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## QUARTERLY

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and of Standard English as a Second Dialect

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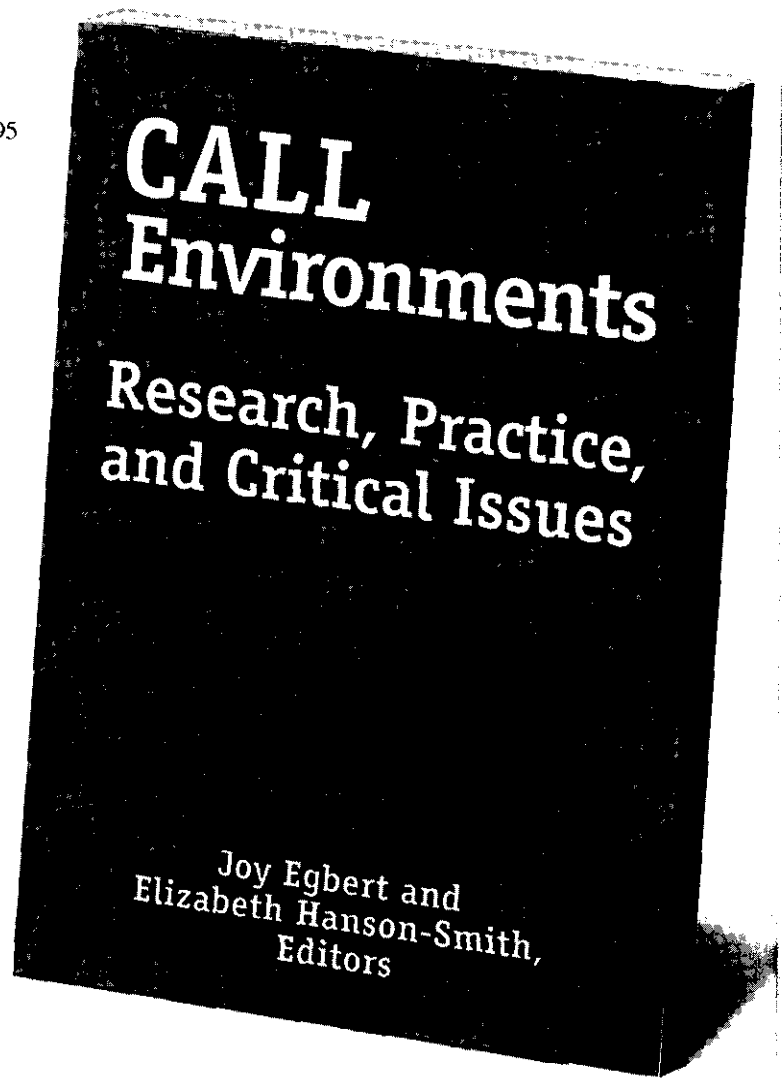
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## Editor's Note

■ In my first issue as editor of *TESOL Quarterly*, I would like to express my appreciation to Sandra McKay and Ellen Garshick for their patience in guiding me through the process of producing this issue. I am also grateful to have Barbara Plakans as my assistant in Ames and to have Ellen staying on as assistant editor.

With this issue, I welcome Dan Douglas as the new editor for Reviews and Book Notices and express thanks to H. Douglas Brown for his work on this section. I am also happy to welcome the following new members to the *TESOL Quarterly* Editorial Advisory Board: Caroline Clapham, Susan Conrad, Kathryn A. Davis, Thomas N. Huckin, Joan Jamieson, Frederick O. Lorenz, Numa Markee, Tim McNamara, and James W. Tollefson. I offer sincere thanks on behalf of TESOL, *TESOL Quarterly*, Sandra McKay, and myself for the work of those members who are rotating off the Editorial Advisory Board: Elsa Auerbach, Graham Crookes, Deborah Curtis, Sandra Fotos, Eli Hinkel, Noël Houck, B. Kumaravadivelu, Alastair Pennycook, Terrence Wiley, and Jerri Willett.

I am happy to report that Patricia A. Duff, Rod Ellis, Karen E. Johnson, and Bonny Norton will continue to serve as editors for their respective sections of the journal. I am grateful to them as well as to former and current members of the Editorial Advisory Board for helping to make the transition of the editorship smooth.

## In This Issue

■ The articles in this issue of *TESOL Quarterly* address diverse areas of concern for the profession.

- Vivian Cook offers a valuable perspective on the continuing discussion of the role of native speaker models in English language teaching. Drawing primarily on evidence from psycholinguistic research, he

argues that L2 learners are inherently different from monolingual native speakers and that attaining the competence of a native speaker is an impossible goal for an L2 learner. It follows, he suggests, that alternatives to native speaker models are needed for language teaching, and he makes some initial recommendations for moving beyond native speaker models in the ESOL classroom.

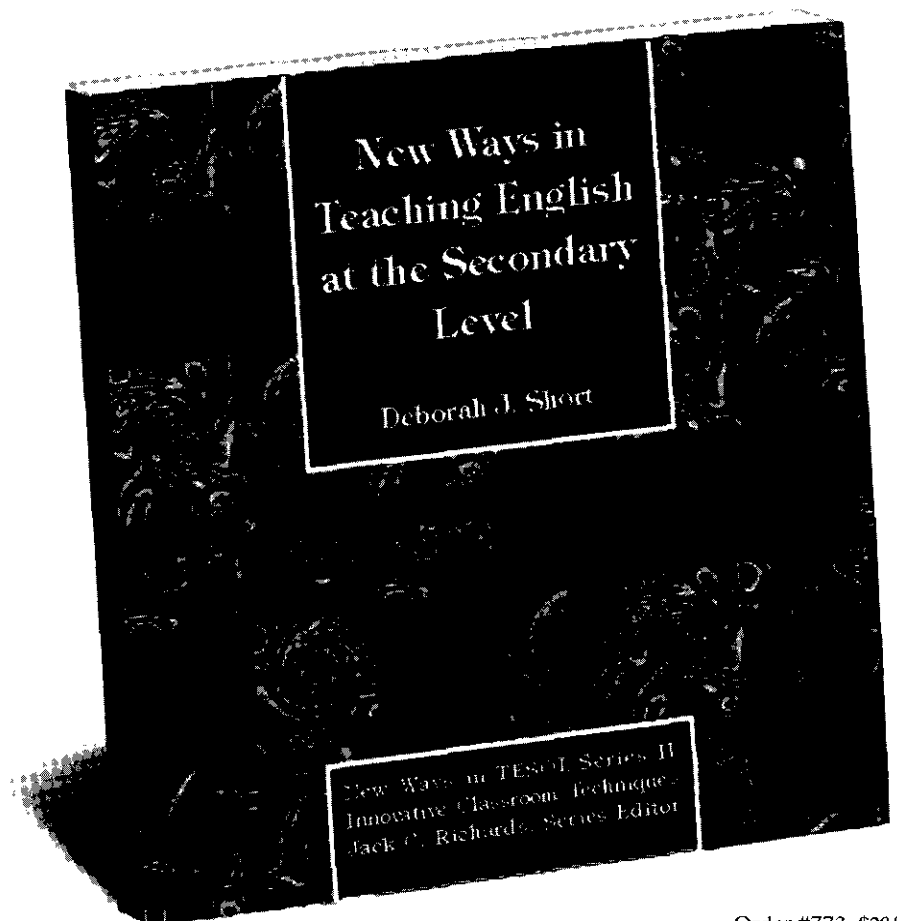
- Vai Ramanathan reports a revealing examination of institutional and instructional practices affecting English learners in higher education in India. Although India has been referred to as an outer-circle country relative to an inner circle of English-speaking countries, her research showed that even within India inner and outer circles are constructed through practices that limit access to Indian English. She found that learners who had not completed English-medium instruction before entering the university were kept in India's own outer circle through practices such as streaming them into non-English-medium classes, not letting them major in English literature, and using instructional methods that did not develop their ability to communicate in English.
- Thomas C. Cooper describes his research into ESOL learners' processing of English idioms. Using a think-aloud methodology in a controlled setting, he documented the strategies that learners used to arrive at the meaning of idiomatic expressions. The results indicated that none of the L1 idiom-processing models reviewed was sufficiently complex to account for the variety of strategies that the L2 learners used. He therefore proposes that L2 idiom processing be considered a heuristic process characterized by strategic experimentation. Cooper suggests the think-aloud methodology as an aid in teaching idiomatic expressions.

Also in this issue:

- The Forum: Paul Wadden and Robert Hilke comment on Liz Hamp-Lyons' "Ethical Test Preparation Practice: The Case of the TOEFL" by drawing on their experience in developing and using preparation materials for the Test of English as a Foreign Language, and the author responds. Jennifer D. Ewald offers her perspective on Graham Crookes and Al Lehner's "Aspects of Process in an ESL Critical Pedagogy Teacher Education Course," and Graham Crookes responds.
- Research Issues: Celia Genishi and Marylin Low explore poststructuralist approaches to second language acquisition research.
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Carol A. Chapelle

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# Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching

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VIVIAN COOK  
University of Essex

This article argues that language teaching would benefit by paying attention to the L2 user rather than concentrating primarily on the native speaker. It suggests ways in which language teaching can apply an L2 user model and exploit the students' L1. Because L2 users differ from monolingual native speakers in their knowledge of their L2s and L1s and in some of their cognitive processes, they should be considered as speakers in their own right, not as approximations to monolingual native speakers. In the classroom, teachers can recognise this status by incorporating goals based on L2 users in the outside world, bringing L2 user situations and roles into the classroom, deliberately using the students' L1 in teaching activities, and looking to descriptions of L2 users or L2 learners rather than descriptions of native speakers as a source of information. The main benefits of recognising that L2 users are speakers in the own right, however, will come from students' and teachers' having a positive image of L2 users rather than seeing them as failed native speakers.

Language professionals often take for granted that the only appropriate models of a language's use come from its native speakers. Linguists look at the intuitions of native speakers or collect quantities of their speech; language teachers encourage students to be like native speakers. This article argues that the prominence of the native speaker in language teaching has obscured the distinctive nature of the successful L2 user and created an unattainable goal for L2 learners. It recommends that L2 users be viewed as multicompetent language users rather than as deficient native speakers and suggests how language teaching can recognise students as L2 users both in and out of the classroom.

## DEFINING THE NATIVE SPEAKER

Davies (1991) claims that the first recorded use of *native speaker* was the following: "The first language a human being learns to speak is his

*native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language" (Bloomfield, 1933, p. 43). In other words, an individual is a native speaker of the L1 learnt in childhood, called by Davies (1996) the "bio-developmental definition" (p. 156). Being a native speaker in this sense is an unalterable historic fact; individuals cannot change their native language any more than they can change who brought them up. This definition is echoed in modern sources such as *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (McArthur, 1992) and the corpus-based *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary* (1995).

This core meaning of *native speaker* is often supplemented by detailing the nondevelopmental characteristics that they share. Stern (1983) claims that native speakers have (a) a subconscious knowledge of rules, (b) an intuitive grasp of meanings, (c) the ability to communicate within social settings, (d) a range of language skills, and (e) creativity of language use. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) adds (f) identification with a language community. Davies (1996) adds (g) the ability to produce fluent discourse, (h) knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the "standard" form of the language, and (i) the ability "to interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker" (p. 154).

Some of these characteristics are in a sense obvious: Native speakers are not necessarily aware of their knowledge in a formal sense ([a] and [b]), nor could they explain how they ride a bicycle. Others are debatable: Many native speakers are unaware how their speech differs from the status form (h), as shown, for example, in the growing use of the nonstandard *between you and I* for *between you and me* even by professional speakers such as news readers. Many native speakers are far from fluent in speech (g), some, such as Stephen Hawking and Helen Keller, having to communicate via alternative means. Some native speakers function poorly in social settings (c). In the Chomskyan sense of creativity, any novel sentence uttered or comprehended is creative (e); a computer can create new sentences, for instance, by means of the speech program that answers telephone directory enquiries with every possible telephone number. In a general literary sense, creativity characterizes a small percentage of native speakers, such as poets and rap singers. Only native speakers who have an L2—and not necessarily all of them—possess the ability to interpret from one language to another (i). Native speakers, whether Karl Marx in London, James Joyce in Zurich, or Albert Einstein in Princeton, are free to disassociate themselves completely from their L1 community politically or socially (f) without giving up their native speaker status.

These characteristics are therefore variable and not a necessary part of the definition of native speaker; the lack of any of them would not disqualify a person from being a native speaker. A monk sworn to silence is still a native speaker. In addition, nonnative speakers, almost regardless

of their level of proficiency in the language, share many of these characteristics: Nonnative speakers show a rapidly developing awareness of gender-linked pronunciation (Adamson & Regan, 1991) and of the status of regional accents (Dailey-O’Cain, 1998); what level of L2 English did it take for Marcel Duchamps to create “surrealistic aphorisms” such as *My niece is cold because my knees are cold* (Sanquillet & Peterson, 1978, p. 111)?

The indisputable element in the definition of *native speaker* is that a person is a native speaker of the language learnt first; the other characteristics are incidental, describing how well an individual uses the language. Someone who did not learn a language in childhood cannot be a native speaker of the language. Later-learnt languages can never be native languages, by definition. Children who learn two languages simultaneously from birth have two L1s (Davies, 1991), which may not be the same as being a monolingual native speaker of either language. L2 students cannot be turned into native speakers without altering the core meaning of *native speaker*. Asserting that “adults usually fail to become native speakers” (Felix, 1987, p. 140) is like saying that ducks fail to become swans: Adults could never become native speakers without being reborn. L2 learning may produce an L2 user who is like a native speaker in possessing some of the nine aspects of proficiency detailed above to a high degree but who cannot meet the biodevelopmental definition. The variable aspects of *proficiency* (Davies, 1996) or *expertise* (Rampton, 1990) relate to a separate issue of quality rather than being defining characteristics of the native speaker (Ballmer, 1981).

Another common assumption is that the native speaker speaks only one language. Illich and Sanders (1988) point out, “From Saussure to Chomsky ‘homo monolinguis’ is posited as the man who uses language—the man who speaks” (p. 52). Ballmer (1981) and Paikeday (1985) include monolingualism in their extended definitions of *native speaker*. In Chomskyan linguistics, monolingualism is part of the abstraction involved in obtaining the idealized native speaker. “We exclude, for example, a speech community of uniform speakers, each of whom speaks a mixture of Russian and French (say, an idealised version of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy)” (Chomsky, 1986, p. 17). Important as it is for other purposes to consider the different types of native speakers and the different abilities that native speakers possess, the distinction here is between people who speak the language they grew up with and those who speak another language as well—that is, between monolingual native speakers and L2 users. The meaning of *native speaker* here is thus a monolingual person who still speaks the language learnt in childhood.

In contrast to *native speaker*, the term *L2 user* refers to someone who is using an L2. The L2 user is further distinguished from the *L2 learner*, who

is still in the process of learning the L2. The point at which an L2 learner becomes an L2 user may be debatable because of the difficulty in defining the final state of L2 learning; moreover, some learners are regularly users whenever they step outside the classroom. Although this distinction is in some ways imprecise, its rationale will emerge during the argument.

## IMPLICIT STATUS OF THE NATIVE SPEAKER

In recent years the role of the native speaker in language teaching and second language acquisition (SLA) research has become a source of concern. Some analysts have seen the issue in quasi-political terms as the exercise of power and status (Holliday, 1994); the native speaker concept has political and economic benefits for the countries from which particular languages originated (Phillipson, 1992). Others see it in cultural terms as the imposition of native speaker interaction norms contrary to the students' own preferred types of interaction (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Still others point out that "one man in his time plays many parts": English-speaking people show they are men by using /ɪn/ in *waiting* (Trudgill, 1974), that they are American by having /r/ in *corn*, or that they are British working class by dropping the *h* in *hair* (Milroy, 1983). Native speakers form only one of the social groups to which a speaker belongs (Rampton, 1990); the role of native speaker is no more basic than any other (Firth & Wagner, 1997). In practice, despite these objections, the native speaker model remains firmly entrenched in language teaching and SLA research.

### The Native Speaker in Language Teaching

Overt discussion of the native speaker as a model is rare in language teaching. However, indirect evidence for the importance of the native speaker in English language teaching is indeed the perennial issue of which kind of native speaker should be the model for language teaching (Quirk, 1990). This discussion assumes that the choice lies between different types or aspects of native speakers, not in whether to use them as models at all. Stern (1983) puts it bluntly: "The native speaker's 'competence' or 'proficiency' or 'knowledge of the language' is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching" (p. 341). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (Harmer, 1991) describes different areas of language competence in a chapter entitled "What a Native Speaker Knows" and goes on to say that "students need to get an idea of how the new language is used

by native speakers," although the usage shifts to the combined expression "native speakers (or competent users of the language)" (p. 57). Kramsch (1998) sums up the issue pithily: "Traditional methodologies based on the native speaker usually define language learners in terms of what they are *not*, or at least *not yet*" (p. 28). Or, one might add, *not ever*.

Another source of implicit views about the native speaker in language teaching is the course book, which provides a structure for many classes (Hutchinson & Hutchinson, 1994). The description of English underlying course books seems implicitly native based, reflecting the teaching tradition's idealised normative view of English rather than actual description. The *Collins COBUILD English Course* (Willis & Willis, 1988), for example, "focuses on the real English students will encounter and need to use in today's world" (back cover) based on a large database of native speaker usage. The model situations met in course books almost invariably involve native speakers interacting with native speakers, apart from the typical opening lessons in which students introduce each other and exchange personal information, for example, Unit 1 in *Headstart* (Beavan, 1995) and in *True to Life* (Collie & Slater, 1995).

## The Native Speaker in SLA Research

SLA research in the 1960s borrowed from L1 acquisition research the assumption that learners have language systems with distinctive features of their own (Cook, 1969; Corder, 1967). This assumption formed one aspect of the well-known interlanguage hypothesis (Selinker, 1972), implicit in the continuing aim of the SLA research field to describe and explain the L2 language system in its own right. In other words, SLA research aims in principle to detach L2 learning from the native speaker.

In practice, however, SLA research has often fallen into the *comparative fallacy* (Bley-Vroman, 1983) of relating the L2 learner to the native speaker. This tendency is reflected in the frequency with which the words *succeed* and *fail* are associated with the phrase *native speaker*, for example, the view that fossilisation and errors in L2 users' speech add up "to failure to achieve native-speaker competence, since in Chomsky's words, native speakers (NSs) are people who know their language perfectly" (James, 1998, p. 2). The success and failure of L2 learners are often measured against the native speaker's language use in statements such as the following: "learners often failed initially to produce correct sentences and instead displayed language that was markedly deviant from target language norms" (Ellis, 1994, p. 15). Many SLA research methods, such as grammaticality judgments, obligatory occurrences, and error analysis, involve comparison with the native speaker (Cook, 1997b; Firth & Wagner, 1997).

An unknown object is often described in terms of one that is already known (Poullisse, 1996); someone who has never seen a tomato before might describe it as a rather soft apple with a large number of pips. But this description is no more than a temporary expedient until the individual has understood the unique properties of the object itself. The learner's language is an unknown object, so SLA research can justifiably use native speakers' language as one perspective on the language of L2 learners, provided it does not make native speakers' language the measure of final achievement in the L2. Klein and Perdue (1992) warn in particular of the danger of the "closeness fallacy" (p. 333), in which one is deceived by learner utterances that bear a false resemblance to those of the native speaker. The avowed aim of their large multilanguage project was to discover "why . . . adults attain the state they do" (p. 334). Despite some recognition that the L2 user should be treated as independent in SLA research, the native speaker often maintains a ghostlike presence.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MULTICOMPETENT LANGUAGE USERS AND L1 USERS

*Interlanguage* refers to the knowledge of the L2 in the speaker's mind. But this L2 interlanguage exists in the same mind as the L1 does. Because no word existed to describe the knowledge of both the L1 and the L2, the term *multicompetence* was coined to refer to the compound state of a mind with two languages (Cook, 1991). Multicompetence covers the total language knowledge of a person who knows more than one language, including both L1 competence and the L2 interlanguage.

*Competence* is a neutral term in linguistics for the native speaker's knowledge of language; it does not involve a judgment about whether such competence is good or bad according to some outside criterion. In a sense, whatever the native speaker does is right—subject, of course, to the vagaries of performance and the like. Multicompetence is intended to be a similarly neutral term for the knowledge of more than one language, free from evaluation against an outside standard. The difficulty is that, whereas all the speakers of an L1 arguably have similar competences, L2 users notoriously end up with widely differing knowledge. Nevertheless, so far as any individual is concerned, a final state of L2 competence exists for the L2 learner just as a final state of L1 competence exists for the native speaker, difficult as this state may be to generalise across many L2 learners.

The term *multicompetence* implies that at some level the sum of the language knowledge in the mind is relevant, not just the portions

dedicated to the L1 or the L2. Language teaching is concerned with developing an L2 in a mind that already contains an L1; as Stern (1992) puts it, “whether we like it or not, the new language is learnt on the basis of a previous language” (p. 282). Multicompetent minds that know two languages are qualitatively different from those of the monolingual native speaker in a number of ways.

## The L2 Knowledge of Multicompetent Language Users

Nobody is surprised that the second language of L2 users differs from the language of L1 users. Very few L2 users could be mistaken for native speakers. Most L2 learners resign themselves to “failing” to reach the native speaker target. Some research looking at ultimate attainment in L2 learning shows that even fluent bilinguals can be distinguished from monolinguals in grammaticality judgments (Coppeters, 1987; Davies, 1991), but other studies have demonstrated that some L2 users are nevertheless indistinguishable from native speakers in syntax (Birdsong, 1992) and phonology (Bongaerts, Planken, & Schils, 1995). As White and Genesee (1996) noted, “Ultimate attainment in an L2 can indeed be native-like in the UG [universal grammar] domain” (p. 258). But the comparison with the native speaker again creeps in; valid ultimate attainment seems to be phrased with reference to the native speaker’s competence rather than in its own terms.

The ultimate attainment of L2 learning should be defined in terms of knowledge of the L2. There is no reason why the L2 component of multicompetence should be identical to the monolingual’s L1, if only because multicompetence is intrinsically more complex than monolingualism. Whether or not one accepts that some L2 users can pass for native speakers, these passers form an extremely small percentage of L2 users. Research with this group documents the achievements of a few unusual people, such as those described by Bongaerts et al. (1995), as typical of human beings as are Olympic high jumpers or opera singers.

## The L1 Knowledge of Multicompetent Language Users

An early definition held that transfer between the L1 and the L2 went in two directions, producing “instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language” (Weinreich, 1953, p. 1). Whereas the effects of the L1 on the L2 interlanguage are easy to see, the effects of the L2 on the L1 have been little discussed. Yet everyone who has been exposed to an L2 can tell anecdotes about its effects on the L1.



For example, my own speech has sentences such as *What do you want for a book?* and vocabulary such as *pulli* for *pullover*, probably showing the use of L2 Swiss-German as a child.

