

## **A proposal for the use of peer tutoring to enhance the grammar skills of Business students at The University of the West Indies, Barbados**

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This paper proposes an investigation to address the incorrect use of the homophones ‘they’, ‘their’ and ‘there’ by Level II and Level III students in the Department of Management Studies at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados. From all appearances, basic grammatical errors are becoming more commonplace in written submissions from Business students at the University. Though procedural knowledge and problem solving may be most important in areas such as accounting and finance, there is evidence to suggest that many members of the Caribbean business community view effective writing as a key marker of a quality university graduate and a similar stance is reported by their US counterparts. The proposed action research has implications for maintaining the current reputation of The University of the West Indies within the regional business community. However, it is equally important for minimising the difficulty that graduates could confront if they fail to address writing and communication deficiencies before entering the workplace. The paper advances the use of peer tutoring and mechanical testing as the preferred mechanisms for addressing the incorrect use of the homophones, while examining their practical and theoretical implications.

**Key words:** grammar, literacy, writing skills, peer tutoring, mechanical testing, action research.

### **Introduction**

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is ranked in the top 1500 universities in the world (Cybermetrics Lab, 2012). This is a credible rating for a Third World institution, given that the 17,000 universities worldwide are concentrated in advanced economies where the financial, human and physical resources necessary for establishing a quality university would be more readily available. In the last ten years UWI’s Barbados campus, Cave Hill, has had exponential growth in its enrolment, as the government of Barbados has sought its goal of having a university graduate in every household. Commensurate with this new initiative has been a seemingly growing dissatisfaction with the communication skills of the UWI Business graduate. In the last five years, Caribbean businesspeople have become more vocal in expressing complaints about poor quality resumes and application letters and a failure to demonstrate competence in the English language when required to write letters and reports as part of their work duties. In an audit of the

Department of Management Studies conducted in April 2013, several members of the Barbadian business community reiterated their dissatisfaction with the written communication skills of UWI graduates. Dr. Ralph Thompson, a Jamaican business executive and education analyst has gone as far as to declare that the majority of students graduating from Cave Hill's sister campus in Jamaica are "mediocre" (Manning, 2009) and called for the 80% subsidy to students enrolled in tertiary education to be reassigned to primary education initiatives. The academic community in the Caribbean has also documented its dissatisfaction with the writing skills of UWI graduates (Stone, 1988; Chevannes, 2005). In speaking about the student body at Mona, Stone (1988) indicated that too many of the students admitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences for the 1987-88 academic year displayed incoherence in their written work and could not understand the meaning of some words used in the classroom environment.

It may be that the rapid growth in student intake has resulted in an increasingly diverse student body (UWI Strategic Plan, 2007-2012) which the business and academic communities are yet to gain an understanding of and an appreciation for. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the UWI, and, by extension, the Department of Management Studies (hereafter referred to as DOMS) to confront the needs and concerns of all of its key stakeholders. Attention must be paid to the criticisms regarding graduate communication skills since research indicates that these are critical to career success after graduation (Fisher, 1999). Given that managers often spend many hours preparing documents and written correspondence, expertise in this area may be critical to receiving promotion (Fisher, 1999). Eady, Herrington and Jones (2010, p.260) sum up the importance of communication skills in their assertion that the "literacy demands of work and life are increasing". Further, a review of research into the skills necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century success indicated that employers value non-cognitive skills such as teamwork and writing skills over the ability to independently solve problems (Payne & Kyllonen, 2012). It is also interesting to note that graduates themselves are convinced of the importance of communication skills to career advancement (Murphy & Hildebrandt, 1988; Gustafson, Johnson & Hovey, 1993).

This paper proposes an action research initiative to address 't-homophone confusion' (the term adopted by the paper to describe the incorrect use of 'they', 'their' and 'there'). After a general discussion of the action research paradigm, the paper systematically addresses the issue at hand within the context of the five steps of the Susman (1983) model of action research. The Susman model was selected due to its parsimony and intuitiveness. This early framework has served as the basis for several later models of action research, for example those developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Stringer (1996).

### **The action research paradigm**

Action research is research undertaken to address a practical problem, rather than an academic or conceptual issue, and is often performed by the individual or organisation confronting the problem without intervention from an external consultant or independent researcher (O'Brien, 1998; Gilmore, Krantz & Ramirez 1986). Action research rejects the concept of researcher neutrality, as the active researcher has a highly personal or work-related interest in seeing the problem resolved.

