	10	59	
Don't know	12	6	6	9	4	37	
Partly true	6	6	3	2	4	21	
7							
True	46	40	23	18	20	147	75%
False	5	5	1	5	5	21	
Don't know	3	6	4	2	1	16	
Partly true	2	1	2	3	3	11	
8							
True	20	28	16	15	13	92	47%
False	4	6	3	4	1	18	
Don't know	28	17	9	8	13	75	
Partly true	4	1	2	1	2	10	
9							
True	43	39	17	18	19	136	70%
False	5	2	3	2	4	16	
Don't know	1	2	–	1	1	5	
Partly true	7	9	10	7	5	38	
10							
True	37	37	21	20	19	134	69%
False	5	8	4	–	2	19	
Don't know	11	7	5	7	8	38	
Partly true	3	–	–	1	–	4	

(*continued*)

Table A2. (*Continued*).

	07 ($n = 56$)	08 ($n = 52$)	09 ($n = 30$)	10 ($n = 28$)	11 ($n = 29$)	Total ($n = 195$)	
11							
True	25	20	9	10	11	75	38%
False	2	1	4	–	–	7	
Don't know	1	–	–	1	1	3	
Partly true	28	31	17	17	17	110	
12							
True	33 59%	20	11	16	8 28%	88	45%
False	1	1	1	–	2	5	
Don't know	1	–	–	1	1	3	
Partly true	21 38%	31	18	11	18 62%	99	
13							
True	36	30	16	16	21	119	61%
False	3	3	5	1	–	12	
Don't know	–	–	–	1	–	1	
Partly true	17	19	9	10	8	73	
14							
True	22 39%	22	9	11	6 21%	70	36%
False	22 39%	22	13	11	19 66%	87	
Don't know	11	7	7	6	4	35	
Partly true	1	1	1	–	–	3	
15							
True	34	31	17	14	19	115	59%
False	7	5	4	3	4	23	
Don't know	2	4	4	3	1	14	
Partly true	13	12	5	8	5	43	
16							
True	10	10	7	2	4	33	17%
False	30	36	19	18	23	126	
Don't know	11	5	1	7	2	26	
Partly true	5	1	3	1	–	10	
17							
True	24	22	13	18	8	85	44%
False	14	16	11	5	13	59	
Don't know	8	4	–	3	4	19	
Partly true	10	10	6	2	4	32	
18							
True	51	49	28	25	29	182	93%
False	1	1	1	2	–	5	
Don't know	3	–	1	–	–	4	
Partly true	1	2	–	1	–	4	
19							
True	38	30	18	17	17	120	62%
False	1	4	4	1	1	11	
Don't know	3	1	1	1	–	6	
Partly true	14	17	7	9	11	58	

(*continued*)

Table A2. (*Continued*).

	07 ($n = 56$)	08 ($n = 52$)	09 ($n = 30$)	10 ($n = 28$)	11 ($n = 29$)	Total ($n = 195$)	
20							
True	36	41	17	16	17	127	65%
False	3	4	3	1	5	16	
Don't know	7	2	6	6	5	26	
Partly true	10	5	4	5	2	26	
Totals	620 55%	552 53%	306 51%	286 51%	289 50%	2053	53%
	181	220	126	98	140	765	
	136	82	61	75	61	415	
	183	186	107	101	90	677	
	1120	1040	600	560	580	3900	
Totals without items 1, 2, 8 and 16	530 59%	470 56%	256 53%	246 55%	239 52%	1741	56%
	121 14%	151 18%	86 18%	65 15%	98 21%	521	17%
	94 10%	59 7%	48 10%	57 13%	46 10%	304	10%
	151 17%	152 18%	90 19%	80 18%	81 17%	554	18%
	896	832	480	448	464	3120	

Table A3. Comparison with Poland and Hungary: percentage of 'true' responses.

	Statements (distractors in *italics*)	Hong Kong ($n = 195$)	Poland ($n = 44$)	Hungary ($n = 32$)
1	The words HARD and HARDLY, although similar in form, are not related in meaning.	74	98	91
2	The comparative of adjectives is formed by adding '-er' to one-syllable words and 'more' to words of two or more syllables.	22	14	9
3	In type one conditional clauses (first conditionals), WILL does not occur after IF.	41	20	88
4	UNLESS has the same meaning as IF + NOT (attached to the verb).	34	98	50
5	In negative and interrogative sentences ANY should be used instead of SOME.	61	36	69
6	In type two conditional sentences (second conditionals) it is wrong to use WAS after IF; WERE must be used instead.	40	23	31
7	In reported/indirect speech, the past tense should be changed to the past perfect tense if the introductory verb is in the past tense.	75	36	84
8	After verbs of perception (FEEL, TASTE, etc.) adjectives and not adverbs are used as complements.	47	54	84
9	The first time you mention a countable noun you use the indefinite article (A, AN); the second time the definite article.	70	75	25
10	The verb WANT does not occur in progressive/continuous tenses.	69	68	72
Average excluding distractors		56	51	60