A body of research shows that this effect of the L2 on the L1 exists in most aspects of language. In terms of phonology, the timing of voicing at the beginning of plosive consonants (i.e., voice onset time [VOT]) in the L1 moves slightly towards that found in the L2, French L1 speakers of English having a slightly longer VOT for /t/ in their L1 than French monolinguals do (Flege, 1987). In vocabulary, L2 words affect their twins in the L1. For example, the meaning of the English word *coin* (piece of money) affects the way French L1 speakers who know English understand the French word *coin* (corner) (Beauvillain & Grainger, 1987). Loanwords have a slightly different meaning in the L1 for people who know the L2 from which the words are derived; for instance, Japanese *bosu* (gang leader) is perceived as less related to crime by Japanese who know English *boss* (Tokumaru, 1999). In syntax, too, L1 grammaticality judgments are affected by the L2: English speakers who know French judge English sentences with null subjects, such as *Is raining*, differently than monolinguals do (Cook, 1996); Francophones and Anglophones learning the respective L2s have different reactions to middle verb constructions in their L1s than monolinguals do (Balcom, 1998). Several experiments have shown that L2 users become slightly slower at processing the L1 as they gain proficiency in an L2 (Magiste, 1986). In reading also, Greeks who know English read Greek differently than monolinguals do to some extent; for example, they are more affected by the order of presentation (Chitiri & Willows, 1997). In short, multicompetent L2 users do not have the same knowledge of the L1 as monolinguals do; for some this may indeed amount to partial loss of their L1 (Seliger & Vago, 1991).

## Language Processing by Multicompetent Language Users

During language processing, multicompetent language users have the L1 constantly available to them. For example, L2 users compensate for gaps in their vocabulary with the same communication strategies that they use in their L1 (Poulisse, 1996). L2 users are faster and more accurate in a language-switching task than in a monolingual condition on an auditory version of the STROOP test, which asks people to decide whether voices saying the words *high* and *low* are actually high or low (Hamers & Lambert, 1972). L1 Spanish users of English understand sentences that are translations of Spanish idioms more quickly than monolinguals do (Blair & Harris, 1981). L2 users tend to switch from one language to another for their own private purposes; 61% prefer the

L1 over the L2 for working out sums, and 60% prefer it for praying, whereas 61% use the L2 for keeping their diary, and 44% for remembering phone numbers (Cook, 1998).

A distinctive process that multicompetent users engage in is code switching. When multicompetent users are talking to other people who know both languages, they may alternate between languages. For example, a Bahasa Malaysia teacher of English was overheard saying to fellow teachers in the staff room, "*Suami saya dulu slim and trim tapi sekarang plump like drum*" (Before my husband was slim and trim, but now he is plump like a drum). They can not only use either language separately but also use both languages at the same time—what Grosjean (1989) calls the *monolingual* and *bilingual modes*. Code switching has complex rules, partly at the pragmatic level of the speaker's and listener's roles, partly at a discourse level for topic, and partly at a syntactic level (see the range of articles in Milroy & Muyskens, 1995). Code switching is the most obvious achievement of the multicompetent user that monolingual native speakers cannot duplicate, as they have no language to switch into. It shows the intricate links between the two language systems in multicompetence: In the mind, the L1 is not insulated from the L2.

## Thought Processes of Multicompetent Language Users

Multicompetent speakers and monolingual native speakers also differ in certain thought processes. It may not be surprising that people who know two languages are slightly less effective at language-related cognitive tasks in the L2 than are monolinguals (Cook, 1997a). Long-term memory of information gathered in lectures is less efficient in an L2 (Long & Harding-Esch, 1977); working memory span in the L2 is usually slightly below the L1 level at all stages of L2 performance (Brown & Hulme, 1992; Service & Craik, 1993). L2 users perform slightly below the level of L1 peer monolinguals in naming objects and following instructions to mark letters in words (Magiste, 1986); "the very fact of having available more than one response to the same stimulus may lead to slower reaction times unless the two response systems are hermetically isolated from each other" (p. 118). In other words, the minds of L2 users differ from the minds of monolinguals in several respects other than sheer knowledge of language.

Indeed, this difference is one reason why, in many educational systems, L2s are taught in the first place. Learning a foreign language is seen as leading to "an interest in language and culture" in Japan (Tokyo, 1990), to the ability "to recognize cultural attitudes as expressed in language and learn the use of social conventions" in the United Kingdom (*The National Curriculum*, 1995), and to "courage, honesty, charity

and unity" in Malaysia (Kementarian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1987, p. 2). A particular benefit has often been claimed to be *brain-training*—learning other mental skills. SLA research has indeed shown some truth in these claims, particularly the bilingual's keener awareness of language itself. Bilingual children are aware of grammatical properties of their L1 sooner than monolinguals are (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990) and are better at judging how many words there are in a sentence. In particular, bilingual children are more capable of separating meaning from form (Ben Zeev, 1977; Bialystok, 1986). Most remarkably, English-speaking children who learnt Italian for an hour a week in the first class of primary school showed advantages over monolingual children in learning to read (Yelland, Pollard, & Mercuri, 1993). Diaz (1985) lists many advantages for bilinguals, such as *measures of conceptual development, creativity, and analogical reasoning*.

Clearly, multicompetent people differ from monolinguals in many ways. L2 users are different kinds of people, not just monolingual native speakers who happen to know another language. The native speaker-based goal of language teaching cannot be achieved in part because the students, for better or for worse, do not remain unchanged by their new languages.

## L2 DIFFERENCE OR DEFICIT?

Most L2 users differ from L1 monolinguals in the way they know and use the L1 and the L2, but how are these differences relevant to questions about the role of the native speaker as a model for L2 learners? Should such differences be seen as deficits from the native speaker standard?

Labov's (1969) classic argument held that one group should not be measured against the norm of another, whether Whites against Blacks or working class against middle class; Labov's argument was in a sense a belated recognition of ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906) in linguistics. People cannot be expected to conform to the norm of a group to which they do not belong, whether groups are defined by race, class, sex, or any other feature. People who speak differently from some arbitrary group are not speaking better or worse, just differently. Today almost all teachers and researchers would agree that a comparison between groups yields differences, not deficits.

However, teachers, researchers, and people in general have often taken for granted that L2 learners represent a special case that can be properly judged by the standards of another group. Grammar that differs from native speakers', pronunciation that betrays where L2 users come from, and vocabulary that differs from native usage are treated as

signs of L2 users' failure to become native speakers, not of their accomplishments in learning to use the L2. Just as it was once claimed that women should speak like men to succeed in business, Black children should learn to speak like White children, and working-class children should learn the elaborated language of the middle class, so L2 users are commonly seen as failed native speakers.

According to the definition used above, L2 users are not monolingual native speakers and never will be; they are as incapable of changing places as are most women and men. L2 users have to be looked at in their own right as genuine L2 users, not as imitation native speakers. It is no more relevant for language teaching that a few L2 users can pass for native speakers than it is for the study of gender that the female novelist James Tiptree Jr. wrote as a man or than it is for the study of race that the clarinet player Mezz Mezzrow claimed to be a White Negro. The study of L2 learning should not be based on a handful of extraordinary people. L2 users should not be treated as an exception to the dictum that one group should not be measured against another. Comparing the characteristics of native speakers and of L2 users is like comparing tomatoes and apples, useful only at a gross level.

L2 users should be treated as people in their own right, not as deficient native speakers. Halliday (1968) wrote, "A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the color of his skin" (p. 165). Clearly, until now many people have had little compunction about treating L2 users in this way.

An illustration is that the measure of success in L2 learning is often held to be the amount of foreign accent—the extent to which people's pronunciation conforms to native standards. Joseph Conrad is taken as a failure at L2 learning because Virginia Woolf, among others, claimed he was "a foreigner, talking only broken English" (Page, 1986, p. 64) despite the excellence of his written English and, indeed, of his L2, French. Apart from a few die-hard writers of letters to the newspapers, nobody would claim that speakers of Brummy and Glaswegian fail to acquire native speaker language because they were born in Birmingham or Glasgow. Consciously or unconsciously, people proclaim their membership in particular groups through the language they use. However, L2 learners are not supposed to reveal which part of the world they come from; they are considered failures if they have foreign accents, as much research into age differences in language learning assumes (Cook, 1986). Why should English-speaking people who sound as if they come from Houston be accepted as L1 successes when Polish people speaking English are deemed L2 failures for sounding as if they come from Warsaw? A French winegrower once said, perfectly sensibly, "My English

is not good but my French accent is perfect." L2 users belong to the general group of L2 users, to smaller groups of L2 users with particular L1s, and to many other language groupings in the languages they know. The one group they cannot belong to is the group of native speakers of their L2. Only if the native speaker is the sole arbiter of language can L2 learners be seen as failures for revealing the social groups to which they belong.

An objection that is sometime raised to the argument against the native speaker model is that it is the L2 users themselves who want to be native speakers. Even bilinguals, according to Grosjean (1989), "often assume and amplify the monolingual view and hence criticize their own language competence" (p. 5). Their attitudes are the product of the many pressures on them to regard L2 users as failed natives. Bilinguals have accepted the role assigned to them in a society that is dominated by monolinguals and where bilingualism is a problem but monolingualism is not, just as psychologists once used to talk of *African precocity* in children's development, not *Euroamerican retardation* (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992). But this acceptance of the native speaker model does not mean these attitudes are right. Members of various groups have indeed wanted to change the color of their skin, the straightness of their hair, or the shape of their eyes to conform to other groups, but this desire highlights the status of various groups in society not the intrinsic deficits in other groups. The only occasion on which L2 users can justifiably be measured against native speakers is when they are passing for natives, for example, when making translations to be read as native rather than nonnative texts.

Monolingual bias is also reflected in the prevalent use of the term *L2 learner* for anybody who knows an L2, whereas the term *L1 learner* is not applied to an adult native speaker. People who learn an L2 are implied to be in a permanently unfinished state, never reaching a final form (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 292). Hence *L2 user* here refers to the person who uses a second language and *L2 learner* to the person in the process of learning it. Although complete consistency is impossible, it seems preferable at least to attempt to credit successful L2 learners with the status of users. It does, incidentally, seem condescending to reduce *L2 acquirer* to *L2er* (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, p. 42).

## CONSEQUENCES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The logical consequence of the arguments raised above is that language teaching should place more emphasis on the student as a potential and actual L2 user and be less concerned with the monolingual native speaker. Abandoning the native speaker totally may be unrealistic

because this model is so entrenched in teachers' and students' minds, yet some steps in the right direction can be taken. The following suggestions apply to an EFL setting. Some may apply rather differently to the teaching of English to students residing or intending to reside in an English-speaking country; indeed, some of them, for example, the use of students' L1s in special alternative instructional programs in the U.S. (Lucas & Katz, 1994), have already been assimilated. These suggestions are more concerned with syntax, vocabulary, and phonology than with pragmatics.

## Set Goals Appropriate to L2 Users

Language teaching has traditionally balanced the educational gains for the student's mind, attitudes, and personality from learning the L2 against the social and communicative gains from being able to use the L2 for practical purposes. The aims of language teaching can be divided into internal classroom goals that relate to the students' life within the classroom, such as communicating their backgrounds and feelings to each other, and external goals that relate to the students' use of English outside the classroom, such as traveling or living in an English-speaking environment (Cook, 1983). The classroom-internal goals are not explicitly related to the actual use of the L2 in the world outside, whether by native speakers or by L2 users, and so may be relatively unaffected by any change in the status of the native speaker. The process syllabus in which students negotiate continuously over what they want to do and achieve (Breen, 1984) relates neither to the native speaker nor to the L2 user, only to the students' own wishes. Community Language Learning allows the students themselves to shape the processes and goals in the classroom without reference to anything outside (Curran, 1976). Though the students are still doubtlessly influenced in their choices by target-based perceptions of what they will need as L2 users and of the status of native speakers, in principle they can decide what they like.

Similar emphasis on the classroom-internal goals can be found in task-based learning, a movement that now brings together areas ranging from the procedural syllabus (Prabhu, 1987) to the psychology of attention (Skehan, 1998). Writers on task-based learning seem divided over the extent to which tasks should be related to what happens outside the classroom. Nunan (1995) divides tasks into real-world tasks, that is to say, "the sorts of tasks required of [learners] in the world beyond the classroom," and pedagogic tasks, "things which it is extremely unlikely they would be called upon to do outside the classroom" (p. 62); Willis (1996), however, does not make external relevance one of the categories of task. Skehan (1998) considers it desirable for tasks to have real-world

relevance “but difficult to obtain in practice” (p. 96). Task-based teaching has not been concerned with external goals because of its primary concern with how best to create conditions for learning within the classroom. Issues about native speakers and L2 users are relevant only to the extent that tasks are designed to mirror “the world beyond the classroom.”

Approaches focusing on classroom-internal goals value language teaching as an educational activity benefiting the students in many ways, not only for utilitarian ends outside the class. The native speaker model is unnecessary because students get many things out of learning the language other than sounding like native speakers. The alternative aims of proficiency or expertise could be applied to these classroom-based goals. Skehan (1998), for instance, sets the goals of fluency, accuracy, and complexity, without explicitly mentioning either the native speaker or the L2 user. These are L2 student goals rather than L2 user goals—abilities that students acquire through L2 learning that can be defined independently of native speaker models.

At the other extreme, target-based external goals were emphasized in the heydays of the audiolingual and communicative methods of teaching. Audiolingualism stressed the situations and language used by natives (Rivers, 1964). Communicative teaching analysed the students’ needs in terms of notions, functions, topics, and so on (Van Ek, 1975), leading to the familiar lists of vocabulary and structures in course books such as *Reward* (Greenall, 1994) to this day. As communicative needs have seldom been established by empirical research into what happens in L2 user situations, the native speaker model is all-pervasive. External target-based teaching is also sometimes found in English for specific purposes, in which detailed analyses are made of the English used by native speakers in specific situations—restaurants (Bung, 1973), medical research papers (Nwogu, 1997), or science lectures (Jackson & Bilton, 1994). Again, insofar as such descriptions reflect what native speakers, not skilled L2 users, do, they have only indirect links to the L2 user target.

A practical way of moving towards an L2 user model is to present students with examples of the language of L2 users and of the language addressed to L2 users; the *pedagogic corpus* (Willis, 1993) of language the students encounter should be expanded to include specimens of the language that L2 users rather than native speakers need. This is not the same as saying that the students should listen more to each other. Rather, they should encounter skilled L2 use. Willis (1996) points out that an “internationally acceptable version of the target language” (p. 12) rather than a native speaker variety could be used. At least some of the authentic recordings used in the classroom could show skilled L2 use; at present such recordings are authentic for native speakers, not for L2

users. Many examples of L2 English are available from the media. Most continental European politicians manage to give fluent television interviews in English, even if English and U.S. politicians rarely manage the reverse. English language newspapers from many parts of the world can easily be accessed over the World Wide Web; for example, the *Straits Times* from Malaysia (<http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com/>) and the *Santiago Times* from Chile (<http://santiagotimes.cl/>) provide examples of good L2 user English as well as native-produced articles.

Teaching can also reflect the language L2 users employ with other L2 users, the most extreme perhaps being code switching. For example, the *New Crown* English course in Japan (Morizume et al., 1997) uses some code switching in dialogues. Some of the language that students encounter could reflect the modifications L1 users make in their speech to L2 users, for example, by providing information more explicitly (Arthur, Weiner, Culver, Young, & Thomas, 1980). Students who have heard only native-to-native speech should not be expected to use such features effectively when they eventually encounter them.

## Include L2 User Situations and Roles

The situations in course books fall into two broad types: those featuring all native speakers and those including L2 users. The exclusively native situations cast native speakers in all roles, as seen on virtually every page of any course book, particularly the “authentic” conversations in the COBUILD course (Willis & Willis, 1988), which rely on recordings of English native speakers talking about themselves and carrying out tasks with each other, such as giving directions and identifying photos. Although such conversations may well cover the relevant vocabulary of native speakers, which is indeed the main aim of the course, the conversations are between native-speaking friends and acquaintances, with hardly an L2 user in sight. The communicative aims in the beginners’ course *Flying Colours* (Garton-Sprenger & Greenall, 1990) include “asking who people are,” “greeting people,” “talking about people’s homes,” and so on (pp. v–vi); the word *people* is not explained, but the text shows that, with few exceptions, they are native speakers of English, even if they reflect multiethnicity.

In the situations in some materials, an L2 learner or a low-level L2 user plays a role; a typical example seen in virtually all communicative or audiolingual materials is the foreigner asking the way of the native speaker. Situations involving low-level L2 users may be relevant, provided they do not fall into the funny foreigner stereotype of Manuel, the comic Spanish waiter in *Fawlty Towers* who perpetually misunderstands everything addressed to him in English. One possibility is to reverse the roles



so that the native speaker is ignorant and the L2 learner omniscient, as in some English courses, in which a native shows an English person the sights and customs of the home country; the course *Angol Nyelv Alapfoken* (Edina & Ivanne, 1987), for example, features English used by travel agents and tour guides in Hungary. It is, to say the least, unhelpful and unmotivating if the only L2 user models that the students see in the classroom are incompetent and ignorant.

The basic need is to present situations in which L2 users take part. The unequal gender roles in EFL textbooks have been pointed out by, for example, Sunderland (1992), with women being fewer in number, lower in status and age, and less active conversational participants. The status of L2 users is in even more need of redress, because they are virtually never represented positively. At one level, materials simply need to demonstrate that L2 users exist in the world as role models for students to emulate. Psychology books have lists of famous bilinguals, including, for instance, Mohandas Gandhi, Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, and Samuel Beckett (Grosjean, 1982, p. 285); the famous people in EFL course books tend to be Ronald Reagan, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Beatles (Greenall, 1994, p. 83), none of whom are known for their L2 skills. Making some parts of language teaching reflect an L2 user target would at least show the students that successful L2 users exist in their own right and are not just pale shadows of native speakers.

A possible technique for introducing L2 user situations into teaching is found in the cross-cultural training in Cushner and Brislin's (1996) volume, which presents a series of key intercultural problems. Students discuss the alternative interpretations suggested and then see which of them is most likely to apply. For example, one case study features a U.S. student in Germany who is perplexed by her apparent rejection by her German colleagues; the students discuss the possible causes and discover that the most likely reason is her lack of interest in politics. Although selecting such situations or alternatives would be difficult, including them would at least bring the figure of the L2 user into the classroom as a person between two cultures.

An interesting type of L2 user role is the nonnative-speaker teacher. Often native speakers are assumed to intrinsically make better teachers than nonnatives do; "learn French from the French" is an advertising slogan for a language school in London. Medgyes (1992) comes to a more balanced conclusion about the possible advantages and disadvantages of being a native speaker. However, students may feel overwhelmed by native-speaker teachers who have achieved a perfection that is out of the students' reach; as Kramsch (1993) puts it, "Nonnative teachers and students alike are intimidated by the native-speaker norm" (p. 9). Students may prefer the fallible nonnative-speaker teacher who presents a more achievable model.

## Use Teaching Methods That Acknowledge the Students' L1

Most orthodox EFL teaching methods minimise the role of the L1 (Howatt, 1984, p. 212), called by Stern (1992) the *intralingual strategy*. Apart from the never-dying but usually decried grammar-translation method, virtually all language teaching methods since the Reform Movement of the 1880s, whether the audiolingual and audiovisual methods, the communicative method, or the Silent Way, have insisted that teaching techniques should not rely on the L1; "inventories of classroom techniques exist of which only a handful are not intralingual" (Stern, 1992, p. 289). Given that much EFL methodology arose from multilingual adult classes, teachers could not use the L1s of their pupils to convey meaning, as the teachers might know at most one or two of those languages. Methodologists' insistence on the L2 does not mean that the L1 has not in practice been used in most classrooms but that doing so goes against the official doctrine. The U.K. national curriculum for modern languages is typical in stating, "The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course" (Department of Education, 1990, p. 58).

Exceptions to this orthodoxy are Community Language Learning, with its reliance on translation (Curran, 1976), and a small group of teaching methods that employ alternating languages. These include the New Concurrent Method, which advocates controlled code switching (Jacobson & Faltis, 1990); reciprocal language teaching, in which matching pairs or groups of students who want to learn each other's language alternate languages as they choose (Cook, 1989; Hawkins, 1981); and the *Tandem* computer network (<http://tandem.uni-trier.de/>), which gets pairs of students learning different languages to send each other e-mails in their respective L2s. Apart from these more radical alternatives, at best course books supply meanings for words or an occasional discussion topic in the L1; *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed & Acklam, 1992), for example, asks students to decide whether adjectives go before or after nouns in their L1s.

At least two ways of using the L1 in the classroom should be distinguished. One is for presenting meaning: When students need the meaning of a new word or grammatical structure, they can access it through translation into their L1, which can come from the teacher or a dictionary, or through an explanation in the L1, from the teacher or a grammar book. Multicompetence theory supports the development of links between the languages, such as translation, rather than viewing the languages as residing in two separate compartments. One reason for the lack of reliance on the L1 has undoubtedly been convenience for the teacher. Given that much EFL methodology arose from multilingual adult classes, teachers could not use the L1s of their pupils for conveying

meaning as the teachers might know at most one or two of those languages.

The other main use of the L1 is for communication during classroom activities. The orthodox view encourages teachers to use the L2 throughout the class, as I have noted; students are expected to use the L2 even in activities in which they would naturally code switch with fellow students who share the same L1. A typical remark is, "If they are talking in small groups, it can be quite difficult to get some classes—particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones—to keep to the target language" (Ur, 1996, p. 121). Although the practical issue of diverse L1s requires the consistent use of the L2 in multilingual classes, this restriction should not apply to those classes where the students share a common L1. L2 users have the L1 permanently present in their minds. Every activity the student carries out visibly in the L2 also involves the invisible L1. The apparent L2 nature of the classroom covers up the presence of the L1 in the minds of the students. From a multicompetence perspective, all teaching activities are *cross-lingual* in the sense of Stern (1992); the difference among activities is whether the L1 is visible or invisible, not whether it is present or altogether absent.

Many approaches to teaching seem to convey the message that the students should aim at L2 use that is unrelated to the L1, something that is virtually impossible to achieve and that denies their status as L2 users. Though teaching manuals such as Willis (1996) or Scrivenor (1994) now countenance some L1 use, the implication is that ideally the students would not be using their L1; "as an ideal I would like a classroom where learners were free to use their own tongue but in fact mostly *chose* to use English" (Scrivenor, 1994, p. 192). Use of the L1 is seen not as desirable but as a necessary evil. One practical suggestion is for teachers to see the L1 as a positive factor in the class rather than as a negative factor to be endured. Doing so may simply put a more positive light on what already happens in many classrooms. Such a change has already taken place in some L2 classrooms (Lucas & Katz, 1994); teachers can come to accept mixed languages in the classroom, however reluctant they are to do so at first (Giauque & Ely, 1990).

A second suggestion is to introduce activities that deliberately involve both languages. The Institute of Linguists (1988) examination, for instance, asks elementary students to listen to messages in the L2 and to relay them in either the L1 or L2; it tests advanced students by getting them to write a report in either language based on a series of interviews and texts in the L2. The classic dual-language task was translation, which might be used as a vehicle for more communicative exercises, for example, "Write down your favourite recipe in your L1 and then decide how you would explain it in the L2 to a fellow student with a different

L1." These activities above all see the student as an *intercultural speaker* (Byram & Zararte, 1994), not an imitation L1 user. The use of such activities in teaching may go some way towards developing the student as a multicompetent speaker rather than an imitation native speaker.

## Base Teaching on Descriptions of L2 Users

If the aim of teaching is to create L2 users, the description of English that is logically required is a description of L2 English. Applied linguistics has always claimed that language teaching can make use of descriptions supplied by linguists (Corder, 1973); much of applied linguistics today is indeed description oriented rather than problem oriented.

Descriptive approaches often use language corpora as data for developing linguistic description. The COBUILD project, for example, produced a large database of English from which it could derive grammars, dictionaries, and teaching materials (see, e.g., the list in Payne, 1995). Such descriptions would be far more useful if L2 users were represented in the corpora. Applied linguists do not at present have a clear idea of what typical successful L2 users know except through the distorting mirror of descriptions of native speakers. Furthermore, corpus-based description may be relevant to teaching only insofar as it is linked to a testable theory of language learning; it needs to attain explanatory adequacy, that is, show how language is learnt, not just observational adequacy, that is, list thousands of occurrences said by hundreds of people (Cook, 1985).