It is however important to note that action research is both scientific as well as practical in orientation (Winter, 1989; Fals-Borda, 1992). Action research can only be classified as such when the researcher makes a systematic investigation of the problem, and ensures that the inquiry is informed by relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts. Critical reflection, often from multiple perspectives, is a fundamental element of action research. It provides strategies for improving the modus operandi within organisations, and can be the mechanism through which the organisation learns (Riel & Lepori, 2011). Much of the action research undertaken is performed by university lecturers/researchers focused on curriculum, student and professional development. This branch of action research is known as educational action research (O'Brien, 1998). The action research paradigm permits the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Winter, 1987).

### **The Susman (1983) model of action research**

Susman (1983) suggests a particularly useful model for conducting action research (see Figure 1), which has some similarities to the traditional research design and implementation process (Burns & Bush, 2009; McDaniel & Gates, 2011). Susman proposes the identification or definition of the problem as step 1, followed by a consideration of the alternative courses of action. Step 3 involves the selection of a course of action. This selection can be practice-driven (what others have done in a similar situation) but should be informed by the relevant theory and concepts. The final steps of the model entail the evaluation of the action taken and the specification of learning outcomes. Since this paper outlines a *proposal* for action research rather than a report on a past initiative, the emphasis at steps 4 and 5 of the model will be on expected consequences and projected learning outcomes.

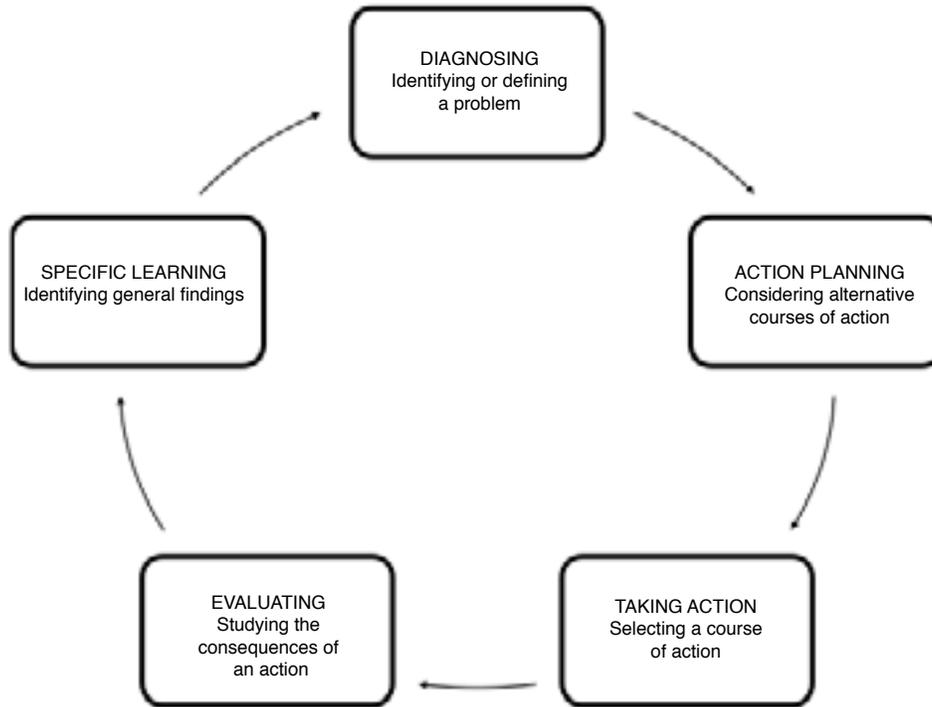


Figure 1. The Susman (1983) model of action research

Despite the preliminary (rather than conclusive) nature of a proposal, this particular one is deemed to be both useful and informative since (a) the intervention would require significant financial and human resource support from the UWI and the administrators would be aided by a written exposition of the rationale; (b) the proposal was written after the collection of evidence over the course of several semesters, and is therefore a source of primary research, and (c) it raises some of the cultural issues surrounding writing and communication deficiency at the university level in the context of the Caribbean, which remains an understudied geographical area in social science literature (Knight, 2011).

### Step 1 (Susman, 1983 model) – Definition of the problem/research issue

I have been a lecturer at UWI since 1999, and in the last five years have noticed an increasing incidence of t-homophone confusion (the inability to correctly use *they*, *their* and *there*) by Level II and Level III DOMS students. Though poor sentence structure, the inability to spell basic words and issues of subject and verb agreement are indicated every semester, t-homophone confusion appears to be the most pressing grammatical issue at this time. Evidence of t-homophone confusion is cause for concern given that the regional education system purposely seeks to build

competence in this aspect of grammar from the primary school stage. Indeed, great emphasis is placed on the mastery of the t-homophones in order to gain entrance to secondary school across the Caribbean. More importantly for us at the tertiary level, there are research findings which indicate that business people are biased against new graduates who do not demonstrate competence in written communication, or worst yet, make rudimentary grammatical mistakes (Hairston, 1981; Casne-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Lindqvist & Vestman, 2011; Payne & Kyllonen, 2012).