In the absence of descriptions of L2 users on which to base language teaching, one possibility is to see what can be gleaned from accounts of L2 learning. Collections of learners' English, such as *The Longman Learners' Corpus* (n.d.), could act as stepping-stones. Syllabuses and teaching materials could suggest intermediate goals for the students on their way to becoming successful L2 users. For example, the European Science Foundation project (Klein & Perdue, 1997) discovered that L2 learners of European languages acquired a basic grammar consisting of three rules: A sentence may be (a) subject-verb-object (e.g., *Jane drinks beer*), (b) subject-copula-adjective (e.g., *Beer is good*), or (c) verb-object (e.g., *Drinking beer*). This L2 grammar is valid not just for L2 English but also for L2 German, Dutch, French, and Spanish, almost regardless of the learner's L1. Although these rules represent an interim stage of L2 learning, they nevertheless provide a useful description of an L2 target for the beginner stage. An additional claim made in much contemporary work with syntax is that the initial stages of SLA depend upon word order rather than inflection (Klein & Perdue, 1997; Pienemann, 1985), a

finding of major importance for the teaching of English, which traditionally spends considerable effort on the plural *-s*, past tense *-ed*, and so on at early stages.

The suggestion to rely on descriptions of L2 user language should not be overstressed in that the differences between L2 users and native speakers described above could be marginal. L2 user goals could be hard to define because of the great variation among L2 users. Nevertheless, taking the description of the native speaker as the basis of language teaching is in a sense a temporary shortcut that avoids describing what L2 users are like and postpones the more satisfactory solution of tackling the description of L2 users themselves.

## CONCLUSION

Going beyond the native speaker lies not so much in following the specific suggestions as in adjusting the perspectives about models that underlie language teaching. If students and teachers see L2 learning as a battle that they are fated never to win, little wonder they become dispirited and give up. L2 learners' battle to become native speakers is lost before it has begun. If students are convinced of the benefits of learning an L2 and recognise their unique status as standing between two worlds and two cultures, more students may go on higher levels of L2 use; those who do give up may feel more satisfied with the level of L2 use they achieve. The graded objectives movement in language teaching tried to set interim targets (Harding, Page, & Rowell, 1981) so that students take away something of benefit no matter the level at which they stop learning a language. A beginners' EFL course took a worldwide external goal to be traveling abroad using English (Cook, 1980); the students who stopped after 1 year still gained a useful skill based on the L2 user, not the monolingual native.

Together with the change in attitude, placing more emphasis on the successful L2 user and on using the L1 more in teaching can bring language teaching to the realization that it is helping people use L2s, not imitate native speakers. Students, teachers, or indeed L2 researchers are unlikely to give up their reliance on the native speaker overnight, but judicious changes such as these can at least begin to acknowledge that L2 users have strengths and rights of their own by giving the students role models of L2 users in action and by requiring the use of both languages by one person. In short, these changes can convince students that they are successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers.

## THE AUTHOR

After teaching EFL and writing EFL course books, Vivian Cook concentrated on linguistics and language learning in books such as *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction* (Blackwell) and *Inside Language* (Edward Arnold). His current interests are linking SLA research to language teaching and the writing system. He was founding president of the European Second Language Association.

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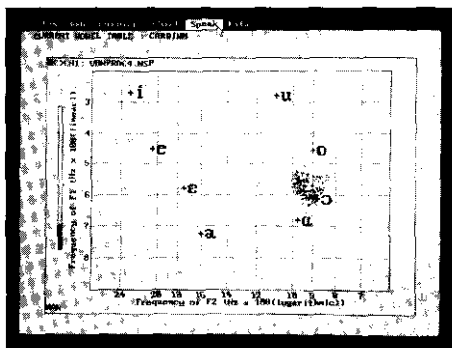
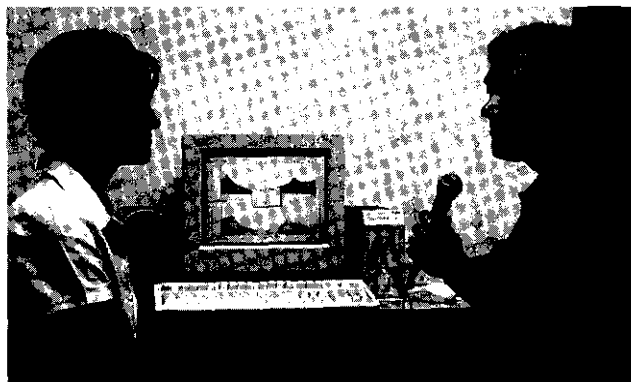
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# “English Is Here to Stay”: A Critical Look at Institutional and Educational Practices in India

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Based on an ongoing ethnographic project, this article examines ways in which the Indian middle class, with its relatively easy access to English, represents an inner circle of power and privilege that for a variety of reasons remains inaccessible to particular groups of people in India. Specifically, the data revealed that certain institutional and teaching practices keep English out of the reach of lower income and lower caste groups and push them into outer circles. The students central to this article are Dalit (lower-caste) students and students from the so-called Other Backward Classes who have been socialized in Gujarati-medium schools in Grades K–12 and who have to contend with English at the tertiary level.

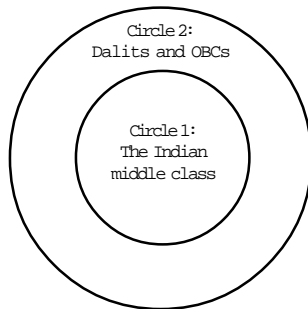
*Confronted by the double authority of the book itself and the English teacher endorsing and buttressing it by painful explication, they read and listen patiently in the classroom. Then they go back to the colorfully translated Hindi version of the text in the crib and memorize the “proper” answers from the same source, thus making both the text and teacher redundant; or they improvise in halting English their expressions of sympathy for Desdemona and Joe Keller and make clear their incomprehension at original sin, and contribute their own malapropisms to an account of Mrs. Malaprop’s contribution to the humor of the play. (Rajan, 1986, p. 33)*

Studies of World Englishes in the 1980s and 1990s have called attention to the growing number of Englishes used internationally (Kachru, 1985; Quirk, 1985) by documenting features of the varieties of English (Pakir, 1991) and raising issues about the socioideological underpinnings of their use (Canagarajah, 1993). A key assumption has been that the inner circle of countries (Britain, the U.S., Canada, and Australia) with native speakers of the language sets English language standards for countries in the outer circle (e.g., India and parts of

Africa), where English is used nonnatively but extensively and has been given official-language status. The different varieties of English used in outer-circle countries make inner-circle standards difficult or impossible for them to meet. Research has largely concentrated on describing English language varieties or discussing the unequal power relations between inner and outer circles of countries resulting from the privileged standard-setting position of inner-circle countries (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992), but little attention has been paid to examining how power relations operate within the outer circle itself.

Extending the study of hegemonic practices associated with English language use to the outer-circle country of India, this article examines how English and the privileges associated with it remain inaccessible to those who are disadvantaged because of their economic situation, their caste, or both. Thus, even within an outer-circle country, an English-related inner-outer power dichotomy appears to exist. The Indian middle class assumes a position of relative power through its access to English in Circle 1, with Dalit, or lower caste, students and students from so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs)<sup>1</sup> in Circle 2 (see Figure 1). By focusing on three specific educational and institutional practices influencing their access to Indian English, I show how some students remain within the relatively less powerful Circle 2. The three practices I address are (a) tracking students into college-level streams that bar some students from English-medium instruction; (b) teaching English literature rather than the English language throughout India, which limits English to the elite and middle class; and (c) using grammar-translation methods, which inhibit the communicative competence of some students, thus keeping them in their disadvantaged position.

FIGURE 1  
Inner and Outer Circles of Power in India



<sup>1</sup> Patronizing as this term is, I use it because it is the current political term used in India for members of tribal groups who are not Hindu (and therefore do not fall into the caste system). Like Dalits, OBCs have been and still are discriminated against.

The discussion and conclusions offered in this study are based on an ongoing ethnographic case study of an English-medium college (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1998) that explores how students in India who have used the vernacular in Grades K–12 adjust to the use of English at the tertiary level. Rooted in the same context and data, this article focuses on how the people most disadvantaged in Indian society—namely, Dalits and OBCs, who are also typically the most economically and educationally handicapped—negotiate with English but are unable to acquire proficiency in it. I draw on a range of data types, including interviews with students, faculty members, and administrators; class observations; and textbooks and other written documents.

The primary motivation for this study stemmed from the fact that, when I was a student at the college myself 14 years before, several friends who had been educated in Gujarati-medium schools experienced serious difficulty with English at the college level. Some were constantly on the verge of dropping out because they found English classes too difficult; many felt enormous pressure to perform on exams and would even go to great lengths to get “leaked” exam questions prior to the exam date in order to prepare responses to them. Only much later in my graduate education and teaching career and during the research for this project did I realize how integrally their problems were tied to the above-mentioned institutional and educational practices. Although I had received a bachelor’s degree from the institution and was thus very familiar with the general workings of the system when I began the research, some aspects of the college, including its general focus and the arrangement of classes, had changed. Thus, as a researcher, I returned to the site as both an outsider (having lived outside the culture for the past 11 years) and a relative former insider (having spent the first 23 years of my life in India and having attended the institution).

To provide some cultural orientation for the research, I begin with a brief exploration of societal practices in India. I then describe the institution, the students, and the data collected and report on the institutional and educational practices that keep Dalit and OBC students out of Circle 1. Finally, I locate the findings within the larger issue of the role of English in India and offer suggestions for improving the language situation at the institution.

## HEGEMONY, CASTE, AND DISCRIMINATION: SOME GENERAL CONNECTIONS

Hegemonic practices, as Gramsci (1988) maintains, are repressive practices in any given social structure that ensure that the means and ownership of production remain in the hands of a few. These practices

are perpetuated at every stratum of society by a variety of invisible factors—including institutions, religions, and legal practices—that justify unequal distributions of goods (Gee, 1990) and disallow minority groups access to and ownership of means of production. The construct of caste and its entailing social practices in India exemplify hegemonic practices that are historically and currently associated with keeping Dalit and OBCs in a disadvantaged position (Sarkar, 1984). According to Quigley (1993, p. 1), the Hindu world is made up of a number of castes, which are closed social groups: One may marry only within one's caste, and the children of the marriage belong to the caste of the parents. In this way the system is perpetuated ad infinitum.<sup>2</sup> Castes are hierarchically ranked on a purity-pollution scale according to their traditional occupations.<sup>3</sup> *Brahmins*, the caste traditionally associated with people who became priests, are considered in some ways the most pure. *Kshatriyas*, or the traditional warriors, are second on the scale; *Vaishyas*, who were originally business oriented, are third; and the *Shudras*, the scheduled caste people or laborers, are fourth.<sup>4</sup>

Although Quigley (1993) maintains that this conceptualization of caste in India is at best a drastic simplification and at worst misleading, he acknowledges that it has remained singularly resistant to modification. The discussion of caste is often framed within two mutually exclusive conceptions of history: materialist versus idealist. According to the former view, caste is simply a rationalization and obfuscation of more basic inequalities; those higher on the caste scale are generally wealthier than those lower on the scale. In hegemonic terms the higher castes have more access to means of production, including better schooling, better jobs, and more social goods. The idealist position, on the other hand, maintains that caste is a cultural construct and that people are placed higher or lower on the scale based on religiously sanctioned notions of purity and impurity. From such a point of view, "material considerations are largely irrelevant because caste is essentially an ideological framework for explaining universal problems of social order . . . where the structure of caste is to be found in a system of ideas and not in concrete manifestations of those ideas" (Quigley, 1993, p. 3).

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<sup>2</sup> Marrying within one's caste is definitely a criterion for arranged marriages. Marriages of choice, on the other hand, are not particularly stringent about matters of caste, although marriages between an upper- and lower-caste person are not common.

<sup>3</sup> Caste and occupation, as Quigley (1993) points out, do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Although the relationship between the two is one way of explaining the social stratification in the caste system, it is extremely outdated. Today, a person born into the tailor caste may not be locked into the tailoring profession but may simply have once had an ancestor who was a tailor.

<sup>4</sup> These four divisions are the broadest in the caste scale. Each contains several subcastes, with rules regulating social practices and behavior—including language use—within and across caste groups.

The general stance on caste adopted in this article is that both the materialist and the idealist positions are relevant. Material aspects of castes have been historically present and are still evident in several spheres of existence in India, most especially in the lack of opportunities for upward mobility for Dalits and OBCs. Although India has adopted and reinforced a strong affirmative action policy whereby slots are reserved for Dalits and OBCs in almost all walks of life—including education and employment—discrimination against them still exists (Kamble, 1983; Sarkar, 1984). The idealist perspective of caste is evident as well in a society that legitimizes discriminatory social practices categorizing some people as pure and the rest as impure.

## METHOD

As mentioned, this study draws on data gathered over 2 years as part of a larger ethnographic project (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1998) that seeks to understand how students who have been socialized in Gujarati throughout Grades K–12 adjust to English in a largely English-medium college. In keeping with the ethnographic tradition (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999), our research questions evolved only after we had spent some time immersed in the field (Holliday, 1994; Prior, 1995), and our larger, somewhat inexplicit goals narrowed over time.

### Data

#### The Students and the Institution

All the students under investigation in this study were attending a well-established college in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. After observing a range of students and classes for some weeks, we chose to focus on Dalit and OBC students for two reasons: First, the institution had in recent years committed itself to empowering them in a variety of ways.<sup>5</sup> Apart from adopting an open-door policy regarding admission for all Dalit and OBC students,<sup>6</sup> the institution, run by the Jesuit community based in the

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<sup>5</sup> These included awakening them to their rights by organizing regular group meetings wherein Dalits and OBCs talked about discrimination and practiced and performed street plays depicting problems in their current general condition. One such meeting, called *Ahmedabad Ekta* (United Ahmedabad) became so well known that many non-Dalits and non-OBCs began to join.

<sup>6</sup> Most institutions in the state do not have such a policy in place. Although all state- and government-funded institutions must reserve seats for students from this group, the college under investigation had chosen in recent years to open more than the required quota of seats as a way of generally uplifting this historically disadvantaged group.



city, also offered them extracurricular support during their first year in the form of tutorials in English language, one area in which these students needed a great deal of help. We felt an investigation of how the institution handled its commitment to Dalit and OBC students would be potentially revealing. Second, because these students were taught in separate English classes during their first year at the college, we were able to conveniently narrow our focus and observe them intensely in a classroom context.

The choice of the institution was deliberate as well. Not only did the college have the reputation of being one of the premier English-medium colleges in the state, it was also the only college in the city that catered extensively to Dalit and OBC students. Furthermore, several departments in the college, including biochemistry, English, Sanskrit, and economics, were recognized as strong departments that were active in research and that graduated students with top marks on university final exams. In recent years, however, the institution's academic standards were thought to have gone down because it was willing to admit Dalit and OBC students who had not done as well as the other students in their 12th-grade exams.<sup>7</sup> Despite this college's deliberate pro-Dalit and -OBC stance, its institutional and educational practices were representative of all English-medium colleges in the state.

According to the vice principal of the college, an average of 1,500 students were enrolled at any given time. Of these, 500–600 students were enrolled in the arts, and the remaining were in the sciences. Approximately 375 of the arts students came from Gujarati-medium schools, and more than half of this number (56%) were Dalit or OBC students. The proportion of Dalit and OBC students in the science section was lower (30–40%). The number of Dalit and OBC students admitted each year to both the arts and the sciences had increased steadily because of the Jesuit community's commitment to "serve the poor and the oppressed" (F4, p. 2).<sup>8</sup>

## The Exam System

All students were expected to take external exams set by the university with which the college was affiliated. Performance on these exams

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, Dalit and OBC students need only passing marks to gain admission into the college whereas all other students have to secure a minimum percentage of marks on their 12th-grade exams (in 1997, 62% for the arts section and 65% for the sciences).

<sup>8</sup> Each interview excerpt is identified by the participant (S = student, F = faculty member), a number assigned to the participant, and the transcription page on which the quotation is found. All interviews took place between June 15 and August 3, 1997. Excerpts from field notes are designated FN; the date the notes were taken is indicated.

determined admission to the next year in the college as well as to master's programs. Much instruction in the college was therefore geared toward getting students ready to take the exams. Instructors typically began the first day of English Compulsory (EC) classes by putting up the university exam format on the board (see Table 1), and every new topic in the class was introduced in terms of its relative importance (i.e., the point value assigned to it) on the exam. Such stress on the exam at every crucial stage of the teaching and learning process partially accounts for students' resorting to extensive memorization of material (especially material they did not fully understand) only to get through the exams. Memorizing seemed to be a way to succeed at all levels of college, but it was particularly prevalent among the group of students relevant to this article; it became a way for the Dalit and OBC students to manage despite their English language handicap.

## Procedures

Data were gathered from multiple sources: 75 hours of classroom observation; interviews with 27 students, with all five faculty members of the English department, and with two chief administrators (the principal and vice principal of the college); and copies of required class texts, diagnostic exams, exam questions, and students' writing. Total time in the field was 12 weeks: 6 weeks in 1997 and 6 weeks in 1998; I conducted follow-up interviews with four of the students during the latter period.

TABLE 1  
Structure of the Second-Year English Compulsory Exam

Test section	Task	Marks assigned
Short notes	Write a paragraph on a specific term, concept, or character	10
Short-answer question	Write a paragraph in response to a question	10
Advertisements	Answer questions based on advertisements (e.g., for jobs available, products for sale)	5
Short news items	Interpret excerpts from newspapers or other general news sources	5
Reading passage	Note the main points	5
Letter writing	Write a job application letter or a letter to a friend	7
Pronunciation	Identify which syllable in a list of words is stressed	10
Word building	In Scrabble-like games, create a certain number of words from an assortment of letters	10
One-word substitutes	Choose one of four phrases that best represents the meaning of a word	7

Interviews with teachers and administrators took place entirely in English and typically lasted 1–1½ hours. Interviews with Gujarati-medium students took place primarily in Gujarati or Hindi and were translated into English during transcription.

Contact with first-year (FY) students was made when we began to observe their EC classes; contact with second-year (SY) and third-year (TY) Gujarati-medium students was made when we went into their classes and asked for volunteers to participate in our project. Student interviews were conducted at times when students did not have class and in relatively quiet areas on campus, such as an empty classroom or the basketball court. Typically lasting for about an hour, these interviews sometimes involved groups of two or three students (generally friends) and at other times just one student.

For the purposes of this article, I draw primarily on 16 of the 27 student interviews with Dalit and OBC students as well as on the rest of the data collected over the two 6-week periods. Of these students, 3 were FY students who had just gained admission to the college, 6 were SY students who had opted to major in English literature, and 7 were TY students.

The students were interviewed about a range of issues: their general background in English, aspects of learning English that they liked or didn't like, the advantages that fluency in English would bring them, possible resistance to learning the language, the quality of English language instruction they had received in school, the adequacy of the instruction they were receiving in college, the relative importance they gave to spoken English, and any feelings of cultural conflict they experienced when reading literary texts based in U.S. or British culture. The interviews were largely open ended and unstructured, with the students' views and responses informing the flow of talk. (See Appendix A for a general schema of interview questions.) Most of the students felt shy about speaking in English; many of them worried about how "wrong" their English would sound ("Maaru English khotuu chhe, sharam aaveh chhe" [My English is wrong, I am shy]; S6, p. 2). In the sections that follow, I draw on themes that emerged in at least 12 of the 16 interviews.

## FINDINGS

Within the setting described above, I found the following institutional and educational practices that appear to keep Dalit and OBC students out of the more powerful Circle 1.

## Practice 1: Tracking

Instruction in the college is broken down into two divisions: the A division, in which Gujarati is the medium of instruction for all courses, and the B division, in which English is the medium of instruction. Students are placed in these divisions depending on whether their primary medium of instruction in Grades K–12 was Gujarati or English.

Unlike students in the B division, students in the A division are tracked into either the *a* or the *b* stream<sup>9</sup> depending on the years of English language instruction they have had in school (see Table 2). Students in the *a* stream typically had English as a subject in Grades 5–12 and are assumed to have a moderate grasp of the language. According to the *Teacher's Handbook* issued by the central university of which the college is an affiliate, this group is at the intermediate level. Students in this stream are generally from middle-class homes, and their literacy levels in Gujarati are relatively high. Three of the six SY students interviewed for this study came from this background.

Students in the *b* stream, on the other hand, are those who opted to drop English as a subject in Grades 10–12, thus having had instruction in it only from the fifth to the ninth grade. Students in this stream are primarily Dalit and OBC students with rural backgrounds. Many come from farming communities outside Ahmedabad, and most have attended municipal schools. Mainstream Gujarati is, in some instances, an L2 or second dialect, with English constituting the third (or sometimes fourth) language. The three FY, the remaining three SY, and the seven TY students whose views inform this article shared this background. Although the *b*-stream students are of most concern in this article, when relevant I call attention to *a*-stream and English-medium students to highlight the general condition of *b* streamers and their position relative to Circle 1.

TABLE 2  
Placement of Students in English Compulsory Classes

Student's K–12 medium	Division	Prior English language instruction	Stream (EC placement)
Gujarati	A	Grades 5–12 Grades 5–9	a b
English	B	n.a.	None

<sup>9</sup> This division into *a* and *b* streams occurs only in the first and second years; in the third year all *a*- and *b*-stream students are amalgamated into one EC class, as *b*-stream students are assumed to have picked up enough English to compete with the *a*-stream students.

Several themes related to this tracking emerged from the student interviews. None of the students articulated any resentment at being tracked into *a* and *b* streams in the college because this tracking was seen as a consequence of an individual choice to continue or to stop taking English in Grades 10–12. However, all of the students believed that the quality of English language instruction they were currently receiving in their EC classes was not markedly different from what they had received in school; they felt that instruction in neither place prepared them to use English in the real world. Many explained their struggle in EC classes as a result of the poor English language instruction they had received in school. Twelve of the 16 students said that they had felt pressure to drop English after the ninth grade because they could not cope with it. According to the students, their teachers were themselves poor speakers of English, and it was thus not surprising that the students found English difficult (“Teacher ne English nathi aavadthu ne, tho amne kevi phaave?” [The teacher does not know English, so how do we cope?]; S3, p. 1). Tracking into *a* and *b* streams, then, although justified by the institution on the basis of these students’ need for special attention, built on their already disadvantaged position with regard to English.

## Practice 2: Extensive Use of Grammar-Translation

The special attention given to students tracked into the *b* stream resulted in EC classes with methods that may have inhibited the communicative competence of these students and limited the choices students could make at the institution.

FY, SY, and TY EC classes for both *a*- and *b*-stream students were observed to get a comprehensive sense of the general focus of the classes. These classes emphasized language tasks, with grammar being the primary focus in the FY classes and more text- and comprehension-based tasks being incorporated at the SY and TY levels. However, grammar was not entirely discarded at the SY and TY levels because at least two of five sections of the final exams for these years were devoted to grammar.

Eventually, we observed only the FY *a*- and *b*-stream EC classes intensively because all FY Dalit and OBC students are placed into the *b* stream. These classes were typically held 4 days a week for 50 minutes each. Detailed notes were taken on any aspect of the class that had a bearing on how English was being taught and learned there. We noted that the young women sat toward one side of the class, that the young men sat toward the other, and that the two groups seldom had anything to say to each other. By contrast, in English-medium classes interaction between the sexes was more common. The instructor began the class sometimes with a joke and sometimes by referring to homework assigned

in the previous class. Typically, the teacher asked questions; the students almost never did. Female students were especially shy about reading aloud in class. All the students were generally very careful to note down the homework expected of them for the next class.