From Semester 1 2010-2011 to Semester 2, 2011-2012, I collected a sample of scripts displaying clear evidence of t-homophone confusion (see Appendix A). The scripts came primarily from students taking Principles of Marketing, a core Level II course for all students enrolled in DOMS.

It must be noted that Appendix A is not exhaustive - it contains only a portion of the instances where t-homophone confusion was found by the author. During data collection the researcher made no attempt to *quantify* the magnitude of the problem, rather to establish that there was a problem. The scripts were selected to specifically demonstrate the *presence* and the *depth* of the problem which some students are experiencing with the t-homophones. It is envisaged that data collection and analysis element of the proposed t-homophone intervention would give a scientific measurement of the size of the problem.

Evidence of t-homophone confusion at Level II raises a number of questions about the usefulness of the Fundamentals of Written English course offered by UWI, Cave Hill, and to a lesser extent about the veracity of the English Proficiency Test and the Grade 1 pass in the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) English Language exam. The Fundamentals of Written English course is designed to be taken in the first year of matriculation by students who have not achieved a Grade 1 in the CXC English Language, or who have not passed the English Proficiency test (a test given to incoming students). This fundamentals course is purported by the University authorities to correct grammatical weaknesses. Therefore, the presentation of t-homophone confusion as late as Level II (as shown at Appendix A) may indicate several deeper issues. It is possible that:

- Students are delaying registration for the Fundamentals of Written English course (not taking it at Level I), thereby carrying grammatical weaknesses into Level II and even Level III.
- A passing grade in the Fundamentals of Written English course may not always signify that the student will be competent in the use of the t-homophones.
- A CXC English Language Grade 1 pass may not always equate to the reduction of t-homophone confusion.
- A pass in the English Proficiency test may not equate to the reduction of t-homophone confusion.

Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster and McCormick (2010) found that several of the university students presenting to reading clinics seeking assistance had already passed state reading assessments in American high schools. Though the Fundamentals of Written English course and the English Proficiency test offered by UWI, Cave Hill, are not perfectly comparable to a state reading assessment given to American high school students, the finding of Pitcher et al. (2010) demonstrate that tests do not always uncover or sufficiently highlight deficiencies.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the primary research issues going forward must be an identification of the magnitude of t-homophone confusion and the isolation of its precursors, bearing in mind that these stem from the educational and socio-economic history of the student or even from the structure of the English Language proficiency programme currently employed by UWI. The practical issue for the proposed action research must be a significant reduction in t-homophone confusion from student writing in DOMS. Several specific action research objectives flow from the need to measure the size of the t-homophone problem whilst working to address it. These objectives are:

- (a) The identification of a suitable mechanism for testing for all Level II DOMS students to determine whether t-homophone confusion is present.
- (b) The identification (and development) of a mechanism for tracking the educational history of Level II students presenting the confusion, to determine whether there are statistically significant indicators/predictors. This would consider which English courses students have passed, failed or not yet attempted to determine whether the confusion is caused by delayed registration or by a deficiency in the courses already taken. Educational history would also consider which primary and secondary schools were attended by the student displaying t-homophone confusion as a means of possibly isolating the 'root' of the problem.
- (c) The development of a mechanism for tracking the demographic characteristics of the student, to determine whether t-homophone confusion is more prevalent in a particular, gender, sex, nationality or even enrolment status. Understanding the 'typical demographic' of t-homophone confusion would help UWI in the design of more effective programmes to address the issue. For example, if part-time students over the age of 25 have a greater tendency to display the deficiency, then the timing of interventions and support would have to take their work schedules into consideration.
- (d) The identification of a best practice for correcting t-homophone confusion.

## **Step 2 - A conceptual and theoretical consideration of alternative courses of action**

The first question to be tackled in identifying a course of action for addressing t-homophone confusion is whether the issue actually merits consideration. The decision to highlight literacy issues rests in the autonomous approach to literacy (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982) which purports that literacy produces “cognitive effects that make literates and literate societies more logical and analytical” (Wiley 1996, p.29). The autonomous approach intimates that high literacy levels should be the goal of any progressive society. To the contrary, there are theorists who reject this perspective and call for an increased emphasis on the multiplicity of ‘literacies’ and skills displayed by persons who may not be literate in the traditional sense (Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Cook-Gumperz & Keller-Cohen, 1993). They question whether persons who are more visual and analytical (as opposed to verbal) should be singled out and forced to display competence in spelling, grammar, comprehension and writing. By extension, they also query whether an intervention like the one proposed would not create undue anxiety for students who are aware that they have grammatical issues.