Two pedagogical practices in particular seemed to be significant.

### Use of Gujarati and Hindi

First, the teachers of both *a*- and *b*-stream classes frequently resorted to Gujarati and Hindi while teaching the class. A TY instructor who tended to use more English in class was generally seen as more difficult to understand and was not seen as a good teacher. (“Gujarati ane Hindi nathi vaparathi, ane amne mushkil laage chhe” [She doesn’t use either Gujarati or Hindi and we find that difficult]; S19, p. 3). On the whole, faculty members believed that they had to use native languages (Flowerdew, Li, & Miller, 1998) because it was the only way they could “get through to the students” (F5, p. 4). Students, likewise, had come to expect this way of teaching because they had been used to it in their English language classrooms in schools.

Almost all language in the *b*-stream class—directives, vocabulary items, entire paragraphs from short stories—was translated. Teachers frequently called on students to read a passage aloud from their textbooks and then had them translate it into either Gujarati or Hindi as a way to check comprehension. This reliance on translation extended to directions in grammar workbooks as well. When asked if using Gujarati and Hindi in the classroom hindered their English language learning, all the students maintained that it helped; translating everything into the vernacular helped them understand (“samjan padeh”; S8, p. 1). None of them seemed to see how it could take away from their gaining fluency in English.

The almost exclusive focus on grammar (discussed below), combined with little or no attention to developing speaking skills (because developing fluency in speaking English was not part of the university-mandated curriculum) left students shy about using English outside the classroom (“sharam aave che” [I am shy about using it]; S14, p. 6). Indeed, when asked to read passages or their responses to grammar drills aloud, many students seemed self-conscious.

### Emphasis on Grammar

The second significant pedagogical practice was that all of the FY *b*-stream classes were devoted exclusively to the teaching of grammar. The class instructor felt that such intensive attention was warranted

because “the students’ hold on grammar and the basics was so poor” (F4, p. 6) that he could proceed with the readings in the textbook only after he had addressed all the necessary grammar points. Thus, in class the EC instructor taught various grammatical features, with tenses taught in one class, nouns in the next, and verbs in the class after. Although the instructor occasionally established connections between different grammatical units—how nouns and verbs are related to each other in sentences, for instance—he did not do so in a communicative context (as is common in language classrooms in the West; Holliday, 1994). The extract below is culled from my field notes from one such class. I have interspersed some of the teacher’s utterances (denoted by *T*) into my field notes; note that the teacher gave all of the instructions in Gujarati and English.

T: Homework *kone karayu?* Who has done the homework?

\*Teacher asked how many of the students did the assigned homework; goes over drill on negative forms that he had assigned in the previous class.

T: Overcome *etle suu?* What does *overcome* mean?

\*Goes over different meanings of *to overcome*—to succeed, to master

T: *Aaje ame tenses karvaana chhe.* We will do tenses today.

\*Says they are going to do tenses today and that they have to *memorize the rules*; says this thrice: “there is no other way of learning the rules.”

T: *Badhhuuj gokhi kaado.* Memorize all of them by heart.

\*Lays out the following three columns on the board:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past participle</i>
leave	left	left
complete	completed	completed
forget	forgot	forgotten

\*Continues this list in the next class, where again he reiterates the importance of memorizing these lists. (FN, June 22, 1997)

Equally strong emphasis on discrete units of language was evident in the FY *a*-stream classes, although the focus in these classes seemed less on sentence-level units than on paragraph-level features (e.g., students reordered jumbled sentences into the correct order).

When asked, all of the students said that this almost exclusive attention to grammar helped them speak correctly but did not really prepare them to use English in contexts like job interviews (“Amne tho ahinya grammaraj sikhwade chhe; English ma vaat karvani practice nathi malthu . . . tho job interviews maa mushkil hoye amne” [We only get taught grammar here; we don’t get to practice speaking English . . . so we find job interviews difficult]; S9, p. 2). Despite the students’ feeling that they might not have been learning exactly what they needed to learn, their recognition that English was a passport to social successes in their

culture prompted them to take the grammar instruction in EC classes seriously. (“Thoda kuch tho seekh lenge” [At least I’ll learn something]; S6, p. 1). All students in the *a* and the *b* stream alike voiced the need to be able to speak English fluently, because, as one student put it, this would give them an “impressive personality” (in English; S6, p. 2).

Regarding their study methods, 13 of the 16 students said that they dealt with the material in the EC classes by memorizing grammar rules, entire chunks of lessons, texts, and ready-made responses from study guides or notes of students who had taken the class previously (“ghokhi kaadwaa nu” [we parrot it all]; S6, p. 4). They reported being unable to comprehend what they read and saw teachers as generally ineffectual at helping them understand what they were reading or learning about (features noted as well by Bhattacharya, 1992). Although all the students conceded that extensive memorizing did little to enhance their fluency—a concern that was echoed over and over in the interviews—many thought they had little choice.

### Practice 3: The Teaching of English Literature

The teaching of English literature in English departments in India is best interpreted within a historical context. Thomas Babington Macaulay, who in 1834 was put in charge of reforming the educational system in India (MacCabe, 1985; Suleri, 1992), defended the teaching of English literature in India in a proclamation—often referred to as the Macaulay Minute—that announced the general superiority of English literature:

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic—But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. . . . I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one of them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. (cited in MacCabe, 1985, pp. 38–39)

Macaulay further maintained that “all historical information which had been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England” (Moorhouse, 1984, pp. 77–78). Views such as these, coupled with the sense that the British needed Indians who were English in every sense but color, set in motion the intensive study of British literature in India’s schools and colleges in the 1800s (Rajan, 1992; Vishwanathan, 1989).

Today, majoring in English literature—including British, U.S., and Indian writings in English—seems to be one of the only ways Gujarati-medium students in the college feel they can master the English



language. Four relevant themes emerged from the data regarding the effect of literature teaching on students' access to English. These factors, related to bureaucratic procedures, cultural practices regarding learning, and areas of cultural conflict, apply to all *a*- and *b*-stream students, although the implications for *b*-stream students are the most extreme. Cumulatively these issues shed light on the complexity and conflict surrounding literature teaching in a postcolonial context and the fact that practices associated with literature teaching keep English within the reach of a few and out of the grasp of millions.

### Gatekeeping

One important theme related to literature involves the gatekeeping procedures that affected the Gujarati-medium students. Majoring in English literature appeared to be an option available largely only to English-medium students. As one faculty member put it, "With English-medium students you can at least assume a degree of language proficiency that does not make the task of teaching Chaucer and Shakespeare seem insurmountable" (F1, p. 11). Among Gujarati-medium students, only a handful of exceptionally good *a*-stream students were allowed to major in English, but only after they had successfully passed a test administered by the English faculty. Because their English language proficiency was generally deemed poorer than that of their English-medium counterparts, Gujarati-medium *a*-stream students majoring in English were required to take intensive grammar, reading, and writing instruction in a remedial English class or tutorial. As for Dalit and OBC *b*-stream students, who had stopped studying English after Grade 9, majoring in English literature was not even a possibility. The institutionalized practice of tracking, therefore, affects who can major in literature, which in turn has consequences regarding the general accessibility of English for both *a*- and *b*-stream students.

### English Teachers' View of Their Role

A second important theme that emerged through the faculty interviews was that English department faculty saw themselves as literature not language teachers. All five faculty members mentioned that the language problems of the Gujarati-medium students were not really their responsibility. None of the faculty had had any formal training in applied linguistics or language teaching methods, and all felt at a loss at having to address grammar-related problems when teaching Chaucer and Shakespeare. All but one teacher also expressed discomfort at teaching EC classes, where language-related concerns were addressed. Many of

the faculty also believed that the college's recently adopted stance on promoting the English language skills of Dalit and OBC students worked at odds with the faculty's literature background. Many seemed to resent the management's not fully understanding that "literature and language teaching are two separate endeavors" (F3, p. 4). Thus the value historically placed on teaching British literature manifests itself today in an English faculty composed solely of literature teachers who lack the expertise to help Gujarati-medium students access English.

### Heavy Use of Study Guides

A third significant practice that emerged was the students' extensive use of study guides. Several of the Gujarati-medium students who were majoring in English literature admitted to relying heavily on such guides to get them through exams (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1998). Many students felt that their English language proficiency was inadequate for understanding and explaining concepts in literary theory and poetry. Study guides, several maintained, explained difficult literary concepts in Gujarati. As for poetry, all of the students believed unequivocally that poetic language and metaphors (especially in contemporary poetry as opposed, e.g., to the nature poetry of the romantics) were generally difficult to grasp. Resorting to memorizing summaries and explanations of such poetry from their study guides afforded the students a way of comprehending these poems.

### Cultural Dissonance

A final finding related to literature teaching was the students' feeling of cultural dissonance between themselves and the topics portrayed in the literature. Students in literature classes also voiced feelings of alienation from texts with overly Western themes. When asked what sense they made of romantic love—a theme predominant in much Western literature—several students admitted to sometimes being at a loss ("mushkil laage chhe" [I find it difficult]; S3, p. 2). This is understandable, as in India's culture love between the sexes typically operates in the framework of an arranged marriage. Some students said they had come to terms with such Western themes by experiencing them vicariously; others would try to translate them into local terms. Students contending with race relations in the abridged version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (the required text for the TY EC class), for example, made sense of the text by understanding race-related issues in terms of unequal power relations between castes in India ("Vaat jevi chhe?" [Is it like caste?]; "Tho bahu power inequality chhe?" [So is there a lot of power inequality

involved?]; S6, p. 2). Several students also believed that they often had to forgo comprehending certain experiences and themes that were too far removed from their everyday realities or that could not be culturally transposed into local terms. Lukmani (1992), based on an in-depth survey of Marathi-speaking literature students, surmises that “Indian students . . . tend to remain aloof from involvement in the representation of life in English texts. Their interest is in the medium rather than the message, the language rather than the culture, and the benefit they hope to attain is proficiency in English rather than integration in a western, cultural ethos” (p. 170), a generalization that seems applicable to the study of English literature at this institution.

Although students may have been interested in literature for its potential to improve their English, the institutional practice of keeping *b*-stream students from majoring in literature precluded any potential benefit from this interest. This practice, like the teaching of grammar and the streaming of students, on the surface may seem to have made good sense for all involved. In fact, however, these practices worked together to deny *b*-stream students access to English proficiency.

## DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The data from this institution illuminate the institutional and educational practices that keep standard Indian English within the reach of the middle class and inaccessible to those students that it is attempting to help. In this section I locate the discussion of this institution within a larger framework of the general role of English in India and offer some suggestions for ways that English language inequality at the institute can be rectified.

### English Versus Regional Languages in India

Dua (1994) maintains that English in India no longer coexists with other languages in a complementary relationship but seems to have acquired such a privileged status that literacy in local, indigenous languages is threatened<sup>10</sup> (Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995). Indeed, many of the students we interviewed wished that their parents had kept them in English-medium schools because good jobs and social successes are directly tied to how fluent one is in English (Kumar, 1993). This preference for English-

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<sup>10</sup> Gujarat, the state in which the institution under investigation is located, is one of the few states in India that offer tertiary-level education in the regional language as well as in English. Most other states impart college education exclusively in English.

medium schools is echoed in other studies as well. Jayaram (1992) cites Reddy's (1979) study, wherein he examined "students' reactions towards English and regional languages as media of instruction" (p. 103) and found that students overwhelmingly favored English. On the basis of this study and others, Jayaram concludes that a "fear of being treated as an inferior category among the educated unless the courses are taken in the English medium" is an important factor in "their aversion to the regional language medium" (p. 103).

The Indian government has tried to balance English language teaching with the teaching of other languages by promoting the teaching of regional languages, including the students' L1 and Hindi as an official language (see Jayaram, 1992, for an in-depth discussion of the *three-language formula* adopted by the Indian educational system). It has not been easy. According to several scholars (e.g., Chitnis, 1993; Jayaram, 1992), not much has been done to build infrastructure that would support regional languages, such as developing reading materials or ensuring administrative autonomy. Although anti-English advocates frequently voice the need to do away with English in the curriculum altogether because it represents colonial and neocolonial vestiges, academics such as Chitnis (1993) maintain that India can give up English only at the grave peril of the educational system. Certainly the students at the institution under study echoed this sentiment. Although the quality of language teaching—of regional languages and English, but of English in particular—needs to be addressed seriously, the fact remains, as one student put it, that "English is here to stay; we have to deal with it" (S4, p. 5). Thus, it looks as if English language teaching will continue in India whether or not the teaching of regional languages develops.

## Widening Access to the Inner Circle

Although the motivation to learn English is very strong in India (Altbach, 1993; Chitnis, 1993; Lukmani, 1992), practices such as those at the institution under investigation keep the poorest and the most disadvantaged students from learning it. The cumulative effect of institutional and universitywide mandates is to keep *b*-stream students in India's own outer circle. The specific factors creating this effect were found to be the institutional practices of teaching, teaching practices in the EC classrooms, the faculty's lack of training in language teaching despite the administration's resolve to provide English instruction to Dalit and OBC students, and the students' own prior learning practices and views about effective language teaching and learning.

Multipronged as this problem is, some measures may ameliorate the general situation:

1. The administration as well as the university should be aware that English language teaching is a completely separate enterprise from the teaching of literature. The English department faculty recognized this distinction clearly and acutely because they had to contend with the vagaries involved on an everyday, local level, but the management seemed to be less conscious of the pedagogical problems involved in having literature faculty teach language. Certainly, raising the consciousness of the administration to classroom problems is necessary.
2. Especially at the university level, the EC class is an area that begs for change. Because fluency in spoken English is so important but currently neglected in the lives of all the *a*- and *b*-stream students, the EC class must include a speaking component that actually helps the students communicate in the real world. The current, almost exclusive emphasis on grammar and the general use of native languages in these classes (Flowerdew et al., 1998), although aiding comprehension and accuracy, does not provide an opportunity for the development of communicative fluency. Balancing these methods with those intended to develop the communicative skills of students while being mindful of local constraints (Holliday, 1994; Li, 1998) is a possible first step.

As a relative outsider to the scene now, I realize that these changes are easier to recommend than to carry out, especially because both faculty and management feel they can do little to alter the situation. The syllabi, the curricula, and the final, external exams, they say, are out of their hands. Their role, as one teacher cynically put it, "lies in merely dispensing what is in a prescribed set of texts into the heads of the students" (F3, p. 6). This lack of autonomy on the part of both the management and the teachers may partially explain why teaching is oriented toward exams, why teachers opt for particular teaching methods over others, why the students resort to memorizing and using study guides to get through the exams, and why English language speaking skills are not emphasized.

The Dalit and OBC students seem to struggle more than others. Not only do they enter the college on the fringes of Circle 2 with poor English language skills, having been educated entirely in Gujarati, but they are also unable to develop their English in the college because they are tracked into streams. These are the students most in need of English, yet English seems farthest from them. Their economically disadvantaged status does not permit them to enroll in language classes in the city, nor does it afford them access to other realia available to learners in Circle 1: the Internet, newspapers, TV shows in English, and English movies. They realize more and more that they need to be computer literate for the

simplest of jobs, but to gain access to knowledge about computers they have to first become fluent in English—that is, they have to develop the language that allows them to enter and become part of Circle 1. For most, however, their worst fears become reality: They never really gain fluency in English or entry into that circle and thus never become qualified for the jobs they desire.

This in-depth look at one English language teaching situation in a postcolonial context raises several questions: Will current English language teaching methods remain? How can the communicative fluency of the most disadvantaged students be facilitated? Would Western communicative language teaching practices work well in the Indian context? What local constraints will influence attempts to implement change? Much more research needs to be done to reveal additional insights, but this article represents a beginning toward understanding some of these issues in a postcolonial reality; in the meantime “education [in India] drifts along” (Jayaram, 1992, p. 111), and English stays.

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## APPENDIX A

### Schema of Interviews With Students

#### General Information

Name  
Place of origin  
Parents' occupation  
Name of high school  
Major in college  
Plans after graduation  
Stream in the college (*a* or *b*)

#### English Language Learning and Teaching

1. How do you view English? How long have you had exposure to it?
2. Do you use English outside the classroom? (with whom? access to TV, newspapers, radio?)  
What are some ways you seek exposure to English?
3. What were your English language classes in middle and high school like?
4. How would you rate your high school preparation in English? Was it adequate for dealing with English in the college?
5. What is the general importance you give English in your life? What advantages is fluency over it likely to give you?
6. Can you tell me about specific instances illustrating your struggles with English?
7. Are English Compulsory classes a help? What would you like to see changed about these classes?
8. Should the college provide you more English language instruction?
9. Do you have difficulty dealing with American and British literary texts? What are some of the difficulties? How do you overcome them?



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# Processing of Idioms by L2 Learners of English

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This study investigated the on-line processing strategies used by a sample of nonnative speakers of English who were asked to give the meanings of selected common idioms presented in a written context. Data were collected by means of the think-aloud procedure: Participants were asked to verbalize their thoughts as they arrived at the meanings of the idioms. Analysis revealed that most of the participants engaged in a heuristic approach to idiom comprehension, employing a variety of strategies through trial and error to find the meanings of the idioms. Models of L1 idiom acquisition did not apply well to the comprehension of idioms by the L2 users. Some pedagogical suggestions derived from the findings are included.

An idiom is an expression whose meaning cannot always be readily derived from the usual meaning of its constituent elements. It is hard to tell from the literal meaning of the individual words, for example, that *to kick the bucket* or *to bite the dust* means *to die*. Because figurative meaning is unpredictable, idioms present a special language learning problem for virtually all groups of learners: native speakers (Gibbs, 1994; Nippold, 1991), language-disordered students (Nippold, 1991; Nippold & Fey, 1983), and bilingual and L2 learners (Adkins, 1968; Cooper, 1998; Irujo, 1986a; Yandell & Zintz, 1961). Nippold (1991), in fact, underscores the never-ending challenge in the acquisition of idioms by maintaining that “there is no clear point in human development when it can be said that idioms have been mastered” (p. 101).

Even though complete mastery of idioms may be nearly impossible, every language learner must be prepared to meet the challenge simply because idioms occur so frequently in spoken and written English (Hoffman, 1984; Irujo, 1986b). Pollio, Barlow, Fine, and Pollio (1977) analyzed political debates, psychology texts, novels, and psychotherapy sessions to estimate the overall use of nonliteral language. They figured that “most English speakers utter about 10 million novel metaphors per lifetime and 20 million idioms per lifetime. This works out to about 3,000

novel metaphors per week and 7,000 idioms per week" (p. 140). Because of a lower level of linguistic competence in the target language, L2 learners are at a distinct disadvantage in understanding L2 figurative expressions, yet they will meet idioms in all forms of discourse: in conversations, lectures, movies, radio broadcasts, and television programs; in all forms of print, such as newspapers, magazines, and books; and throughout the world of electronic communication. Indeed, mastery of an L2 may depend in part on how well learners comprehend initially and produce eventually the idioms encountered in everyday language.

How idioms are acquired in an L2 is clearly an area worthy of investigation, but with the exception of studies by Kellerman (1978, 1979, 1983) and Irujo (1986b), most of the research on idioms has involved native speakers of English. Models of L1 idiom acquisition therefore offer a starting point for investigating the acquisition of idioms in an L2 and for comparing the extent to which L1 idiom comprehension models apply to the comprehension of idioms by L2 speakers. In this article, I first review research on L1 and L2 idiom comprehension and describe my study of the on-line processing strategies a group of nonnative speakers (NNSs) of English used to interpret a set of idioms. I then use results from the study to propose a model for idiom acquisition that describes and captures more fully the processes involved when L2 learners encounter idiomatic expressions.

## RESEARCH ON IDIOM COMPREHENSION

### Four Theories of L1 Idiom Comprehension

Four theories try to explain how native English speakers comprehend idioms. The first, called the *idiom-list hypothesis* (Bobrow & Bell, 1973), states that a native speaker who encounters an idiom first interprets it literally. If a literal meaning does not fit the context in which the expression is situated, the native speaker searches for the idiom in question in a special mental idiom lexicon and then chooses the figurative meaning. This hypothesis was formulated on the basis of an experiment in which participants were first presented with either a set of four literal sentences or a set of four sentences containing idioms. The participants were then instructed to indicate which meaning of a test sentence—which could be interpreted either literally or figuratively—came to mind first, the literal or the idiomatic. The default mode of processing seemed to be the literal interpretation of the idiom test sentence, whereas the idiom-processing mode seemed to be active only when the participants were presented with the sentences containing

idioms. Only after seeing the set of sentences containing idioms did the participants interpret the test sentence figuratively.

Findings from later studies have led to the rejection of the idiom-list hypothesis, for idioms are understood at least as quickly as comparable literal expressions. In experiments that timed the speed of recognition of the meaning of idioms, participants never understood the literal meanings more quickly than they understood the figurative ones (Glucksberg, 1993). This would not have been true if the participants had had to compute the literal meaning of the expression first (Gibbs, 1980).

The second model for idiom processing is called the *lexical representation hypothesis* (Swinney & Cutler, 1979). In this model idioms are considered to be long words that are stored in the mental lexicon along with all other words. A native speaker who encounters an idiom processes both the literal and the figurative meanings of the expression simultaneously, which results in a "horse race" in which the context determines the more fitting interpretation. In the timed experiments that led to the formulation of this hypothesis, participants viewed a word string on the computer and had to decide whether or not the string formed a meaningful, natural phrase in English. In addition to meaningful strings, the list contained in random order of appearance idioms and literal phrases: for example, *take him for a ride/take him for a beer* or *wrap it up/lift it up*. The participants responded significantly faster to idioms than to matched control phrases. Based on these results, Swinney and Cutler were able to confirm their hypothesis that "idioms are stored and retrieved from the lexicon in the same manner as any other word," and they therefore refuted the idiom-list hypothesis, stating, "There is no special idiom list nor any special processing mode . . . individual words are accessed from the lexicon and structural analysis is undertaken on these words at the same time that the lexical access of the entire [idiom] string (which is merely a long word) is taking place" (p. 525).

The third model, the *direct access hypothesis* (Gibbs, 1980, 1984; Schweigert, 1986), is an extension of the lexical representation hypothesis, for it posits that a native speaker rarely considers the literal meaning of an idiomatic expression but instead retrieves the figurative meaning directly from the mental lexicon. According to Glucksberg (1993), idiom access is normally "completed more quickly because it does not require the lexical, syntactic, and semantic processing required for full linguistic analysis. Thus, familiar idioms will be understood more quickly than comparable literal expressions" (p. 5). Gibbs (1980) posited that the conventionality of the idiom affects how easily it is understood and claimed that native speakers do not need to interpret the literal meaning of a common idiomatic expression before deriving the figurative meaning. This assumption was borne out by an experiment in which subjects were presented with short vignettes that each set up the context for

either a figurative or a literal interpretation of a concluding idiom. More often than not, the subjects chose the figurative meaning more quickly than they chose the literal meaning, leading Gibbs to observe that native speakers do not process idioms literally by default. Instead, they can access the conventional figurative meaning of idioms directly.

The fourth idiom-processing model, the most current one, is the *composition model* (Gibbs, 1994; Tabossi & Zardon, 1995), which supersedes the three models described above. The composition model was first proposed by Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting (1989) in the context of a series of reading-time experiments in which participants had to decide whether a given word string formed a meaningful English expression. The participants needed significantly less time to process decomposable idioms—that is, idioms in which the figurative and literal meanings are close (e.g., *hit the jackpot*)—than to process nondecomposable idioms—that is, idioms in which the literal meaning offers no clue for the construction on the figurative meaning (e.g., *kick the bucket*). According to Gibbs (1984), “these data suggest that people attempt to do some decompositional analysis when understanding idiomatic phrases. When an idiom is decomposable, readers can assign independent meanings to its individual parts and will quickly recognize how these meaningful parts combine to form the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase” (p. 285).