Some Caribbean scholars and linguists also question whether our people should even be asked to discourse in Standard English and maintain its grammatical rules. Writing in 1959, Cassidy noted that only a small fraction of the people living in the Anglophone Caribbean converse in Standard English. Nero (2000, p.486) describes the Caribbean as a “linguistic contact zone from which local or Creole language emerged as a result of European-controlled plantation systems bringing together Africans and other ethnic groups from Asia and Europe as indentured labourers”. Consequently the insistence of Caribbean schools on the teaching of Standard English rather than Creole is viewed by some as a culturally imperialistic perpetuation of colonially derived norms (Nero, 1997, 2000; Winford, 1994). Winford (1994) notes that British colonisation has left a modern day Caribbean society where Creole speaking is stigmatised and social mobility is in part dependent on one’s mastery of Standard English. Indeed a look at the pronunciation features of Caribbean Creole English which have been compiled in the work of Allsopp (1996), Roberts (1988) and Rickford (1987) would suggest that the issue of t-homophone confusion may be as a result of the Creole influence. For example, ‘their’ or ‘there’ would be pronounced ‘day’ or ‘they’ in the Barbadian vernacular. Walker (1966) and Milson-Whyte (2008) both suggest that the speech habits of the various Creole languages have found their way into the writing of UWI students, who are often unaware that they are not adhering to the grammatical and spelling rules of Standard English.

It is also relevant that Caribbean persons of higher social class have a greater tendency to speak Standard English in everyday discourse (Winford, 1994). This implies that persons of lower social classes must develop a mastery of Standard English as they endeavour to move up the educational and social ladder. Research has established that persons from higher income households also tend to display a

higher level of competence in the *writing* of Standard English (Wiley, 1996; Carneiro, Crawford & Goodman, 2007). Therefore, the insistence that every UWI student displays competence in the speaking and writing of Standard English may amount to discrimination against those individuals whose socio-cultural backgrounds could have predisposed them to be less than fully literate in the traditional sense (Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Cook-Gumperz & Keller-Cohen, 1993; Street, 1993; Levine, 1982). Indeed, to highlight t-homophone confusion at this juncture may be considered a backward step as UWI seeks to enfranchise Barbadians from lower socio-economic groups by placing a graduate in every household. In pursuing the intervention, the University risks being accused of working with the business elite to block the educational and career related success of persons who have a history of unequal access to social and educational resources (Cook-Gumperz and Keller-Cohen, 1993; Wiley, 1996).

The criticisms of the autonomous approach to literacy and the concerns about the marginalisation of Creole are real and well founded. However, these contentions have for the most part been raised in academic circles, and have not resonated with average Caribbean persons. In fact, Cassidy (1959) records the outcry made by the people of Jamaica when it was suggested that the Jamaican Creole be made the official language of that nation. Though more than 50 years have passed since Cassidy (1959) wrote, the Caribbean business community continues to hold to the autonomous view of literacy, and this stakeholder is one that UWI should be careful not to ignore since Caribbean businesses continue to be the major employer of UWI graduates and are being increasingly called upon to support revenue generation initiatives as the University seeks to reduce its financial dependence on Caribbean governments. Nevertheless, the University can still play a pivotal role in sensitising the business community to the socio-cultural factors which drive literacy and educational attainment. There is also room to suggest the need to give equal credence to the multiplicity of 'literacies' and skills which graduates possess.

Two broad spectrums of thought exist on the measures that are most appropriate for addressing grammatical issues at the tertiary level. Traditionally, the mechanical testing approach was recommended to correct writing and spelling deficiencies. However, several writers advanced that students should be taught to write in an organic, natural fashion, rather than be asked to take tests or assessments to identify and correct specific grammar, spelling and punctuation errors (Osenburg, 1950; Dieterich, 1977; North, 1977; Peck & Hoffman, 1984). Osenburg (1950) suggested that the best way to build student writing skills is to permit them to free write, whilst de-emphasising errors of spelling and grammar. In his mind, the mark of a good student/graduate is his/her creativity, organisation skills and ability to grasp concepts. This position should be balanced against evidence that suggests key stakeholders (University administration, faculty, business people and government) in the Caribbean region still expect students to have competence in writing *before* entering university (Stone, 1988; Manning, 2009; Chevannes, 2005; Milson-Whyte, 2008). It may therefore prove difficult to garner the support for a

fully-fledged writing programme or centre through which the organic approach could be established. Indeed, the subsidisation of tertiary education is itself under serious threat (Beckles, 2012) as Caribbean governments seek to grapple with the deleterious effects of the current world economic recession. Though the organic approach is ideologically superior and would be more emotionally uplifting for students, the less expensive mechanical approach may meet with a more favourable reception in light of the prevailing financial constraints. Moreover, the intervention may be required to consider a *range* of grammatical issues being confronted by students in the interest of cost effectiveness.