In general, the composition model states that people do not inhibit or shut down their normal language-processing mode when they encounter an idiomatic phrase: Their *syntactic parser* automatically analyzes the grammatical structure of the words and phrases they hear or read; the *lexical processor* accesses the lexical items in the mental lexicon and assigns a meaning to them; and a *semantic analysis* is undertaken on the basis of the grammatical structure and the meaning of the lexical items of the phrase (Flores d’Arcais, 1993). Idioms are processed as any phrase or sentence is, and the meanings of the individual words of the idiom generally contribute to the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase. Van de Voort and Vonk (1995) write, for example, that

During processing people try to analyze an idiomatic expression compositionally, much like they analyze a literal expression. They try to assign independent idiomatic meanings to the individual parts of the idiom, which then can be combined to form the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase. This assumption implies that access to the meaning of an idiom is dependent on the extent to which an idiom can be compositionally analyzed; that is, meaning access is dependent on the compositionality of an idiom. (p. 284)

An important point, therefore, is that idioms range along a continuum of compositionality or analyzability. At one end of the continuum are normally decomposable or analyzable idioms, such as *pop the question*,

in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between the figurative and literal meanings: *pop* means *ask* and *the question* means *marriage proposal*. Idioms at the opposite end of the continuum are nondecomposable or nonanalyzable—e.g., *kick the bucket* and *bite the bullet*. Here an initial compositional analysis will fail because the meanings of the individual parts of the idioms have little relation to the stipulated meaning or the meaning agreed upon by native speakers—*die* and *endure in a difficult situation*.

## Comprehension of L2 Idioms

Research on processing of L2 idioms and figurative language has focused on the influence of L1 transfer. Irujo (1986a) conducted a study to determine whether advanced learners of English used their knowledge of their mother tongue, Spanish, to understand and produce L2 expressions. Using recognition and production tests, she assessed subjects' comprehension of three groups of English idioms: those that were identical to, those that were very similar to, and those that were substantially different from Spanish idioms. The results showed that English idioms identical to their Spanish equivalents were the easiest to comprehend and produce. Participants understood idioms similar in the two languages almost as well as they understood identical idioms, but in the production tests interference from Spanish was prevalent. The idioms that were different in the two languages—for example, *to have a free hand* is rendered in Spanish by *tener carta blanca* (to have carte blanche)—were the hardest for the participants to comprehend and produce, but there was little evidence of positive or negative transfer from Spanish in the test results. The test results varied greatly from subject to subject, and Irujo notes that the participants comprehended and produced most easily and correctly the idioms that were frequently used in everyday speech, had simple vocabulary and structure, and were metaphorically transparent in that their literal meanings were closely related to their figurative meanings.

Kellerman (1978, 1979, 1983) also addressed the relationship between L1 knowledge and interpretation of the figurative use of the L2. In a study focusing on the meaning of the Dutch word *breken* (break), he investigated the role of L1 transference in L2 learning with Dutch students learning English. In his study, Kellerman (1979; cf. Ellis, 1994, pp. 324–327) first asked native speakers of Dutch to sort 17 sentences containing *breken* into groups by similarities in meaning. Analysis revealed that there were two dimensions of semantic space, *core/noncore* and *concrete/abstract*. In the second stage of the study, Kellerman asked 81 Dutch students in their first and third years of university study to say

which of the 17 Dutch sentences they would translate with the English verb *break*. In a rank order of transferability, Kellerman found that even though both verbs have a focal meaning (*He broke his leg*) and a set of peripheral meanings (*His fall was broken by a tree* or *His voice broke when he was 13*), a greater percentage of Dutch students (81%) accepted as translatable the English sentences corresponding to the core or prototypical meaning of the Dutch verb than accepted the English sentences corresponding to peripheral meanings. For example, *breken* was acceptable for the English sentence *He broke his leg* but not for the sentences *Some workers have broken the strike* or *The tree broke his fall* (cf. Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, pp. 109–110). Thus, knowledge about the semantic space occupied by the meaning of words in the L1 is not necessarily transferred to the L2, even though the words may on the surface have similar meanings in the two languages.

These studies showed that the L1 plays a role in L2 idiom processing even though L2 learners are less likely to transfer L1 knowledge when they perceive the meaning as figurative. Thus, it is likely that L1 transfer may play some role in learners' processing of L2 idioms, but there is a need to better understand when and how this and other comprehension strategies are used in L2 idiom processing. Therefore, the present study examines the comprehension processes that NNSs employ when they attempt to interpret the meanings of English idioms at the moment they are encountered.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the on-line processing strategies used by NNSs of English who were asked to interpret the meanings of 20 idioms presented in a written context. The computer term *on-line* refers to the immediate thought processes activated in the minds of L2 learners as they try to comprehend a given idiomatic expression on the spot, without time for reflection. The theoretical models developed for L1 idiom comprehension were examined to see if they could explain the comprehension of idioms in an L2.

The research questions underlying the study were

1. To what extent did the idioms chosen for the study vary in difficulty as measured by the Idiom Recognition Test (IRT)?
2. What kinds of strategies did the participants employ to comprehend the idioms?
3. To what extent do the theoretical models of comprehension of idioms in the L1 apply to the comprehension of idioms by L2 speakers?

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 18 NNSs of English served as participants for the study. They ranged in age from 17 to 44 years, the average age being 29.3 years (see Table 1). There were eight native speakers of Spanish, three of Japanese, five of Korean, one of Russian, and one of Portuguese. The participants had lived in the U.S. for 5.1 years on average and had spent 7.3 months on average studying English in the U.S. Many of the participants had studied or were studying English in special language programs designed to increase the language proficiency of international students so that they could achieve a high enough score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language to apply for admission to a U.S. university. With the exception of three participants (Nos. 7, 9, and 11), all had studied English in their home countries for an average of 6.5 years. Ten of the participants were working in the U.S. in positions that required them to communicate with their coworkers in English. For the sample group

TABLE 1  
Background of Participants

No.	Age	L1	Years in the U.S.	English study in the U.S. (months)	English study in home country (years)	Job requires use of English	Time with U.S. friends or colleagues (hours/week)
1	42	Spanish	12.0	0	4.0	Yes	40
2	32	Portuguese	3.0	6	3.0	Yes	40
3	26	Japanese	1.5	3	8.0	Yes	4
4	26	Japanese	3.5	0	10.0	Yes	10
5	24	Japanese	1.5	1	8.0	Yes	5
6	34	Spanish	18.0	1	12.0	Yes	40
7	32	Spanish	3.0	0	0.0	No	1
8	29	Spanish	10.5	0	3.0	No	7
9	28	Spanish	9.0	0	0.0	Yes	2
10	29	Spanish	5.0	3	3.0	Yes	25
11	30	Spanish	15.0	36	0.0	Yes	8
12	35	Korean	0.8	10	10.0	No	7
13	26	Korean	0.7	8	10.0	No	5
14	44	Korean	0.8	10	7.0	No	4
15	17	Spanish	0.8	9	13.0	No	7
16	25	Korean	0.8	10	6.5	No	5
17	24	Korean	0.8	10	11.0	No	7
18	25	Russian	5.0	24	9.0	Yes	40
M	29.3		5.1	7.3	6.5		14.3
SD	6.5		5.5	9.5	4.3		15.0
Mean	28.5		3.0	4.5	7.5		7.0
Mode	26.0		0.8	0.0	3.0		40.0



overall, the average number of hours per week spent with U.S. friends or colleagues was 14.3.

## Materials

Participants were given the IRT (see Appendix A), in which they were asked to give orally the meanings of 20 frequently used idioms selected from *A Dictionary of American Idioms* (Makkai, Boatner, & Gates, 1995). The idioms chosen represented a mixture of different levels of discourse. According to the dictionary's categorization, eight of the expressions were representative of standard English, eight were informal or colloquial in level of discourse, and four were slang expressions (see Table 2). The standard English expressions would be more likely to occur in written English than the colloquial and slang expressions would.

To aid the participants in deciphering the meanings of the 20 idioms, each idiom was incorporated into a one- or two-sentence context selected from studies of L1 idiom comprehension conducted by Cronk and Schweigert (1992) and Nippold and Martin (1989). Each idiom with its context was typed on a separate note card and given to the participants in sequence.

## Think-Aloud Protocols

From the point of view of methodology, this study derives its impetus from native language research with speakers of English and Italian. The research used on-line measures of comprehension to analyze the pro-

TABLE 2  
Idioms on Idiom Recognition Test, by Level of Discourse

Standard English (more formal)	Informal or colloquial (conversational)	Slang (informal)
To burn the candle at both ends	To pull the wool over someone's eyes	To have a big mouth
To see eye to eye	To have a chip on one's shoulder	What's cooking?
To suffer from burnout	To have something in the bag	To get sacked
To tighten one's belt	To have a green thumb	To be chicken feed
To roll up one's sleeves	To rob the cradle	
To see things through rose-colored glasses	To be up the creek without a paddle	
To be a little frog in a big pond	To let the cat out of the bag	
To stir up a hornet's nest	To get off the ground	

cessing of idioms immediately after aural or visual perception (Cacciari, 1993; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988; Flores d'Arcais, 1993; Gibbs, 1994; Tabossi & Zardon, 1993).

To investigate comprehension processes, the researchers used think-aloud (TA) protocols to gather data while students took the IRT. In the course of a TA protocol, subjects are asked to verbalize their thoughts to the researcher while completing a cognitive task such as solving a mathematical problem or comprehending a reading passage (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). The focus of the TA task, according to Olson, Duffy, and Mack (1984), "should be to get subjects to report the content of their immediate awareness rather than to report explanations of their behavior. Further, subjects should be asked to report what they are thinking right now, not what they remember thinking some time ago . . . TA data should not be taken as *direct* reflections of thought processes but rather as data that are correlated with underlying thought processes" (p. 254). TA methodology has been used intermittently as an investigative instrument in L2 reading research (Block, 1986; Brown, 1996; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993). Given that, during the reading process, not understanding idioms is probably one of the most troublesome barriers to comprehension, TA procedures may prove a fruitful approach to investigating the process of comprehension. TA data provide evidence of what is on the subject's mind during the task, thereby allowing the researcher to zero in on the mental efforts involved at the very moment an NNS encounters a potentially problematic idiom.

In conducting the IRT and collecting the resultant TA data, the present study followed the procedures suggested by Olson et al. (1984): Along with detailed instructions (see Appendix B), the subjects were given a list of examples of the types of things they could talk about to help them verbalize their thoughts. As Olson et al. state, "The important point vis-à-vis the use of the [TA] task to study comprehension is that one be explicit with the subject about what to talk about. The exact list of suggestions should be motivated by theoretical ideas or by prior research" (p. 258). For the present study, I hypothesized that the recognition of the idioms might be influenced by such factors as the context of the idiom, the literal meaning of the idiom, the meaning of a particular word in the idiomatic phrase, the experiences and background knowledge of the participant, or an expression in the native language. Thus, the participants were asked to keep these factors in mind as they verbalized their thoughts on how they arrived at possible meanings of the 20 expressions.

Three researchers interviewed the participants. To ensure uniformity of procedure, I discussed the process of collecting TA data with each researcher and gave each a set of directions (see Appendix B) to read to each participant at the beginning of a data-collecting session. The

sessions were conducted in a private office and were recorded on audiotape.

## Data Transcription

The audiorecorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, yielding 165 double-spaced pages containing approximately 25,000 words. The unit of analysis was the minimal terminable unit (T-unit), described by Hunt (1970) as “one main clause plus any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure that is attached to or embedded in it” (p. 4). According to Hunt, “cutting a passage into T-units will be cutting it into the shortest units which it is grammatically allowable to punctuate as sentences. . . . Any complex or simple sentence would be one T-unit, but any compound or compound-complex sentence would consist of two or more T-units” (p. 4). For example, in the following excerpt from the transcription, each T-unit is numbered and begins a new line. The note card given to the participant read, “Robert knew that he was robbing the cradle by dating a sixteen-year-old girl. What does *robbing the cradle* mean?”

- Participant: 1. Cradle is something that you put the baby in/  
Interviewer: That’s where a baby sleeps  
Participant: 2. So that means robbing the cradle/  
3. That means, I think, you are robbing a child/  
4. You’re stilling [stealing] a child from a mother/  
5. A 16-year-old girl is still too young to date/  
6. So robbing the cradle is like dating a really young person/

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in two phases. In the first phase, the participants’ definitions of the 20 idioms were scored on a 3-point scale. One point was given for an answer of “I don’t know” or for a wrong definition (e.g., defining *to see eye to eye* as *to watch out very carefully for someone*); 2 points for a transitional-stage response that was partially correct (e.g., defining *to have a green thumb* as *to do horticulture stuff*); and 3 points for a correct definition (e.g., defining *to get off the ground* as *to get started*).

In the second phase of analysis, the participants’ responses for each idiom were divided into T-units, and each T-unit was analyzed and marked according to the idiom comprehension strategy used by the participant. The comprehension strategies for which evidence was found in the data (see Table 3) were named with reference to previous studies

TABLE 3  
Strategies Used to Comprehend the L2 Idioms

Strategy	Example
<i>Preparatory</i>	
RP: Repeating or paraphrasing the idiom without giving an interpretation	"To tighten your belt is . . . uh . . . to make belt more narrower . . ."
DA: Discussing and analyzing the idiom or its context without guessing at the meaning	"Chicken feed . . . uh . . . Compared to people, uh, chicken usually eat, uh, less than people, you know. Chicken feed is little and people eat a lot . . . . It has something to do with eating and stuff, but I'm not sure of meaning."
RI: Requesting information about the idiom or context	"What does [usually a single word from the idiom or context] mean?"
<i>Guessing</i>	
GC: Guessing the meaning of the idiom from the context	"I don't know it [the meaning] at all, so I have to guess from the first clause [We decided that Molly was a bad worker] . . . . These people want to fire Molly, so I think to get sacked means to get fired."
LM: Using the literal meaning of the idiom as a key to its figurative meaning	"When I make an image of this phrase, to roll up his sleeves, I think of somebody who is trying to get ready to do something, to work, so I think that's what it means."
BK: Using background knowledge to figure out the meaning of the idiom	"What's cooking? I think my boyfriend might be using this often. I've never asked him what it means, but I learned the expression through hearing it all the time. At first I didn't know it, but then since he uses it all the time, I realize the meaning: What's going on?"
L1: Referring to an idiom in the L1 to understand the L2 idiom	"Look at the world through rose-colored glasses. We have a sentence that has almost the same meaning in Portuguese, 'cause a rose-colored world is something nice."
OS: Using other strategies	

dealing with on-line L1 idiom comprehension (Cacciari, 1993; Flores d'Arcais, 1993) and on-line L2 reading comprehension (Block, 1986; Brown, 1996; Davis & Bistodeau, 1993), for such terminology had been shown to be effective in analyzing and categorizing data from TA protocols.

The idiom comprehension strategies fell into two groups: preparatory strategies and guessing strategies. The preparatory strategies allowed the participants to clarify and consolidate knowledge about the expression (Strategy RP, repeating or paraphrasing the idiom); to gain more time before uttering a guess, perhaps to rehearse an answer, and to sift through the new linguistic information (Strategy DA, discussing and analyzing the idiom); and to gather additional information in order to

make a better informed guess about the idiom's meaning (Strategy RI, requesting information about the idiom). The guessing strategies represent cases in which the participant actually ventured an interpretation of the expression, and the strategy leading to the guess was categorized as guessing from context (Strategy GC), using the literal meaning (Strategy LM), using background knowledge (Strategy BK), referring to an L1 idiom (Strategy L1), or using other strategies (Strategy OS).

To test the reliability of the researchers' scoring of the IRT and coding of the idiom comprehension strategies, I trained a second rater, an experienced foreign language teacher, to score the IRT and categorize the TA responses by going over examples of correct, partially correct, and incorrect IRT responses and the respective comprehension strategies shown in Table 3. After the training session, the second rater independently scored the IRTs and coded the T-units from the TA protocols. For both phases of the data analysis, the number of agreements between the second rater's responses and my responses was divided by the number of agreements plus disagreements, and this value was multiplied by 100. Interrater agreement was 98% for the IRT and 87% for the coding of comprehension strategies. All disagreements were subsequently resolved through discussion so that 100% agreement was attained.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Question 1: To What Extent Did the Idioms Chosen for the Study Vary in Difficulty as Measured by the IRT?

Average scores on the individual items in the IRT ranged from 1.67 for the idiom *to have a chip on one's shoulder* to 2.78 for the two idioms *to have a big mouth* and *to be suffering from burnout* (see Table 4). The mean score was 2.32. Three idioms—Items 3 (*to have a chip on one's shoulder*), 11 (*to be up the creek without a paddle*), and 12 (*to let the cat out of the bag*)—were the most difficult to understand. The average scores on these items ranged from 1.5 to 2.0. The easiest expressions to interpret were Items 5 (*to have a big mouth*), 6 (*to be suffering from burnout*), 7 (*to have something in the bag*), and 15 (*to get sacked*). The average scores on these idioms were between 2.5 and 3.0.

In comments recorded in the TA protocols, participants indicated that a stumbling block in comprehension was often the lack of a clear and close relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom. The following comments, dealing with the idiom *to let the cat out of the bag*, describe the typical struggle for the correct fit between the meaning of the metaphor and the meaning of the expression.

TABLE 4  
Means and Standard Deviations for Individual Idioms

Idiom	M	SD
1. To burn the candle at both ends	2.33	0.77
2. To pull the wool over someone's eyes	2.22	0.81
3. To have a chip on one's shoulder	1.67	0.84
4. To see eye to eye	2.17	0.99
5. To have a big mouth	2.78	0.55
6. To be suffering from burnout	2.78	0.55
7. To have something in the bag	2.56	0.86
8. What's cooking?	2.44	0.92
9. To have a green thumb	2.50	0.79
10. To rob the cradle	2.11	0.96
11. To be up the creek without a paddle	1.83	0.86
12. To let the cat out of the bag	1.89	0.96
13. To get off the ground	2.28	0.75
14. To tighten one's belt	2.17	0.86
15. To get sacked	2.61	0.78
16. To roll up one's sleeves	2.50	0.79
17. To see something through rose-colored glasses	2.39	0.78
18. To be a little frog in a big pond	2.44	0.70
19. Something is chicken feed	2.33	0.84
20. To stir up a hornet's nest	2.33	0.69
M of item means	2.32	

*Stimulus situation:* By mistake, Kay let the cat out of the bag when she revealed the surprise. What does *to let the cat out of the bag* mean?

Participant: So she doesn't really have a cat/  
I think that means, uh, you put the cat in the bag/  
and when you put the cat out of the bag, then the cat will be excited/  
And so I don't know how to explain/  
But it [the cat] gets very historical [hysterical], maybe/  
So everybody around the cat can be troubled/

Two other idioms were troublesome for the majority of the participants: *to have a chip on one's shoulder* and *to be up the creek without a paddle*. Comments from the TA protocols revealed that the meanings of *chip* in the first expression and *paddle* and *creek* in the second were the source of difficulty in deciphering the meanings. This was so even though the interviewer had given the meanings of these words to the participants. In many cases, a participant who had gotten off on the wrong foot in defining the idiom seemed to find it almost impossible to get back on track, recover, and continue in the pursuit of the correct definition.

At the other end of the continuum, the two easiest expressions were *to have a big mouth* and *to be suffering from burnout*. According to Irujo (1986b), factors that might affect the level of difficulty of an idiom could

include salience, frequency of exposure, and ease of production. Most of the participants indicated that they had heard these idioms often during their stay in the U.S. Their U.S. interlocutors frequently used these idioms, and the participants had heard them on TV and in movies. The underlying metaphors of these two idioms are easy to understand and relate to their figurative meanings, and the grammar of the expressions is not so complex as to interfere with production.

## Research Question 2: What Kinds of Strategies Did the NNSs Employ to Comprehend the Idioms?

### Strategies by Frequency of Use

Participants usually used several strategies in the process of comprehending an idiom (see Table 5). A rank ordering of strategy use, reported in percentages in the bottom row of Table 5, gives the following results: Guessing from context was the strategy used most frequently (28% of the time), followed by discussing and analyzing the idiom (24%), using the literal meaning (19%), requesting information (8%), repeating or paraphrasing the idiom (7%), using background knowledge (7%), referring to an L1 idiom (5%), and using other strategies (2%).

Three of the strategies—guessing from context, discussing and analyzing the idiom, and using the literal meaning of the idiom—were used more frequently than the others (71% of the time) (see Figure 1). By contrast, participants relied on the remaining five strategies—requesting information, using background knowledge, repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, referring to an L1 idiom, and other strategies—less often (only 29% of the time). Below, I discuss the eight strategies individually in their rank order based on their frequency of use.

**Guessing from context (28%).** In using the context, participants discussed the situation in which the idiom was embedded and clearly made reference to the situation to infer the meaning of the expression. In their comments they often used the word *so* or *because* as a marker for inferring or interpreting the meaning from the context. Below is an example of this strategy.

*Stimulus situation:* People say that Jennifer can keep any plant alive with her green thumb. What does *green thumb* mean?

Participant: I never heard this/  
But I can understand the meaning from the context/  
She's good with plants/

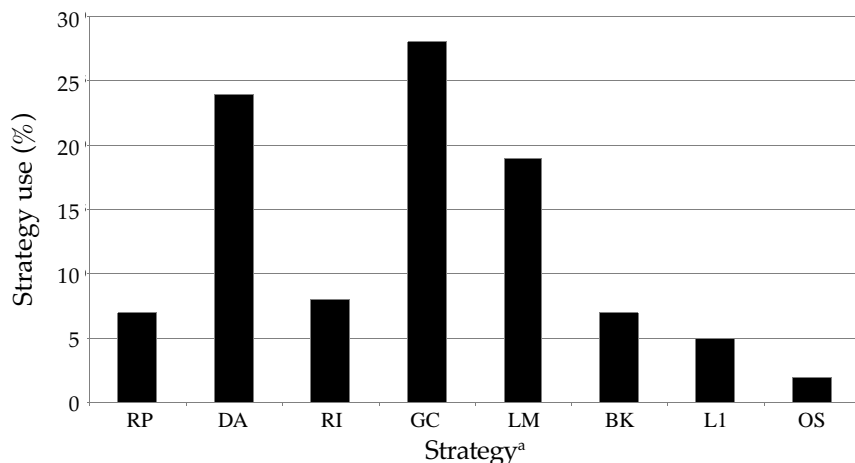
TABLE 5  
Frequency of Strategies Used, by Idiom

Idiom	Strategy							
	Repeating or paraphrasing idiom	Discussing and analyzing idiom	Requesting information	Guessing from context	Using literal meaning	Using background knowledge	Referring to L1 idiom	Using other strategies
To burn the candle at both ends	7	7	9	17	33	0	0	0
To pull the wool over someone's eyes	7	26	15	26	15	1	0	0
To have a chip on one's shoulders	4	12	9	13	19	8	0	0
To see eye to eye	10	25	7	23	14	10	7	3
To have a big mouth	2	7	4	21	7	8	14	0
To be suffering from burnout	4	8	3	13	28	19	4	0
To have something in the bag	4	10	2	18	15	9	0	0
What's cooking?	4	5	0	22	7	12	1	0
To have a green thumb	7	8	7	22	8	6	0	0
To rob the cradle	1	28	4	21	11	2	0	0
To be up the creek without a paddle	3	23	7	19	13	1	0	0
To let the cat out of the bag	7	10	5	16	10	10	0	6
To get off the ground	6	2	0	21	17	2	6	0
To tighten one's belt	7	7	6	19	7	2	8	2
To get sacked	2	10	1	20	10	2	0	0
To roll up one's sleeves	5	12	6	16	2	2	1	1
To see something through rose-colored glasses	8	34	3	7	20	3	8	1
To be a little frog in a big pond	3	33	2	17	2	0	12	9
Something is chicken feed	2	21	2	17	9	0	2	0
To stir up a hornet's nest	4	28	9	13	5	1	0	0
Total	97	316	101	361	252	98	63	22
% of all uses <sup>a</sup>	7%	24%	8%	28%	19%	7%	5%	2%

<sup>a</sup>Total strategy uses on all items = 1,310.



FIGURE 1  
Frequency of Use of Idiom Comprehension Strategies



<sup>a</sup>RP = repeating or paraphrasing the idiom; DA = discussing and analyzing the idiom; RI = requesting information; GC = guessing from context; LM = using the literal meaning of the idiom; BK = using background knowledge; L1 = referring to an L1 idiom; OS = using other strategies.

And thumb is a finger/  
So she's good with plants like this/  
This is what green thumb means/

**Discussing and analyzing the idiom (24%).** Participants often talked in general about the idiom and the context before venturing an interpretation. In employing this strategy they exercised their skills of logical thinking to solve the linguistic puzzle represented by the unknown L2 expression. Discussing and analyzing the idiom and situation may also have given the participants a way of buying more time to clarify their thoughts before having to come up with a meaning. In this regard, discussion was an artefact of the TA method, for normally NNSs would not verbalize their thinking upon encountering a new word or phrase. An example follows.

*Stimulus situation:* If you procrastinate, you will find yourself up the creek without a paddle. What does *up the creek without a paddle* mean?

Participant: I don't know *up the creek without a paddle* . . . Mh hhm/  
Creek is a small river/  
So . . . um . . . *up the creek* is very difficult/

Down the, down the creek is very easy /  
So we need, we must need a paddle /  
We, we are, if we have no paddle, we can't go up the creek  
on the boat /  
So it is a very difficult situation, and maybe impossible /

**Using the literal meaning of the idiom (19%).** The participants who employed this strategy were aware of the metaphorical aspect of idioms, and they concentrated on the literal meaning of the expressions as a key to the figurative meaning. Here is an illustration of this strategy at work.

*Stimulus situation:* Mr. Carson works as a teacher all day and works in a factory at night. His wife says he is burning the candle at both ends. What does *burning the candle at both ends* mean?

Participant: I guess that he, I suppose what it means is he is exhausting his resources /

He is working very . . . too hard /

Interviewer: How do you get this meaning?

Participant: I get the picture of what it would be /

The candle will have the two ends on /

And it's burning /

They [the ends] are burning at the same time /

You turn one on /

And then you turn the other one on /

And the wax would be melting quicker /

So I know that he [Mr. Carson] is working . . . working too much /

**Requesting information (8%).** The participants requested information when they did not know the meaning of a vocabulary item in the idiom or in the context. Some of the words that presented problems in comprehension were *chip* in *to have a chip on one's shoulder* (Idiom 3), *cradle* in *to rob the cradle* (Idiom 10), *paddle* in *to be up the creek without a paddle* (Idiom 11), and *hornet* in *to stir up a hornet's nest* (Idiom 20). The participants were given the meanings of these words if they asked for them in order to facilitate their efforts to understand the idioms, for the main research focus was on the thought processes that accompanied the unraveling of the meanings of the idioms. Certain vocabulary items seemed to have been difficult because they were low-frequency words that an NNS would seldom encounter in everyday discourse. Requests for information were often preceded by phrases denoting frustration, such as "I have never heard this idiom before," "I have no idea what this expression means," or "I don't know!" After a few seconds, the participant would ask for the meaning of a specific word and then try to figure out the meaning of the phrase.

**Repeating or paraphrasing the idiom (7%).** Many of the participants employed the strategy of repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, apparently to help anchor the expression in mind before they ventured a definition. Repeating could also have been an artefact of the TA process; because the participants were constantly urged to verbalize their thoughts, repeating might have been a way to gain time before a possible interpretation came to mind.

**Using background knowledge (7%).** This strategy refers to participants' making use of prior knowledge and associations to explain and clarify the idiom and its context. They remembered, for example, that they learned the idiom in a language class either in the U.S. or in their home countries. They indicated that they had heard the idiom for the first time on TV or in a song or that they might have heard their friends and acquaintances using the expression. Below are two interview excerpts exemplifying this strategy at work.

*Stimulus situation:* Pam needed a vacation because she was suffering from burnout. What does *suffering from burnout* mean?

Participant: I . . . I newly met this kind of idiom whenever I went [to] the dining halls/  
There are so many part-time students to work there/  
And one day I said, "I want this one, this one, this one" /  
And they said, "I'm burning out" /  
So I asked them what does mean "burning out"?/  
They explained: "I'm totally exhausted, I tired out, I don't have any power to work" /  
In this case uh living in here help me to guess the meaning and to and to understand this kind of idiom/

*Stimulus situation:* After dinner, John would go over to the mall to see what's cooking. What does *What's cooking?* mean?

Participant: I think my boyfriend might be using this [expression] often/  
Does this mean *What's going on?* /  
Interviewer: So you hear your boyfriend saying that?  
Participant: Right, but I've never asked him /  
But I learned the expression through hearing it all the time/

**Referring to L1 idioms (5%).** Sometimes the participants remembered expressions in their native languages that are identical or similar enough to the English idioms to aid in their interpretation. For example, the following Portuguese expressions served as keys to the meaning of several of the English idioms for the Portuguese native speaker.

- *To see eye to eye* (Idiom 4) equals *olho no olho* (eye to eye).
- *Big mouth* (Idiom 5) equals *boca grande* (big mouth).

- *Through rose-colored glasses* (Idiom 17) is similar to *O mundo é um mar de rosas* (The world is a sea of roses) and to *A vida não é um mar de rosas* (Life is not a sea of roses).
- *To stir up a hornet's nest* (Idiom 20) is similar to *Isto é como pôr a mão em um ninho de abelhas* (This is like putting your hand in a swarm of bees).

The Spanish speakers indicated that the following phrases in their native language helped them ascertain the meanings of the corresponding English expressions.

- *Big mouth* (Idiom 5) is the same as *una bocona*.
- *To tighten one's belt* (Idiom 14) corresponds to *Tenemos que ajustarnos los cinturones* (We have to tighten our belts).
- *A little frog in a big pond* (Idiom 18) is the mirror expression to *una rana pequeña en un lago muy grande* (a little frog in a very big lake).

The Japanese speakers found that the following Japanese phrases helped them with the English idioms.

- *To tighten one's belt* (Idiom 14) is similar to the transcribed Japanese phrase *saifu no himo o shimeru* (to tighten the string of the [money] purse).
- *A little frog in a big pond* (Idiom 18) is similar to *I no naka no kawazu* (a frog in a well).

A Russian phrase helped the speaker of this language understand the corresponding English idiom.

- *To see the world through rose-colored glasses* (Idiom 17) is similar to *smatrét na mír chérez rózovyye achí* (to look at the world through pink glasses).

**Other strategies (2%).** Two types of strategies came to light in this category. One was the personalized discussion of the idiom and the context in which it was found. In these instances the participant imagined or remembered an actual situation in which the expression could have been used appropriately. The second kind of strategy consisted of a type of meta-analysis about the nature of idioms, the way they function, and ways to unravel their meaning if recollection fails. Examples from the interview transcriptions follow.

*Stimulus situation:* Mother wants to buy a new house in the country. Father sees eye to eye with her. What does it mean to *see eye to eye*?

Participant: Well, I think about me and Marco when we wanna buy something/  
 Marco say, "I think it's good" /  
 And I say, "I think it's good, too" /  
 That mean eye to eye/

*Stimulus situation:* After getting laid off from the pen factory, George had to tighten his belt. What does *tighten his belt* mean?

Participant: *After getting laid off . . . uh . . . I don't know /  
Six or seven years I study English /  
And I think that English idiom has two meanings /  
One is physical meaning /  
The other is maybe mental meaning /  
But whenever I guess just physical meaning, I almost, I wrong /  
I try infer the, uh, mental, abstract meaning, or contrasting  
meaning /  
Then I guess the meaning and see context, too /*

## Successful Strategies

Thus far I have discussed the comprehension strategies used without considering whether or not the participants correctly guessed the meaning of the idiom. In this section I examine those strategies that led the participants to successfully interpret the idioms. Of the 360 total items (20 test items 3 18 participants), 200 were answered correctly (i.e., received a score of 3), representing a 56% success rate among the participants. In rank order the strategies leading to correct interpretations were guessing from the context to figure out the meaning of the expression (Strategy GC, leading to a correct answer 57% of the time), using the literal meaning of the idiom (Strategy LM, 22%), using background knowledge (Strategy BK, 12%), referring to an L1 idiom as a key to the meaning of the English idiom (Strategy L1, 8%), and using other strategies (Strategy OS, 1%) (see Table 6).

Although in many cases the participants used more than one strategy to succeed, only the one that led directly to the correct response was included in this count. The strategies of repeating or paraphrasing the idiom (Strategy RP), discussing and analyzing the idiom (Strategy DA), and requesting information about the idiom or its context (Strategy RI) are not shown in Table 6 because they represent preparatory strategies that allowed the participants to gain time, gather information, and clarify their thoughts before guessing the meaning of the expression. These three strategies are a way of marking time so that the respondent can sift through the new linguistic material contained in an expression while piecing together components that might lead to an interpretation.

An example of how Strategy DA can set up a correct guess is given below.

*Stimulus situation:* Pam needed a vacation because she was suffering from burnout. What does *suffering from burnout* mean?

Participant: *Suffering from burnout mean / [Strategy RP]*

TABLE 6

Comprehension Strategies Leading to Correct Answers, by Participant and Idiom

Idiom	Participant																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
To burn the candle at both ends	GC				LM	LM		LM		LM	GC	LM	LM	LM	GC			
To pull the wool over someone's eyes	GC				GC	GC				GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	LM	GC
To have a chip on one's shoulders	LM	L1	GC		GC	BK	OS	GC		GC			GC	BK				GC
To see eye to eye	L1	L1	BK	BK	BK	L1		GC	GC	GC	GC		BK	BK	GC	L1	GC	BK
To have a big mouth	BK	LM	L1	LM		BK		LM	GC	BK	LM	LM	LM	LM	GC	BK		GC
To be suffering from burnout	BK	GC	GC	GC	GC	BK	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	LM	LM	LM	LM	BK		GC
To have something in the bag	BK	GC	GC	BK	BK	BK	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	LM	LM	LM	LM	GC	BK	BK
What's cooking?	GC	GC		BK	BK	BK	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC
To have a green thumb	GC		LM	LM	LM	BK	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	LM
To rob the cradle	GC		GC	GC	GC	GC		GC		GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC
To be up the creek without a paddle				LM			GC			GC	LM	LM	LM	LM	GC			GC
To let the cat out of the bag		GC				BK		GC		GC	BK	BK	LM	LM				BK
To get off the ground				LM		GC	GC		GC	GC			LM	LM	BK			GC
To tighten one's belt		GC		L1	GC			GC	GC	GC			L1	GC			GC	GC
To get sacked	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	LM	LM	LM	LM	GC			BK
To roll up one's sleeves	LM	GC	L1	LM	L1	GC		GC		GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC
To see something through rose-colored glasses				LM	LM	OS	GC		GC	GC		LM	LM	GC	GC			L1
To be a little frog in a big pond			L1	L1		LM	GC		GC	GC	GC	L1	L1	L1			GC	GC
Something is chicken feed	LM	GC	LM		LM	GC		GC	GC	GC	GC	L1	L1	L1			GC	LM
To stir up a hornet's nest				LM		GC	LM	LM		LM	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC	GC

Note: Each code in the body of the table represents a strategy that led the participant to a correct response to an item on the Idiom Recognition Test. GC = guessing from context, LM = using the literal meaning of the idiom, BK = using background knowledge, L1 = referring to an L1 idiom, OS = using other strategies. Blank cells represent incorrect answers.

I really don't know /  
But it sounds that Pam was really, really tired /  
Sounds like you don't have any energy /  
You already spent everything you could / [Strategy DA]  
You are totally stressed and are to now burn out all your  
energy / [Strategy LM]  
Sounds like Pam is stressed and needs vacation / [Strategy GC]

When ranked by the frequency with which they led to correct answers, the five successful strategies (Table 6) fall into the same order as they do when ranked by frequency of strategy use in general (Table 5). Even though the successful strategy is the one used to arrive at a correct answer, participants often tried several approaches along the way before they came up with the successful one.

### Research Question 3: To What Extent Do the Theoretical Models of L1 Comprehension of Idioms Apply to the Comprehension of Idioms by L2 Speakers?

A native speaker of English reacts to an idiomatic expression in a split second, rarely needing to stop and deliberate on its meaning. On the other hand, L2 learners who encounter an unknown idiom are at a distinct disadvantage because they do not possess the native speaker's degree of linguistic competence. The L2 learner must somehow screen a series of possible meanings in order to arrive at a plausible interpretation; think through any number of possible significations; and take into account the context, the literal meaning of the expression, and the learner's own experiences in the target culture. Because the thought processes of the L2 learner are not instantaneous in recognizing an idiom but are slower, more deliberate, and therefore more tractable than those of the native speaker, the researcher can follow these thought processes by using TA methodology in an effort to gain a better understanding of how the L2 learner arrives at an interpretation of the expression.

Upon encountering an unknown idiomatic phrase, L2 learners are placed in a position of having to solve a comprehension problem by experimenting and evaluating possible answers or solutions through trial and error. That is to say, L2 learners must develop an interpretive approach, a heuristic method, for solving the linguistic problem. The term *heuristic* can denote both a procedure and a learning method (*Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1994, s.v. *heuristic*). As a procedure, *heuristic* means that a problem is solved by discovery and experimentation in a trial-and-error, rule-of-thumb manner rather than according to

a planned route specified by an algorithmic approach. In teaching, *heuristic* implies that learners are encouraged to learn, discover, understand, or solve problems on their own by experimenting, by evaluating possible answers or solutions, or through trial and error.

The results of the present study show that the participants employed a heuristic approach in solving the linguistic problem of finding the meaning of the idioms. They usually used a variety of strategies, and they were not afraid to experiment and search for meaning through trial and error. The heuristic model seems to capture best how L2 learners process idioms. The models for L1 idiom comprehension—the idiom-list hypothesis, the lexical representation hypothesis, the direct access model, and the composition model—are each too limited in scope to account for the wide variety of strategies employed by the participants in the present study, although these models adequately describe several of the specific strategies.

The idiom-list and the lexical representation hypotheses, which state that a person considers the literal meaning of the idiom, describe Strategy BK; the direct access model may account for the instances when the participants were able to come up with the correct meaning immediately without referring to any strategy that helped them; and the compositional model may be a good description of Strategy DA, whereby the participant discussed and analyzed the idiom and context before giving an interpretation. Evidence for use of the other model or strategy mentioned in previous research, using L1 idioms as a key to the L2 expressions (Irujo, 1986a), was apparent in the results of this study, although the participants did not frequently employ this strategy (only 5% of the time). Kellerman (1983) suggests that learners have perceptions about what is transferable from their native language and attempt to keep the L2 “reasonable” and “transparent” (p. 129). L1 structures such as idioms work against the principle of what has core meaning in the L1 and are not readily transferred to an L2. This may account for the finding that reference to the participants’ L1 was not a major strategy in the idiom comprehension process in the present study.

Overall, the strategies employed by the participants in this study can be divided into two groups according to their frequency of use. The first group consists of the three most frequently used strategies, which were used 71% of the time (guessing from context, using the literal meaning of the idiom to understand the figurative meaning, and discussing and analyzing the idiom to gain knowledge of its figurative meaning). The second group comprises the remaining five, less frequently used strategies, which were employed 29% of the time (requesting information, using background knowledge, referring to an L1 idiom, repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, and using other strategies). Because the comprehension process is a dynamic not a set procedure, and because it



varies both from individual to individual and within the individual, one or several strategies can be used at any time. The heuristic model allows the analyst to account for the quality of variability inherent in the process of understanding L2 idioms.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Because they constitute a special language learning problem for NNSs, idiomatic expressions may deserve special attention in classroom instruction. Some commercial instructional materials focusing on teaching idioms do exist (cf. Collis, 1994; Feare, 1997; Makkai et al., 1995); however, language teachers frequently must create their own materials. Articles by Cooper (1998) and Irujo (1986b) offer practical suggestions for teaching idioms that are easy to incorporate in classroom instruction.<sup>1</sup> Another way to approach the task of L2 idiom acquisition is to offer learners a method for comprehending the unfamiliar idioms they encounter. The TA data from the present study reveal how learners tackle the problem of comprehending idioms, and this procedure—thinking out loud as one solves a linguistic problem—can be adapted as a teaching tool. Although the TA method and analysis system has been suggested as a way of helping students improve their L2 reading skills (Brown, 1996; Hosenfeld, Arnold, Kirchofer, Laciura, & Wilson, 1981), it has not been applied to developing the skill of comprehending L2 idioms.

As Brown (1996) points out, the TA procedure can be adapted to an instructional setting with either a single student or an entire class. In the case of a single student, the instructor can have the student think aloud about how he or she comes up with the meaning of idioms presented in a context, such as those in Appendix A. At the same time, the instructor can lead the student to the correct answer by giving hints about the meaning of the idiom. As the student tries to come up with the idiom's meaning, the instructor can demonstrate that using a variety of comprehension strategies, such as those discussed here (e.g., using context clues and thinking about the literal meaning of the expression), can lead to a correct interpretation. Thus, under the guidance of the instructor, the student can rehearse a heuristic approach to idiom comprehension. One hopes that the skills developed during this type of rehearsal will transfer to situations in which students have to navigate the process of idiom

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<sup>1</sup> A rich source for American English idioms, suggestions for teaching them, and references is the Internet. *MetaCrawler* (<http://www.metacrawler.com/>) and *Inference* (<http://www.inference.com/>) are good search engines for locating information on idioms. The search terms to use are *teaching idioms* and *American idioms*.

interpretation by themselves. Below is an excerpt from one of the interviews in this study that has been restructured slightly to show how the TA method might be adapted for pedagogical use.

*Stimulus situation:* The salesman sold Mrs. Smith a broken dishwasher. He pulled the wool over her eyes. What does *to pull the wool over someone's eyes* mean?

Yoshi: Oh, it's very painful!

Instructor: What do you mean, Yoshi?

Yoshi: Because sometimes I get dust in my eyes, and I have a hard time to get dust out of my eyes?

Instructor: How does this relate to the expression?

Yoshi: I think it is pretty much a similar situation; so if I pull the wool over the eyes, is my eyes covered?

Instructor: Yes. That's right. How does this relate to Mrs. Smith?

Yoshi: He, the salesman, disguise people.

Instructor: He disguises people.

Yoshi: Yes. Mrs. Smith sees cross-eyed; so we, she can't see good. We are easily cheat, cheated. Mrs. Smith is cheated.

Instructor: Great! So the idiom means to cheat someone?

Yoshi: Yes. I think.

In the present study, most of the participants were very interested in participating in the TA protocols on idiom recognition and always wanted to know the meanings of the expressions. They were poignantly aware of the pitfalls inherent in understanding L2 idioms and wanted more help in this area, especially a plan of attack for dealing with the frustration caused by L2 idioms.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study investigated the on-line processing strategies used by a sample of NNSs of English who were asked to interpret the meanings of selected English idioms presented in a written context. From the data elicited by the IRT, eight idiom-processing strategies were identified, of which three—guessing from the context, using the literal meaning of the idiom, and discussing and analyzing the idiom—were used the most often, whereas the other five—referring to an L1 idiom, requesting information about the idiom and context, repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, using background knowledge, and using other strategies—were in evidence less. The best model for explaining idiom comprehension was not found among the known L1 idiom comprehension models but is a heuristic model whereby the NNS, upon encountering an unknown

expression, employs a variety of strategies in a trial-and-error fashion to interpret L2 idioms.

Further research might expand on the study described here in the following ways.

1. Additional studies of the on-line processing of idioms should involve a sample larger than the 18 participants included in this study.
2. The number of idioms tested—20—was relatively small. Other studies might include a larger number of frequently used idioms to see if those that cause NNSs particular problems in understanding can be identified.
3. Other studies might explore the role of the context in which the idioms are presented to the participants. The idioms were presented in a rich context in this study, and one of the findings was that the use of context was the major strategy employed by the participants to arrive at the meaning of the expressions. Presenting the idioms in a nonsupportive context to see which strategies would be most frequently used might lend a different perspective on how NNSs deal with figurative expressions.
4. The relationship between background or external factors and knowledge of idioms is an area for further study. These factors could be grouped into those dealing with the workplace, those dealing with the family and neighbors, and those dealing with ties to the U.S. External factors measure the degree of identity with the L2 society and culture, which, in turn, may contribute significantly to knowledge of the idioms in the target language.

Anyone who has tried to learn to speak an L2 sooner or later realizes that idioms are a stumbling block. Learners are often at a loss to understand conversations because comprehension may hinge on the meaning of a key idiom, and when learners incorrectly use an idiomatic phrase, native speakers often look amused or, worse, puzzled because they do not understand. Avoiding the use of idioms gives language a bookish, stilted, unimaginative tone. Learning to use idioms is therefore extremely important for achieving command of authentic language. As a consequence, to help learners gain mastery over this important aspect of their L2, instructional materials and teaching techniques need to be based on an understanding of how learners comprehend idioms.