### **Step 3 – Selecting a course of action**

This paper advances the correction of t-homophone confusion through mechanical testing and peer tutoring. However a possible solution could be the revisiting and restructuring of the Fundamentals of Written English course to address this issue. In order to better understand the current English Language programme at UWI, Cave Hill, two short interviews were conducted on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 with the current Co-ordinator of the Foundation Language programme at UWI, Cave Hill; a past Co-ordinator of the Fundamentals of Written English course and a current lecturer/tutor in that same course. The interviews highlighted that the English Proficiency test and the Fundamentals of Written English course focused heavily on essay writing though some attention was paid to the rules of grammar. A look at the course outline for Fundamentals of Written English showed emphasis on grammatical issues such as subject and verb agreement, co-ordination and subordination and punctuation, but no specific emphasis on the t-homophones. The past Co-ordinator intimated that the grammar rules which featured in the course were more commonly occurring than t-homophone confusion so emphasis had to be placed on these. The current Co-ordinator agreed that t-homophone confusion was a real issue at UWI and gave insight as to why it may persist after having done the Fundamentals course. Like Milson-Whyte (2008) she proposed that the dialects of the region influence students' ability to write Standard English. More importantly she reiterated that students take it for granted that they know Standard English, and are not conscious of their weaknesses. She further suggested that UWI students may do enough preparation to pass the Fundamentals of Written English course, but thereafter continue to 'write what they speak'. Both participants defended the strong emphasis on essay writing in the Proficiency test and Fundamentals course since poor essay writing was an even greater concern than weak grammar.

What is clear from the interviews is that the Fundamentals of Written English course is addressing the most pressing concerns at UWI. However, there are less pressing, though equally important issues such as t-homophone confusion which cannot be addressed due to the limited length of the course. If the t-homophone intervention proposed herein is instituted, DOMS would then know the magnitude of the problem with certainty and could make a case for the inclusion of t-homophones as a module in the Fundamentals course. Even if

t-homophones could be included in the Fundamentals course, there still exists the strong possibility that some students will not overcome t-homophone confusion. This assertion flows from a point made by the past Co-ordinator who noted that like mathematics, grammatical rules are mastered through practise. However, with a maximum of three hours being spent on most topics in the Fundamentals course, the students would have to take the initiative and practise the t-homophones on their own. In her opinion, the average student, with all that is competing for his/her attention, may be reluctant to do this.

There is the option of introducing a Fundamentals Part II course to address aspects of grammar which are currently not being covered, however this would be seen as an added burden. At present, the Fundamentals of Written English course is an extra not-for-credit course which only those students who do not have CXC English at Grade 1 or who did not pass the English Proficiency test are required to take. To ask these students to take a second not-for-credit course might not sit well with them. In addition, the University's administration might appear to be making it more difficult for students to satisfy graduation requirements in light of increasingly strong competition from extra-regional universities that are often perceived by students and potential students to be more lenient.

The observation that t-homophone confusion may persist even after it is included as a module in the Fundamentals course suggests the need for a more intensive and personalised approach. The intervention on which this paper is based not only suggests a more stringent testing approach to uncover the true character of t-homophone confusion among DOMS' students, but also advances a peer tutoring strategy that offers the intimacy and depth that defies the traditional UWI class setting.

### **The t-homophone intervention**

A quantitative research approach/methodology is suggested for the t-homophone intervention. Quantitative research is appropriate when one wants to make inferences about a population, through testing that entire population or a representative sample. Typically, quantitative research involves the use of closed ended questions or questions that have only one correct response (McDaniel & Gates, 2011; Burns & Bush, 2009). In this case, the entire population of Level II students would be tested to establish t-homophone competence, and the test bank would comprise of questions which have only one correct response.

#### *Participant choice, research setting and questionnaire development*

Provided that approval is granted, the t-homophone study would be instituted in the last four weeks prior to the start of the registration for Semester I 2013-2014. Students would be informed of the scheduled testing times by e-mail and by letter. The t-homophone test would be a computerised test drawn from a test bank of over 500 questions. It is expected that these questions would be developed with the assistance of the Faculty of Humanities and Education.