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## APPENDIX A

### Idiom Recognition Test

1. Mr. Carson works as a teacher all day and works in a factory at night. His wife says he is burning the candle at both ends. What does it mean to be *burning the candle at both ends*?  
[Answer: to be doing too many things at the same time]
2. The salesman sold Mrs. Smith a broken dishwasher. He pulled the wool over her eyes. What does it mean to *pull the wool over someone's eyes*?  
[Answer: to try to trick someone]
3. Billy often gets into fights with other kids at school. His mother says he has a chip on his shoulder. What does it mean to *have a chip on one's shoulder*?  
[Answer: to always have a bad attitude]
4. Mother wants to buy a new house in the country. Father sees eye to eye with her. What does it mean to *see eye to eye*?  
[Answer: to agree with someone about something]
5. Because Betsy cannot keep a secret, other people call her a big mouth. What does *big mouth* mean?  
[Answer: a person who talks too much]
6. Pam needed a vacation because she was suffering from burnout. What does *suffering from burnout* mean?  
[Answer: being exhausted]
7. After coming back from her interview, Stacey knew she had the job in the bag. What does *in the bag* mean?  
[Answer: assured of a successful outcome]
8. After dinner, John would go over to the mall to see what's cooking. What does *What's cooking?* mean?  
[Answer: What's happening?]
9. People say that Jennifer can keep any plant alive with her green thumb. What does *green thumb* mean?  
[Answer: a way with plants]
10. Robert knew that he was robbing the cradle by dating a sixteen-year-old girl. What does *robbing the cradle* mean?  
[Answer: being romantically interested in someone who is too young]
11. If you procrastinate, you will find yourself up the creek without a paddle. What does *up the creek without a paddle* mean?  
[Answer: in serious trouble]
12. By mistake, Kay let the cat out of the bag when she revealed the surprise. What does *to let the cat out of the bag* mean?  
[Answer: to tell a secret]
13. Many small businesses can be successful once they get off the ground. What does *get off the ground* mean?  
[Answer: get a good start]

14. After getting laid off from the pen factory, George had to tighten his belt. What does *tighten his belt* mean?  
[Answer: live on less money than usual]
15. We decided that Molly was a bad worker and that she would have to get sacked. What does *get sacked* mean?  
[Answer: to be fired]
16. The researcher had to roll up his sleeves to get the proposal in on time. What does *roll up his sleeves* mean?  
[Answer: to prepare to work hard]
17. Depressed people should look at the world through rose-colored glasses. What does *through rose-colored glasses* mean?  
[Answer: as good and pleasant]
18. Looking up at the sky can make you feel like a little frog in a big pond. What does *a little frog in a big pond* mean?  
[Answer: an unimportant person in a large group]
19. To some people, a thousand dollars is chicken feed. What does *chicken feed* mean?  
[Answer: an insignificant amount of money]
20. Mentioning the abortion issue just stirred up a hornet's nest. What does *to stir up a hornet's nest* mean?  
[Answer: to make many people angry]

## APPENDIX B

### Directions for Data Collection

In this experiment we are interested in recording on tape what you think about when you figure out the meanings of 20 idioms in English. An idiom is an expression or phrase that doesn't mean what it says: For example, *You hit the nail on the head* is an idiom that means *You got that right*. It doesn't mean that you hit the nail with a hammer. I am going to give you 20 cards with idioms on them, and I am going to ask you to THINK ALOUD as you figure out the meanings of the idioms. What I mean by *think aloud* is that I want you to tell me EVERYTHING you are thinking from the time you first see the idiom until you tell me what it means. Some questions going through your mind after you see the idioms might be: How does the context explain the meaning of the idiom? Is there a similar expression in my native language? Does the literal meaning of the idiom relate to its figurative meaning? Does a certain word give away the meaning of the idiom? Does the idiom remind you of something that you heard someone say before? I would like you to talk aloud CONSTANTLY from the time I present each expression on the card until you have given your final answer. Please don't try to plan out what you say. Just act as if you are alone in the room speaking to yourself. It is most important that you keep talking. If you are silent for any long period of time, I will ask you to talk. Here is a practice run: John always goes to bed at 9:30 each night because he remembers his mother saying, "The early bird gets the worm."

What does *The early bird gets the worm* mean to you? Tell me what thoughts go through your mind as you figure out the meaning of this expression.

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# THE FORUM

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The *TESOL Quarterly* invites commentary on current trends or practices in the TESOL profession. It also welcomes responses or rebuttals to any articles or remarks published here in The Forum or elsewhere in the *Quarterly*.

## Comments on Liz Hamp-Lyons' "Ethical Test Preparation Practice: The Case of the TOEFL"

### Polemic Gone Astray: A Corrective to Recent Criticism of TOEFL Preparation

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■ This article is a form of argumentative dialectic to Liz Hamp-Lyons' Forum commentary (Vol. 32, No. 2), "Ethical Test Preparation Practice: The Case of the TOEFL." It is argumentative because, as coordinators of a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation series and writers of a wide variety of TOEFL preparation materials, we take a much different position on the issue of the TOEFL and test preparation, disagreeing strenuously with many of the assumptions and dichotomies in Hamp-Lyons' piece. It is dialectical because it springs into existence only as a result of the vital questions that Hamp-Lyons has shown the care and insight to raise, and we suspect that our own position as represented here will likely evolve (rather than fossilize) in the ongoing debate.

To begin, Hamp-Lyons extrapolates most of her observations on TOEFL preparation materials from a rather small and decidedly unrepresentative sample of five TOEFL texts "selected at random" in 1996 from "the market" (p. 331) (presumably English-only books on the North American market, for the texts themselves remain uncited). Based upon this haphazard sample, she draws sweeping conclusions about the state of TOEFL preparation materials worldwide. In contrast to Hamp-Lyons' methods and findings, our recent study of TOEFL preparation texts (Hilke & Wadden, 1997) focused on widely used TOEFL texts



(based on estimated sales) in a particular region (Japan, the largest foreign market for the TOEFL). It appears that the 10 texts examined at length in our study (two English-Japanese editions and eight international English-only editions) contrast markedly with those from which Hamp-Lyons derives her generalizations. A much larger study of the leading TOEFL preparation texts in five countries (Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and Vietnam) that we are now preparing further bears out these differences. Regrettably, our extensive search of TOEFL literature has (as of December 1998) failed to turn up any comparable studies of TOEFL preparation materials, and we are therefore forced to rely principally upon our own primary data in the following discussion.

Our 1997 study revealed that TOEFL preparation materials vary dramatically in quality, as Hamp-Lyons points out, particularly in the accuracy of their representation of the TOEFL. Here, however, much of our agreement ceases. For instance, whereas Hamp-Lyons observes that the volumes she randomly picked up offered exercises and practice tests but “no preceding material to teach the point tested by each item” (p. 333), nearly all of the widely used texts in our study provided instruction, examples, and explanations prior to exercises and tests. Whereas Hamp-Lyons found that only one of the five books she examined had “consistent explanations” for why each distractor in its practice tests was “wrong” (p. 333), all of the books treated in our study provided focused explanations for the correct answer, and more than half offered additional explanation for specific distractors when explanation of the correct answer was insufficient to help users understand the point. Whereas Hamp-Lyons concluded that only one of the books she appraised included “any significant amount of helpful test-taking material” (p. 333; referring to more global test-taking strategies), the majority of TOEFL texts that we examined (and that TOEFL preparation students, at least in East Asia, purchase and use) offered some such instruction. Admittedly, the operative word here is *helpful*, and the operative question, helpful to whom?

Hamp-Lyons concludes that the test-taking material in the books she surveyed was “unlikely to be of much help on other kinds of tests, such as essay tests or oral proficiency interviews” (p. 333). Yet why would the discerning student-consumer purchase a TOEFL preparation text focusing on strategies appropriate for oral proficiency or essay tests when such exams are not typically part of the TOEFL? Hamp-Lyons goes on to lambaste the preparation books, their authors, and their publishers because the books are not helpful in providing a ready syllabus for teachers of TOEFL courses. But is it possible that what is helpful to students preparing to take a test (one that may, fairly or unfairly, decide whether they have access to a university education in North America) could in reality be quite different from that which is useful to classroom

teachers whose pedagogical goal is “instructed acquisition” (p. 336)? Hamp-Lyons defines their sanctioned aim as instructed acquisition rather than self-guided activation of lexical structures, vocabulary, and language skills, which many students (especially those in Asia) have already learned formally in long years of classroom English study.<sup>1</sup>

Like her methodology and inferences, several of Hamp-Lyons’ observations on the TOEFL itself appear to be far wide of the mark. She observes, for instance, that “the test is not intended to reveal or reflect a model of language in use” (p. 332). This assertion is simply not true—at least as regards the reading and listening sections of the exam. As former TOEFL developer and then-doctoral candidate Peirce explained in her aptly titled article “Demystifying the TOEFL Reading Test” (1992), passages chosen for the reading section are not written for the TOEFL but drawn from “academic magazines, books, newspapers, and encyclopedias.” The “rationale” for using these sources for materials and for refraining from altering their organization and wording is, as Peirce put it, to present TOEFL takers with “authentic language” and to expose them to the original prose of “a variety of writers” (pp. 668–669). The model of language such prose is intended to reflect, contrary to Hamp-Lyons’ claim, is clearly identified in the information booklets distributed to prospective test takers; namely, prose passages that are “similar in topic and style to those that students are likely to encounter in North American universities and colleges” (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 1997/1998, p. 11). Our 1997 analysis generally corroborates this claim in identifying the common topic areas from which the passages are drawn (natural science, natural history, North American history, and the social sciences); these subjects—and the lexical density and vocabulary load of the passage—do appear to reflect the types and topics of readings that foreign students are likely to encounter at North American universities, especially in the general education and introductory courses taken during their first or second year of study. Of course, the passages in the TOEFL are culled from longer texts, but this hardly renders them inauthentic.

The talks, conversations, and minilectures of the TOEFL similarly assume an actual model of language in use, though it may not be quite as compelling or transparent as in the reading section. This model is the use of standard, idiomatic, and communicative North American English such as students are likely to encounter in daily life in and around their future institutions. True enough, the conversations and talks in this section are not genuine in the sense that they have been taped live and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Helgesen’s (1993) excellent discussion of the critical role that activation of previously learned vocabulary, structures, and content should play in the language learning of Japanese college students.

then rebroadcast at their original length, but they nonetheless clearly represent and even reveal (slang and profanity aside) the language of the dormitories, classrooms, libraries, museums, banks, and offices students will contend with in their desired place of study. To be sure, the various regional dialects of American English in use (e.g., those of Brooklyn, Boston, the deep South) are not represented, but this hardly justifies characterizing both the exam itself and the currently available preparation materials as embodying “discrete chunks of language rules and vocabulary items without context and even much co-text” (p. 332). This latter criticism may have held partly true for the pre-1995 vocabulary section, in which discrete vocabulary items were tested with virtually no regard for context; however, one badly needed change in the exam that ETS (the company that produces the exam) had the foresight and resolve to enact has been the outright elimination of discrete vocabulary testing and the embedding of vocabulary questions within the current reading section, where key words and phrases have substantial context and co-text. Likewise, to conclude from Hamp-Lyons’ small sample that preparation texts invariably fail to provide context and co-text is unfair; nearly every recent volume we have examined features vocabulary that is nested, as in the TOEFL, in textual passages, though authenticity and accuracy again vary drastically among texts.

In claiming that the TOEFL and TOEFL preparation materials are based on discrete chunks of language rules and frequently without co-text or context, perhaps Hamp-Lyons mainly has in mind the Structure and Written Expression section of the exam (the shortest of the three sections). Here, her charge contains its largest grain of truth, and it is this section of the exam that is most in need of revision. (In fact, in our view the so-called Structure and Written Expression section should be completely eliminated and replaced with an improved, more substantial version of the Test of Written English). Yet even if one arbitrarily limits Hamp-Lyons’ critique to this section, she appears to overextrapolate from the TOEFL preparation texts she perused and sharply oversteps the facts when she surmises that

the only strategy for deciding what language areas to focus on would seem to be to work out the probable frequency of different types of items or probes across multiple, actual TOEFL forms. But even this strategy leaves the teacher with nothing more than a laundry list of grammatical or lexical points to be covered. (p. 334)

Many preparation texts indeed inadequately treat this decontextualized section of the exam, but this does not mean that the test presents a mere “laundry list” of grammatical and lexical mistakes. Even this most dubious substest of the TOEFL focuses largely on commonly occurring language errors that significantly impede fluency and accuracy (e.g.,

incomplete sentences, pronoun errors, subject-verb agreement) that are distracting (if not unacceptable) to many academic readers, particularly the North American professors who will read and grade the students' future written work. Although L1 compositionists have long abandoned error correction as their principal focus, cutting-edge contemporary writing teachers nevertheless include in their pedagogical brief a commitment to cultivating students' awareness of the widely subscribed to (and admittedly politicized) conventions of written English, if sometimes only for the pragmatic reason that less enlightened faculty (and administrators) elsewhere in the university will not tolerate what they view as work riddled with repeated and egregious violations of grammar and usage. In any event, it is worth noting that this section of the exam is the least formidable subtest to many TOEFL takers (especially those in Asia), who already have impressive grammatical knowledge of English (often more than their native-speaking ESOL instructors) but who need practice utilizing and focusing this knowledge within the rhetorical and epistemological framework of the test, precisely the type of practice potentially offered by well-designed and accurate TOEFL preparation materials.

Among the most important and provocative questions that Hamp-Lyons justly raises is concern about whether TOEFL preparation courses "actually do improve scores" (p. 331). She cites an absence of empirical evidence to support her skepticism and astutely points to an area in which research is badly needed. Yet here, too, several cautionary points are in order. First, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, as Carl Sagan used to intone against creationist views of evolution that tried to shift the spotlight to missing parts of the fossil record. A great deal of data exist around the world at schools and companies that offer TOEFL preparation courses, but those data need to be gathered, screened for bias, and carefully analyzed. Second, beyond abundant common sense about the value of preparing for a test, ETS's own research suggests (albeit inconclusively) that practice improves performance, as the test scores of examinees who simply retake the TOEFL, with or without the use of TOEFL preparation materials, have consistently been found to increase (see, e.g., Wilson, 1987). Third, our own data in a study we are currently conducting at a liberal arts college in Japan suggest that a mere 20 hours of TOEFL preparation focusing on skill and language activation and select vocabulary acquisition can decisively raise scores; our preliminary analysis indicates that 200 students who took such a course showed an average score gain of 65 points.<sup>2</sup> Hamp-Lyons caps her observations on the current lack of evidence by laying the "burden of

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<sup>2</sup>We are at present replicating the preliminary study and working to factor out some of the intervening experience variables in the experimental group.

proof" (p. 331) for the efficacy of TOEFL preparation study squarely on the doorstep of the publishers and writers of TOEFL preparation materials. We agree that research is desperately needed, but not by the textbook-publishing industry or the authors of TOEFL preparation materials—those whom Hamp-Lyons excoriates—but rather by independent-minded academic researchers.

Yet another shortcoming of Hamp-Lyons' critique of TOEFL preparation is that it neglects to take into account the distinct contexts and cultures of the students who take the TOEFL. Japan, for instance, like several other East Asian countries, possesses a veritable culture of testing with roots stretching back to the imperial examinations of 12th-century China. Even today in Japan, results on a wide array of tests largely determine the course of one's life—success on tests smooths the way for everything from entrance to the right kindergarten to lifetime employment in a prestigious corporation. The psychological dimension of these pervasive cultural practices can scarcely be overestimated. Possessing the proper qualification is not only essential for demonstrating one's achievement and worth but indeed often a precursor to the self-confidence needed to perform well. As peculiar as it may sound to someone from a different culture, achieving a benchmark test score on the TOEFL certifies the right of Japanese students to have confidence in their English ability, and having this sense of confidence encourages students to academically and communicatively use the language (e.g., by studying abroad), setting up a positive spiral that leads to ever-greater improvements in the students' overall English competency. Although this type of positive washback is particularly prominent in countries with strong testing cultures and although TOEFL preparation classes and self-study materials can play an important role in promoting it, critical debate on testing issues often takes place in the abstract (or at least within the confines of the quantitative paradigm) and tends to ignore culturally specific factors such as these.

More troubling than Hamp-Lyons' explicit claims and allegations are the deep-seated assumptions and skewed dichotomies that lie behind her argument. For instance, she doubts that a text that follows the TOEFL's format (i.e., is faithful to the form and content of the test) can be "credible as a learning experience" and concludes that "all the textbooks [she] surveyed were at the unethical/indefensible end of the scales" (p. 334) that she devised and drew on to evaluate them. She contends that at present teaching time and student energy are "diverted from mainstream, well-designed language classes . . . into unproductive test-mimicking exercises" (p. 335) and posits a dichotomy between "the real business of learning the language" versus the distraction of "mastering item types for the test instead" (p. 329). These conclusions follow, of course, from the faulty methods and questionable observations we have

critiqued above. If one wrongly posits that the TOEFL does not reflect or represent a model of language in use, doubts that the activation of the wide variety of language and skills needed to perform well on the exam will increase a TOEFL score, and employs a small arbitrarily gathered sample of textbooks to allege that TOEFL preparation materials present a mere “laundry list” (p. 334) of grammatical and lexical points, then one can arrive at what appears to be a predetermined destination. From there it is but a short step to the moralistic binary of the good classroom teacher who is ethical and the nefarious test preparation teacher whose *modus operandi* is “boosting scores without mastery” and “coaching merely for score gain” (p. 334) (itself a contradiction given Hamp-Lyons’ skepticism that scores can be boosted). One disturbing corollary of this dualistic thinking is the patronizing attitude Hamp-Lyons appears to take toward TOEFL preparation students (most of whom are adult learners) when she assumes that they must be taught by a teacher in order to learn and even to learn how to learn, as evidenced by her declaration that “few learners” in the many countries where TOEFL preparation books are sold have been “trained in the skills of autonomous learning” (p. 332). Such a posture, it would seem, presupposes that college- and graduate school-bound students in cultures all around the globe are incapable of self-guided learning but need a properly certified language teaching professional not only to help them acquire language but also to teach them how to teach themselves.

Finally, the most dubious and perhaps best-hidden proposition of Hamp-Lyons’ broadside against TOEFL preparation materials and materials writers is that it replaces a cause with an effect. Long one of ESL’s more tenacious and perceptive critics, Hamp-Lyons uncharacteristically shies away from direct criticism of ETS, the nonprofit megacorporation that manufactures and markets the TOEFL (along with the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Graduate Record Examination, the Graduate Management Admission Test, and other tests) and peddles its own preparation materials for a test that it (like Hamp-Lyons) claims cannot be prepared for. She further turns a blind eye to the thousands of North American colleges and universities that indiscriminately and imprudently use the TOEFL as their principal initial criterion for determining admission. Indeed, it is here that the true washback takes place. Because of these admission practices, students must study for and perform well on the exam if they are to have access to higher education in North America. Highly motivated and discerning students will pursue this goal in the most effective way possible, and that is not likely to be in the teacher-fronted classroom focusing on “instructed acquisition” of strictly “communicative” English (p. 336). Given these conditions neither of the students’ choosing nor of the material writers’ making, we question whether the solution is to call in the TESOL regulators, mandate

classroom instruction (or books designed for the classroom), and issue teaching licenses to TOEFL preparation instructors. A better approach, we suggest, may be to critically educate students as to which materials are the most accurate, representative, and appropriate for their own interests and to encourage and empower them in achieving their own educational goals.

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## The Author Responds . . .

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■ I was delighted to read Paul Wadden and Robert Hilke's response to my Forum commentary and to have the opportunity to respond to it. Their response is important, first, because it continues the airing of a very important issue; second, because they provide citations to lead interested readers to welcome evidence that not all Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) textbooks are as problematic as those I analyzed; and third, because it provides opportunities for me to clarify several important points that were evidently not clear enough in my commentary.

I first stress that the commentary was a drastically reduced version of my original submission. The full article contains details of the five textbooks I analyzed, all of which are from major (North American) publishers and sell in huge numbers every year, not only in North America but all over the world (including, in most cases, Japan). I agreed with *TESOL Quarterly's* editor that my purpose was not to single out any individual authors and that the books should be unidentified. Length restrictions required the removal of the detailed framework of descrip-

tors and the scores for each text as well as the criteria for ethicality in test preparation materials, which I arrived at not by “devising them” myself but by combining two similar sets of criteria from experts in the field of educational measurement (Mehrens & Kaminsky, 1989; Popham, 1991; both were displayed in my original paper at the Language Testing Research Colloquium in 1996 and cited in my commentary). As a consequence of these deletions, the article is inevitably less than complete and satisfactory. But a more important clarification is that its purpose was not to attack the TOEFL or the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The purpose was, rather, to direct critical attention toward all unethical test preparation materials, and only unethical ones. I have in fact seen some excellent test preparation materials (sadly, none for the TOEFL yet, but I have not seen Wadden and Hilke’s). However, I believe there is a distinction between test preparation that enables test takers to approach the test with a clear understanding of its structure, rules, and response requirements (such as what type of pencil to use or whether guessing penalties apply) and test preparation that comprises practice on imitated forms or old copies of the test without teaching the language in use. The former is both ethical and essential, as Wadden and Hilke agree; the latter is educationally unsound, and the more closely the material approximates to the actual test, the more reason there is to question its ethicality.

I now attempt some clarification of Wadden and Hilke’s specific points. First, Wadden and Hilke direct considerable attention to my characterization of the TOEFL as not reflecting a model of language in use; however, they misinterpret my use of the term *model*. I use the term not to refer to examples of good language (as in *a model text*) but to refer to an empirically derived, theory-based construct that explains how the English language works—a model in the scientific sense; for example, Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence or Bachman’s (1990) model of communicative language ability. I note that in their work toward TOEFL 2000, ETS researchers and advisers are putting considerable emphasis on developing a test that will enact a viable model of language in use.

Second, Wadden and Hilke’s question, “Why would the discerning student-consumer purchase a TOEFL preparation text focusing on strategies appropriate for [other kinds of] tests . . . ?” is a wholly reasonable one. But my criticism is not mainly about this question. To the extent that it is, the reasons are related to the view that exam preparation could—and should—be a rich opportunity for teaching the language because the external motivation focuses learners’ attention wonderfully. I would also argue that few people are discerning consumers when it comes to high-stakes tests and success on them. Most people’s decisions about which tests to take are based on the test’s *surrender*



*value*—what barriers it buys the way through—rather than on its excellence of design, appropriateness to the context the test taker seeks access to, goodness-of-fit to the best knowledge in language in use, or even its ability to predict success in the target context. This strategy can only be called discerning if discernment is based on expedience and not qualities such as excellence, appropriateness, and effectiveness. In my own (admittedly very limited) survey of TOEFL preparation texts, none of the above criteria for consumer decision making were addressed by the authors or publishers. Stimulated by Wadden and Hilke's critique, I have looked at all the TOEFL preparation materials I could find in Hong Kong and found only one textbook that could be said to address any of them.

Looking again at TOEFL materials brought me to my third point: I am reminded again of the assumptions made by TOEFL preparation texts (and, apparently, by Wadden and Hilke) that TOEFL takers are capable of self-guided learning in the context of a high-stakes test. Wadden and Hilke accuse me of being "patronizing" and of assuming that (adult) learners are not capable of self-guided learning. My comments were based not on an assumption but on research (including good empirical studies currently being carried out by my own doctoral students into the effectiveness of self-access learning) supporting the value of having a professional language teacher to support learning in classrooms and in self-access contexts and on studies of the value of learning-to-learn approaches in English language teaching.

The fourth point is perhaps the most serious one. In response to my comment that the evidence that (TOEFL) test preparation materials improve test scores does not exist, Wadden and Hilke offer two very vague arguments: the comment that ETS research suggests that test practice may improve scores (although whether test practice improves performance is a different question from whether [any particular] test preparation materials improve scores) and reference to their own work, which I look forward to reading. Given the gigantic income of the test preparation industry, it seems a sorry state of affairs that such forthright proponents of test preparation materials and practices can offer so little evidence of value for money. What portion of the profits of this industry is being ploughed back into ensuring product excellence and efficacy? The drug industry, for example, is held accountable to high standards and commits a large proportion of its profits to research into the effectiveness and safety of its own products and to the development of improved products. Drug companies must prove that their products improve medical conditions without causing an unacceptable level of side effects; why shouldn't companies that market test preparation materials similarly be required to prove that their products improve scores without causing detrimental effects such as curricular alignment

and raising scores beyond the student's actual ability? I cannot accept Wadden and Hilke's argument that the burden of proof rests not with the developers and profit makers but with "independent-minded academic researchers." Where would these researchers get the money to carry out the research? Why should public money be spent on this (even assuming the money was available) when the authors and publishers are making such large profits? I suggested that TESOL as the field's professional organization, and as one committed to protecting the interests of language learners everywhere, should set standards for the test preparation industry, partly because of the economic truth that only a large professional body can afford to do so and partly because accreditation by TESOL, should a test preparation text achieve it, would be a strong (and marketable) affirmation of quality. TESOL accredits language programs and teacher education programs; why not test preparation materials? States and colleges license language teachers; why not license test preparation teachers? Surely the authors of test preparation materials do not consider themselves above or outside the same kinds of quality assurance expectations and mechanisms that the rest of the education sector has accepted?