Students would be required to take the test (approximately 25-30 questions chosen randomly from the test bank) in the computer labs during one of a series of invigilated sittings, before they can register for their first Level II course. Failure to take the test would result in inability to register for any Level II or Level III course.

The student would be deemed to have passed the test only if responses are 100% correct. At the time of testing students would not be informed which questions they have gotten right or wrong. Failure to attain a perfect grade would result in one of several remedial interventions. These are as follows:-

If the student was exempted from Fundamentals of Written English (having passed CXC English Language with a Grade I, or having passed the English Proficiency Entrance exam) or if the student has already passed the Fundamentals of Written English course, the student would be given the option to:

- (a) immediately take a second random test. If 100% is not attained on the second try, the student will automatically be assigned to a peer tutor for four to six half hour sessions of remedial support, and then required to take a post test. The student would be allowed to register for Level II after taking the second test.
- (b) be assigned to a peer tutor without making the second attempt. The student would then be allowed to register for Level II.

If the student has not taken the Fundamentals of Written English course, he/she would be required to immediately sign up for this course (and given registration priority), whilst registering for Level II. This student would be required to take the t-homophone test again before the start of Semester II 2013-2014, and to immediately sign up for peer tutoring if the 100% grade is not attained.

#### *Peer tutoring and recruitment and training of tutors*

Peer tutoring is the process by which students help each other to learn new concepts and relearn old ones (De Backer, Van Keer & Valcke, 2012). During the peer-tutoring process, tutees can confront misconceptions and mistakes in their current knowledge schema, and begin to gain the correct understanding of the material to which they were previously exposed (Loke & Chow, 2007; De Backer et al., 2012). Peer tutoring programmes have been commonplace in UK and US universities for at least 40 years and have been shown to provide tangible benefits to both tutor and tutees (Sobral, 2002; Booth & James, 2001; Solomon & Crowe, 2001; Loke & Chow, 2007; De Backer et al., 2012). The advantages of peer tutoring are as follows:- (a) it improves the reflective and critical thinking ability and the knowledge base of tutees; (b) it forces students to take responsibility for their learning (Topping, 1996), and (c) it provides both tutor and tutee with communication, time management and

interpersonal skills (Loke & Chow, 2007). The exercise of peer tutoring provides an individual attention and immersion in the material that would have been difficult to accomplish in the traditional classroom. Peer tutors seem to intuitively understand the mental blocks experienced by their peers since they would have had similar learning experiences in the recent past (Moust & Schmidt, 1994). Clarke & Feltham (1990) go as far as to argue that persons who have been peer tutored register higher levels of performance overall. Tutors also gain confidence in their knowledge and teaching skills.

In order to facilitate the t-homophone peer tutoring exercise, tutors could be recruited from the Faculty of Humanities and Education. This faculty offers degrees in Education and Linguistics. There would therefore be a group of persons who are either in the process of mastering the English language, or are learning the best methods for teaching English to primary or secondary school students. Being selected as a t-homophone tutor would provide an internship-like experience for the tutors which would enhance the strength of their resumes, as well as supplement their income. It would also be advantageous if tutors had experience in spotting conditions such as dyslexia since t-homophone confusion may be a single symptom of a deeper communication issue being experienced by individuals. Rothman's (1977) guidelines for choosing tutors would be followed as far as possible. He posited that effective writing tutors tend to be capable non-fiction writers who have a passion for clarity and teaching, and are willing to be patient with others. Every effort would also be made to recruit tutors with proven people skills or experiences in dealing with difficult or distressed people and making them feel comfortable. This is critical to success in our 'educatio-centred' culture (Campbell, 1997; Goveia, 1965; Knight & Palmer, 1989) where persons may feel uncomfortable admitting that they need remedial help in the English language at the tertiary stage. Tutors must be able to put tutees at ease and come over as a 'friendly' but firm support person, rather than as a 'super student' condescending to help a floundering colleague.

The tutors would be supported with a comprehensive training workshop, similar to that undertaken in a recent peer tutoring exercise for student nurses in Hong Kong (Loke & Chow, 2007). In that case, a two hour training workshop was conducted to inform the tutors on the theoretical and conceptual foundation of peer tutoring; the roles and responsibilities of tutors; the ground rules for interacting with tutees, and methods for establishing a rapport and working relationship with tutees. Following Loke & Chow (2007) tutors would also be provided with a written document summarising what was covered in the workshop. Ideally this training would be conducted by a resource person from a university with a proven record of success in peer tutoring such as Brooklyn College in New York or the University of California at Santa Cruz.

### *The tutoring exercise*

Tutor and tutee would be required to have a minimum of four and a maximum of eight half hour sessions to correct the t-homophone confusion. The first session would involve the tutee explaining how he/she has used or learned to use the t-homophones in the past. The tutee could accomplish this by giving either verbal or written examples. Having first to reflect upon one's current knowledge and understanding before commencing the process of correction and re-engineering is a key element of metacognitive learning. Increasingly, educators are proposing that the metacognitive approach to learning is the most effective (Grasha, 2002; Mezirow, 2000; Fink, 2003). Metacognition is facilitated when students are deliberately given the opportunity to reflect upon and understand their conceptions and misconceptions before beginning to reconstruct their knowledge base (De Backer et al., 2012). For example, in the study by Loke and Chow (2007, p.239) one tutee noted that "my tutor challenged me about why I do things in a particular way. I used to follow strictly what the teacher or the literature said. But now I have started to question if it should be done in that way..."

After tutees have reflected on their past misconceptions and mistakes, the tutor would attempt to help the tutee to relearn the use of the t-homophones, and hopefully to master them. If the student is able to master the t-homophones in less than eight sessions, then the remaining ones could be used to address additional grammatical difficulties which the tutee may be experiencing. This more holistic approach would have to be spearheaded by tutees who feel comfortable enough to reveal additional problems and concerns to the assigned tutor.

### *Tutor responsibilities*

Since the tutors are busy students themselves, they would be allowed to have no more than two tutees at a time. Tutors would be required to keep a register to show that the tutees have attended the sessions. Tutees would sign to verify that they have attended. Based on the tutee's grasp of the concepts, the tutor would determine whether the tutee needs to take all eight sessions to achieve competence. If a student achieves competence in less time, then the tutor could cancel the remaining sessions and approve the tutee to take the next sitting of the t-homophone test. After the maximum number of sessions is completed, the tutee would automatically be required to take the test, with or without the written indication of competence from the tutor. Tutors would *not* have access to the t-homophone test bank. Instead, they would be required to develop their own testing questions and strategies. This restriction would help to maintain the integrity of the test, since tutors would be prevented from encouraging tutees to simply memorise answers to test bank questions.

### *The post test*

The post-tutoring test would come from the same test bank as the pre-tutoring test, and be taken under similar conditions. The peer tutoring exercise would be deemed a success if students can improve on the scores achieved in the pre-test. It is hoped that the tutoring exercise would allow students to score 100% on the post-test. However, if this is not accomplished, DOMS can recommend that the student seeks further remedial support, for example the writing courses offered by UWI Student Services Department or seek private tuition where possible.

### *Data collection and analysis and the peer-tutoring exercise assessment*

Incoming students at UWI are required to provide several sets of demographic information on their applications for entrance. Information on schools previously attended is also collected. T-homophone test scores would be cross-referenced or matched to students' personal and educational history to determine whether t-homophone confusion is more prevalent in students coming from particular nations/territories/schools, of a particular sex, age or enrolment status. The search for statistical significant correlations/associations could be conducted in statistical programmes like SPSS (Statistical Programme for Social Scientists). Expertise in this application is readily available in DOMS. It may take several years of data collection and analysis to determine whether significant associations exist, however it would be prudent to start the data collection and analysis from the outset of the t-homophone study. In time, an understanding of the statistically supported precursors of t-homophone confusion (if any exist) would provide the basis for advising particular secondary schools or national education systems so that the problem can be addressed before persons are admitted to UWI. As indicated earlier an understanding of the demographic groups most impacted by t-homophone confusion would help DOMS in developing more targeted programmes for intervention.

After the completion of the first peer tutoring exercise, two focus groups would be conducted to capture the experiences of the participants. Tutees could speak to the value of the exercise and give recommendations for improvement. A second focus group would also be held with the tutors to record their experiences, evaluations and suggestions. The use of the 'post mortem' focus group is benchmarked from the study conducted by Loke and Chow (2007).

### *Expected issues and limitations associated with the proposed course of action*

Given that Caribbean society places a high premium on educational attainment (Campbell, 1997; Goveia, 1965; Knight & Palmer, 1989) it is questionable whether students would want their lack of fundamental grammar skills to be highlighted. Persons may also find difficulty in receiving assistance from their peers. Rothman (1977) reports the difficulty students experience in having to ask their peer tutors for help in the discipline of writing. Tying the t-homophone intervention to registration would force reluctant students to confront their writing issues. However,

DOMS could adopt a non-threatening approach in marketing the t-homophone intervention. It could be pitched as a mechanism for empowering students and making them more attractive to employers, rather than as a remedial programme for weak students. The intervention could be discussed during student orientation and marketed as a proactive measure. Students should be encouraged make themselves more attractive to employers by seeking to ‘*know their t-homophone status.*’ If the t-homophone programme is not marketed in a positive light it may prove difficult to get students to commit to engaging in the peer tutoring exercise.

Faculty could play a key role if they encourage students to see the intervention as being useful. Research has shown that faculty members in universities are often reluctant to confront the issue of poor writing and communication skills on the part of students. Some faculty members of DOMS have expressed the view that students’ inability to write has little to do with their grasp of disciplines such as accounting and marketing, and should not feature in assessment rubrics. In fact, some are even reluctant to counsel students about such weaknesses in informal encounters. Nevertheless, there are other faculty members who repeatedly express concern about the deficiencies seen in assignments and examination scripts. It would be important to engage these persons as champions for the intervention as they interact with students on a daily basis.

#### **Steps 4 and 5 - Expected outcomes and conclusion**

When the first round of testing is completed, the magnitude of t-homophone confusion can be quantified. The immediate benefit of this would be a clear indication as to whether the t-homophones merit inclusion in the Fundamentals of Written English course. It is expected that the peer tutoring exercise will reap some success, provided the appropriate resources are made available. As indicated earlier, the personalised attention and focused nature of peer tutoring does help weak students (De Backer Van Keer & Valcke, 2012; Loke & Chow, 2007). Students who see improvement in their grammar skills as a result of the intervention should also be more confident to enter the workplace. Oftentimes students are quite aware that they have deficiencies such as t-homophone confusion, but are too embarrassed to ask for help.

Undoubtedly, DOMS should benefit from an improved relationship with the business community, as long as that community is made aware of the efforts being made to address its concerns. Moreover, the expected collaborative effort with the Faculty of Humanities and Education could also improved relationships between this entity and DOMS.

Finally, it is hoped that DOMS would move to broaden the scope of the intervention to encompass additional grammatical issues, in light of the need to make our students as equipped as possible for the workplace. It would also be heartening to see other departments at UWI confront the communication weaknesses of their students. This, in the author’s opinion, would be a positive move, and would validate the initiative proposed herein.

## Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Dr Joyce Stewart and Ms Margaret Gill for their valuable input as well as Dr Sylvia Henry for assistance in conceptualising the research.

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Candidate's Number: 449001899 Page No. 2

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Question 6.0  
write on both sides of the paper

These factors we can impact because the owners of Chicken Barn would know what to expect as they enter. They would have a hands on idea of the type of consumers they dealing with & if there is competition in the type of market there & there are bringing Chicken Barn would know what they have to change or readjust to fit the likes of Cubans. They would also know what type of training they would have to do when hiring staff. They would know what taste to bring & if to keep doing there food the way there are.

In other words chicken Barn would have to expect nearby needs to be met

Question Section B

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As to relation to the Peplex case <sup>there</sup> are some marketing-related issues, which if considered may have assisted in the productivity of Peplex Inc. & business endeavours.

Firstly, I would have recommended that <sup>there</sup> be an adjustment to the promotional mix. Total was inadequate advertising undertaken by this firm as they have been in the Canadian market that amounts of 700 potential customers and have only sold five units. To this instance, my recommendation would have been greater <sup>advertising</sup> marketing of the product.

Refresh is Refresh name. Specifically!

The purchase of a bottling line is a major investment for a firm and therefore every effort should have been made, when entering the Canadian market, to make this product more appealing. ~~After~~ In light of the fact that this product was more expensive but also more efficient, creating value by ~~an~~ emphasizing its efficiency and customer service should be important.

Upon entry into the new market, the firm should have had a more aggressive personal marketing strategy. Over the two years in the market, they have only employed three sales persons. The technical manager at Refresh was aware of the product and had to be refused by Coca Cola. Personal presentations to as much potential consumers upon entry would have been highly beneficial.

5

Candidate's Number 4090018791

Page No 2

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Question B6

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These factors mean impact because the owners of Chicken Barn would know what to expect as they enter. They would have a hands on idea of the type of consumers they dealing with & if there is competition in the type of market there & there are bringing Chicken Barn would know what they have to change or readjust to fit the likes of Ashans. They would also know what type of training they would have to do when hiring staff. They would know what taste to bring it if to keep doing there food the way there are.

In other words chicken Barn would be able to expect marketing would bring