Another assumption that I did not explore in my article needs to be questioned: that raised scores, should they occur after test preparation or practice, are meaningful. I know of no research into this assumption, but I have encountered case after case of college admissions advisors and English language programs that treat TOEFL scores from different countries differentially. Most common among these differences is the tendency to take TOEFL scores from Japan and Korea with a very large grain of salt. The folk wisdom holds that TOEFL scores from Japan tend to be 20–30 points above the test taker's actual language ability. This seems to be about the amount that practice and preparation materials can raise scores without boosting mastery of the language. Wadden and Hilke rightly point out that this is because students have learned "lexical structures, vocabulary, and language skills . . . in long years of classroom English study." Admissions officers may adjust these applicants' scores downward, because experience shows that they overestimate the applicants' ability to apply the passive knowledge of grammar and lexis to the real-life needs of either the English language college classroom or survival in an English-speaking society. The research to prove that preparation materials boost scores does not exist, but even if it did, further research would be needed to prove that the boosted scores were valid.

I am surprised to find that even though Wadden and Hilke pay considerable attention to arguing the goodness of the model (in their meaning of the term) used by ETS for the TOEFL and reveal that they are authors of TOEFL preparation materials, they are nevertheless

critical of the “nonprofit megacorporation that manufactures and markets the TOEFL . . . and peddles its own preparation materials for a test that it . . . claims cannot be prepared for.” They also attack North American colleges and universities for the way they use TOEFL scores. I agree with the latter view. One of the fundamental issues in discussions about the nature and definition of *washback* (see Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Wall, 1997) is to what extent the influence of a test should be viewed as a consequence of it. Should the improper use of test scores be seen as the fault of the testing agency or of the test itself, somehow without any human agent? Or should it be seen as the fault of the score users themselves? I see no clear answer to this difficult set of issues yet.

Again, my purpose was not to criticize ETS, the TOEFL, or any specific test, testing agency, or test preparation materials. It was to raise an issue of professional ethics for consideration by the profession. I am grateful to Wadden and Hilke for their willingness to engage in dialogue in this important arena, but to lay all the blame for bad testing practices at the door of the testing agency, lay all the blame for bad score uses at the door of colleges, yet lay none of the blame for bad test preparation materials at the door of their authors and publishers seems a very self-interested view of the issue. My commentary was polemical, as Wadden and Hilke call it in their title, but I do not believe it went astray. I repeat that I hope TESOL as an organization will target this issue as a significant ethical question for the profession.

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# Comments on Graham Crookes and Al Lehner's "Aspects of Process in an ESL Critical Pedagogy Teacher Education Course"

## A Plea for Published Reports on the Application of a Critical Pedagogy to "Language Study Proper"

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■ Graham Crookes and Al Lehner's reflective and insightful account of their application of a critical pedagogical orientation to an actual teacher education classroom (Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 1998) is indeed promising. Fostering the development of a critical pedagogy in future teachers is an inspiring and thought-provoking challenge, but it is perhaps also misleading because of the lack of guidance on practical issues associated with critical pedagogy.

Current work on alternative pedagogies addresses such topics as social identity and voice (Peirce, 1995), power (Auerbach, 1993; Pennycook, 1989), the morality of teaching (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Johnston, Juhsz, Marken, & Ruiz, 1998), (participatory) action research (Auerbach, 1994; Crookes, 1993, 1998), and the development of a critical pedagogical approach to research and teaching (see Crawford, 1978; Crawford-Lange, 1981; Pennycook, 1994). Because of the emphasis on these areas and related issues, teachers, most often in vain, search the literature for discussions of concrete pedagogical implications.

Crookes and Lehner's candid and timely recognition that there are "few accounts of the processes involved in implementing [critical pedagogy] in a S/FL [second or foreign language] teacher education context" (p. 319) is well taken. Their reflective and detailed report of experiences in a teacher education classroom contributes to the collective knowledge. However, just as in the teacher education context, there are few actual accounts of the implementation of a critical pedagogical orientation within the S/FL classroom. Despite the proliferation of discussion regarding critical pedagogy and S/FL classrooms, few authors have suggested what it might look like fleshed out in an actual classroom.

Several authors have attempted to develop processes and principles that represent broad characterizations of the use of critical pedagogy (see Crawford-Lange, 1981). Unfortunately, few reports discuss the application of these principles to language teaching at the introductory level. Students in perhaps their most impressionable, initial state are socialized into the role of language learners through their early

experiences primarily in introductory language courses. The learners do not usually participate as actors *on* the process but rather are *acted upon* while playing the role of an object. The students then fulfill their perceived part in the educational process, which has evolved through their experiences in the introductory language classroom. Therefore, at this early state of language learners' development, critical pedagogy and its applied practice need to be fostered in the minds and methods of students and teachers.

Crookes and Lehner point out that "critical pedagogy should be seen as a social and educational process rather than just as a pedagogical method" (p. 327). However, its implications for the "method" are what are most urgently relevant to teachers on a day-to-day level in their language classrooms. The use of broad terms such as "social and educational process" conceals the hard fact that the process takes place primarily in actual classrooms. In these classrooms, language learners are required to speak only in the target language, communicate at all costs (even if it means that they must pretend to be someone else in a situation that they will likely never be in), and discuss topics of little interest that are neither chosen nor negotiated by learners and merely feign learner centeredness. In developing applications of critical pedagogy to language classrooms, supporting teacher education that is based on a critical pedagogical orientation, as demonstrated by Crookes and Lehner, is a practical beginning and an appropriate research step, but it is not sufficient.

Issues such as "pessimism" about and "resistance" to critical pedagogy (p. 324) are relevant not only to a teacher education context but also to teachers in their programs, departments, and schools. Administrators who are interested in teachers teaching language and learners learning to communicate at certain proficiency levels for academic and personal purposes are not usually open to theoretically driven, postmodern pedagogies—especially not to those which new teachers desire to implement without sufficient evidence that the pedagogies succeed or methodological details of how they work in actual instructional contexts. The joint goals of critical pedagogy, the "simultaneous development of English communicative abilities and the ability to apply them to developing a critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters" (p. 320), are not what administrators perceive as the mission of most S/FL programs.

The contradiction between furthering a critical pedagogy and its related goals and fulfilling the traditional role of a language educator may create a tension for teachers, requiring them to compromise their own pedagogical and moral perspectives. Moreover, the lack of shared experiences and published knowledge concerning the application of critical pedagogy to actual language classrooms exacerbates this tension.

Administrators may expect teachers to adopt a communicative approach through the exclusive use of the target language, so-called authentic materials, and so-called meaningful interaction with the goal of developing nativelike competency in the S/FL. The expectations may frustrate the teacher who is equally interested in engaging in a problem-posing pedagogy and providing opportunities for learners to participate in problem-posing activities conducted in the target language when appropriate.

Like administrators, learners are unlikely to be familiar with a critical approach. As Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987) explained and Crookes and Lehner emphasize, the implementation of critical pedagogy requires an initial structure and an understanding of its assumptions and goals. This structure and understanding are needed to convince administrators as well as to prepare learners for the benefits and practices of critical pedagogy.

The “risky task” (Crawford, 1978, p. 171) of implementing a critical pedagogy in a S/FL classroom is often thwarted not only by a lack of knowledge of how to do it but also by the system’s constraints on what is possible within the curriculum. Simply “training problem-posing teachers” by “teach[ing] them by a problem-posing methodology and curriculum” (Crawford, 1978, p. 172) does not offer sufficient guidance. Teachers need to benefit from published reports and perspectives on how to apply a critical orientation to language teaching and language learning, following the model set forth by Crookes and Lehner.

Like others, I am interested in critical pedagogy and strongly desire to see a critical pedagogical orientation promoted within higher education and specifically in language teaching and learning. I find it disheartening, however, to be frequently reminded of the importance and even necessity of such an orientation without being exposed to even a minimal idea of how to address the concerns that teachers face every day. The brief phrase “subject to administrative constraints” (p. 323) does not refer to a minor issue. Furthermore, because language instruction in its very essence is content free and differs in nature from concepts discussed in contexts such as teacher education, Crookes and Lehner’s report does not show how critical pedagogy in content courses informs teachers about its use in classrooms where students need to learn nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

For teachers who are truly convinced that “traditional education is biased, discriminatory and perpetuates the status quo” (p. 325), further research must focus on the application of principles such as Crawford’s (1978) to methodology, curriculum design, language program development, and language acquisition. “Thoughts for future practice” (p. 326) in the areas of language teaching itself need to concentrate on the needs of S/FL teachers in their classrooms as well as on their training and

education. Specific ways in which a critical pedagogy affects materials development, lesson planning, assessment procedures, and classroom management need to be explored and developed. Principles that are said to characterize critical pedagogy must be applied to the issues and problems that teachers encounter daily in their language classrooms and programs.

Pennycook (1994) emphasized the value of this orientation to a range of concerns, including the “relationship between L2 education and race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, minority languages, literacy, cultural difference, and so on” (pp. 691–692). As crucial as these issues are to language learning, the critical teacher also needs exposure to issues dealing with what Crawford-Lange (1981) calls “language study proper” (p. 261). Not wanting to fall headlong into the role of a teacher pleading to have her empty pedagogical vessel filled by researchers in a traditional framework, this teacher still seeks and solicits applicable pedagogical implications. Most specifically, I seek published accounts by language teachers who have applied a critical pedagogical orientation to their classrooms. The exploration of critical pedagogy must move from principles to materials, lesson plans, classroom activities, assessment tools, and course designs.

Crawford-Lange’s (1981) 20 principles outline a framework and approach that may be useful. She states, “This concern for critical thinking is neither foreign nor objectionable to most educators. However, to truly make it the primary concern, some alterations must take place in classroom approaches and activities” (pp. 259–260). In the same vein, I hope that Crookes and Lehner’s application of critical pedagogy to teacher education will inspire others to further these pursuits in language classrooms, conduct participatory action research projects, address issues raised within a critical pedagogical orientation, and report their findings in ways that can be modeled in other language classroom settings.

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## An Author Responds . . .

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■ In responding to Jennifer Ewald, I primarily wish to second her concerns, though perhaps I can ameliorate them slightly simply by foreshadowing work shortly to be published in *TESOL Quarterly* as well as pointing to other accounts not mentioned in the work commented on.

Like Ewald, I have indeed searched, and continue to search, the critical-alternative-radical pedagogical literature for concrete suggestions concerning classroom practice, and, like her, I would like to see more accounts of practice. The task of searching the literature is getting more difficult as this area is growing so quickly that the terminology itself is expanding. Many pedagogies are built upon critiques of society or critical social theories—not only Paulo Freire's socialist (and Marxist and Catholic) critique but other long-standing leftist critiques, such as the anarchist critique that underlies many free schools (Mercogliano, 1998; Shotton, 1993; Smith, 1983), the green critique (e.g., Randle, 1989), the gender-based critiques that lead to feminist pedagogy (e.g., Sattler, 1997) and queer theory (e.g., Pinar, 1998). In addition, the expansion of the term *pedagogy* to mean curriculum theory as well as classroom practice leads to a problem in searching the literature.

The relative absence of implications for or accounts of classroom practice in writings in some of these areas that readers of this journal, like Ewald or me, may encounter perhaps stems from the various specific interests of the above groups as well as from our own ESL-specific concerns. For example, quite a bit of the anarchist education and free-school literature concerns itself more with structures for and practices in school governance and teacher-student interaction in general



than with classroom instructional practices. The focus is on the setting up of truly free institutions, perhaps in the belief that with right-minded teachers and institutional structures that reflect the natural spirit of the child, classroom interactions will fall into line and that, when they don't, the institutional structures will enable problems to work themselves out (cf. Long, in press).

Alternatively, much of the literature on feminist pedagogy is written by feminist teachers who are working in postsecondary education. Among other topics, they concern themselves with matters of curriculum, resistance, and ethical issues of how a feminist teacher can utilize a position of authority over students while not reembodying patriarchal values (see, e.g., the discussion in Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Descriptions of classroom practices then follow, which, with some key differences (notably the concern for feminist process; Wheeler & Chinn, 1991) perhaps are similar to those espoused in much of the literature on critical pedagogy (cf. Vandrick, 1994).

On the other hand, there is indeed a literature on classroom practices under the critical pedagogy heading, admittedly one drawn from the non-ESL classroom. Although I would join the chorus of complaints about the very hard-to-read work of some left curriculum theorists in this area (notably Henry Giroux and the later Peter McLaren), there exists a counterstream, which includes the work of Shor. His book, *Empowering Education* (1992), in particular can be mined for principles and practices. It includes extended discussions of what exactly some term of Freire's might mean for the community college teacher and extended, jargon-free, first-person accounts of how Shor tries to get his critical pedagogy to work and be true to its principles in specific classroom contexts. His account of the times when it did not work (Shor, 1996) is also illuminating.

Finally, again, a growing literature encompasses both classroom and curricular practices that would apply to or at least could be drawn on by L2 teachers working from any generally left-libertarian perspective (e.g., Auerbach, 1992; Auerbach et al., 1996). For the teacher beginning to explore this domain of TESOL, it is particularly unfortunate that Wallerstein's (1983) extremely accessible and practical work is out of print. I recognize, however, that these works may not address the individual teacher in a mainstream school because of the freestanding, community-based nature of the programs these two authors have been involved in. And, with the exception of Auerbach et al.'s volume, these works are manuals for practice rather than accounts of practice. Not to be overlooked is the recent book by Wink (1997), who certainly was working in mainstream school contexts. The upcoming special-topic issue of *TESOL Quarterly* (Vol. 33, No. 3, Autumn 1999), too, may (one hopes) address this need for practical reports.

I am sympathetic to Ewald's point that our account offered few

suggestions concerning what to do in “classrooms in which students need to learn nouns, verbs, and adjectives,” though one of the few points on which I would disagree with her is in her statement that language instruction “in its very essence is content free.” The last point has been chewed over by many in the TESOL field who have no particular connection to critical and alternative pedagogies. My interpretation of the ideas of these authorities (e.g., Cook, 1983; Ellis, 1993; Snow, 1991) would lead me to say that a language lesson is always about something. The legitimacy of an exclusive focus on language as structure can be seen itself as a position with political implications; why such a fuss about using gender-inclusive pronouns but for the fact that things like nouns and verbs are dangerous? Some feminist linguists might say “the personal [pronoun] is political” (cf. Sunderland, 1992). That is why one of the first and often easiest moves to make toward a critical pedagogy when studying language could be curricular, via the work in critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992; cf. Menacker, 1998). Alternatively, if learners truly need to learn “nouns, verbs, and adjectives,” even a teacher who is the students’ only natively-like informant could teach the material in a dialogic manner, with a participatory approach to curriculum in which the learners actively research the language whose structures they must learn. Various individuals have advocated this approach (for a quick sketch see van Lier, 1992; cf. Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998, for general discussion of students as researchers, not just of language). I would assert that learning goals that refer to the structure of language could be a starting point for a dialogical approach to learning that makes the learners active investigators of and actors on their own (linguistic) worlds.

Ewald raises another important point that I have seen considered in passing in some mainstream literature but, I have to admit, I have not seen worked on much in the TESOL field: what to do about unsympathetic administrators. Of course, one could be a bit brusque and cynical here: I am tempted to say (a) persuade them if possible, (b) pressure them if not, and (c) hide one’s practice from them if neither (a) nor (b) works or is an option. The last is actually discussed in the L2 literature in an account of bilingual teachers in Texas using non-state-mandated materials as a way to do culturally appropriate pedagogy in an unsupportive administrative setting (Constantino & Faltis, 1998). In past work (Crookes, 1990), drawing on my classroom teaching experience, I briefly reviewed the possibilities open to ESL/EFL teachers who wish to improve a program they are working in and find no help or support from an administration. I discussed various strategies and initiatives that suggested themselves to me as a result of my own teaching experience in such settings and worked up to discussing the matter of unionization and direct action. Although I managed to get the piece published in my own

departmental in-house journal, I gave up trying to publish it in mainstream ESL journals after it had been turned down three times. Was there a lesson there? Teacher preparation programs in the field may focus too much on “disciplinary knowledge” and too little on the skills that teachers need to keep their jobs or struggle against the exploitative working conditions that characterize much of ESOL teaching (Crookes, 1997). If teaching is seen as a solitary rather than a collaborative practice, the solidarity needed to persuade administrators will not be available. On the other hand, in the business of TESOL, administration as a domain is only just starting to get the attention it deserves. Not so long ago, Staczek (1991) was able to recognize what we as ESOL teachers all knew: that almost none of our administrators had any administrative training. Until the publication of Impey and Underhill (1995) and Christison and Stoller (1997), there were no book-length treatments of administration in TESOL. What the field needs next are administrators with emancipatory ideals. Fortunately, at least one MA program both includes administrative training and appears to have such administrators (see Rojas, 1995).

I absolutely agree with Ewald that learners, too, are quite unlikely to be familiar with some (though not all) of the procedures implied by any one of the possible critical or alternative pedagogies that might be used by teachers committed to social change in the direction of greater equality and justice for all. Learners also may be thoroughly unsympathetic to the whole project. Accounts of how to address this issue and the ethical implications are important and necessary (cf. Evans, Evans, & Kennedy, 1987). The older critical pedagogy literature of Freire was criticized, particularly by feminist pedagogy exponents, for ignoring this. In TESOL, many EFL teachers will have experienced working with exactly the opposite kind of student that Auerbach (1991) writes about. For them (I include myself here), the student body is not the marginalized and dispossessed but the elites of highly inequitable societies. The EFL teacher’s search for “big bucks in Japan” (and other places) can also involve working with the sons and daughters of those who hold “big *estancias* in Brazil” (cf. Vandrick, 1995). These individuals may be less receptive to the perspective of a radical or even a feminist teacher. At a guess, I would have thought that many ESL teachers were feminists, so at the risk of exposing my own ignorance, I add my voice to Ewald’s in asking, where are the accounts of classroom practice in our field by feminists (besides Vandrick, 1994)?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I note that the 33rd Annual TESOL Convention included an academic session on critical issues for women in adult ESOL (Goldstein et al., 1999). Perhaps there is about to be an explosion of papers, accordingly.

Ewald concludes (and this makes me optimistic) that she does not want “to fall headlong into the role of being a teacher pleading to have her empty pedagogical vessel filled” by me or any other researcher. Besides pointing to some published literature that may address some of her concerns, I would like to mention that her point brings up the whole question of the nature and whereabouts of teachers’ knowledge. Some of the questions she mentions, I believe, have been addressed to some extent in unpublished writings by teachers. The ones I know best about are the term papers and other writings done by student teachers in my own department, but some of Ewald’s concerns have also been addressed simply in the oral exchanges, sharing of stories, and advice giving that go on between teachers. This is *teacher lore*—the evanescent form of teachers’ personal practical knowledge reflected upon and transmitted, often effectively, outside the channels sanctioned and sanctified by practicing academics. Though things are beginning to change (perhaps), the only sector of education that provides substantial rewards or encouragement to practitioners to write and publish accounts of their teaching is the postsecondary sector. However, the growing, increasingly popular and influential teacher research movement provides ways and means for the promotion and preservation of such alternative knowledges (Crookes, 1993). I think it is interesting that the more alternative the education journal, the more likely it is to contain articles written by teachers for teachers concerning classroom practices. Look, for example, at journals like *LibEd*, *Radical Teacher*, *Feminist Teacher*, and *Rethinking Schools*. I also would point out the fantastic growth in the use of e-mail discussion lists for teachers, in which ongoing professional conversations are preserved in cyberspace, with (thank goodness) little or no intervention by academics. Had Lehner and I written our Forum commentary more recently (it was mostly put together shortly after the course, which is to say in 1995), we would have mentioned some World Wide Web sites (e.g., *Feminist Pedagogy Homepage*, 1998; *Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 1998; Mintz, 1999; *Networks: An On-Line Journal for Teacher Research*, n.d.; Shaw, 1997) or e-mail discussion lists. For now, I would mention the very active lists XTAR (for action research), the regrettably much less active FEMPED-L (for feminist pedagogy), CRITICALED-L (for critical pedagogy), and ANOKED-L (for anarchist/radical pedagogy).

It would be worth posting the basic question that Ewald (and I) are concerned with in these forums and seeing what comes back. In concluding, I extend my thanks to Ewald. I hope that the conversation started here will encourage other teachers, especially teacher-researchers, to add their accounts of practice, whether electronic or print, to the published record so that all of us searching, exploring teachers can benefit.

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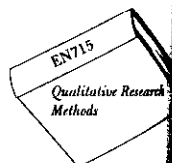
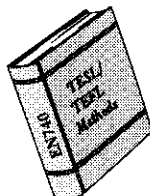
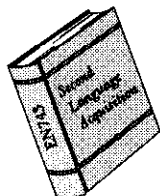
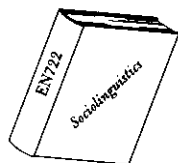
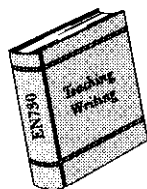
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## RESEARCH ISSUES

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*TESOL Quarterly* publishes brief commentaries on aspects of qualitative and quantitative research. For this issue, we asked two researchers to discuss poststructural approaches to L2 research and related cross-cultural research issues.

Edited by PATRICIA A. DUFF  
*University of British Columbia*

### Poststructural Approaches to L2 Research

#### Between Psychology and Poststructuralism: Where Is L2 Learning Located?

CELIA GENISHI  
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■ Increasingly complex ways of looking at language suggest that no single disciplinary approach suffices to explain all that contributes to the child's language learning processes. Whether children are learning one language or multiple languages, they are continually *individuals-in-context* (Graue & Walsh, 1998). As they learn how to be language users in particular cultural contexts, they are at once psychological and social beings. In this commentary I present brief sketches of contrasting theoretical approaches to children as (language) learners in order to highlight two early childhood classrooms in which multiple theories are illustrated. The approaches have undergirded a variety of qualitative methods of investigating children's language.

#### CHILD AS ACTIVE LEARNER: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION

Disciplinary constructions of children in education and psychology have ranged from *responder to stimuli* or *active thinker* to *resister* or *behavior problem*. From most points of view children are works in progress, advancing toward particular mature endpoints or benchmarks set by adults. The constructions stem from various psychological theories that have shaped the field of early childhood education since the beginning



of the 20th century. Despite the continuing commercial popularity of some structured language programs (e.g., direct instruction system for teaching and remediation [DSTAR] programs), which construct children above all as *responders*, professional organizations have traditionally rejected this construction. Thus the prevailing construction of children in literature for practitioners and teacher educators has been that of *active thinkers and learners* in the process of becoming fully developed (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Moreover, linguists (Chomsky, 1968) and psycholinguists (Brown, Cazden, & Bellugi, 1969) have built the argument that although children do respond to and imitate what adults around them say, they also create some of their own linguistic forms (e.g., overregularized forms: *goed, holded, feets*).

More recent studies by psycholinguists like Bloom (1993) and Nelson (1996) have provided empirically and theoretically rich accounts of children developing English in the preschool years. Bloom, for example, has over time developed a theory of early communication that incorporates the very young child's growing ability to express emotion. Thus language is first a means for expressing private meanings and intentions with attentive others. Nelson focuses on how the infant makes the transition from infancy to childhood, by means of growing abilities to represent mentally or internally the world and experiences in it and to communicate in that world through language.

The portrait Nelson (1996) builds is one of the human being developing cognitively, not just linguistically, within a sociocultural context. She states that between the ages of about 2 to 6 years, "language and the surrounding culture take over the human mind. It is during these years that biology 'hands over' development to the social world" (p. 325). But even as she emphasizes the significance of culture, she concludes that development is ultimately psychological, occurring within the individual: "The individual and unique are always assumed to be the level wherein developments take place" (p. 327).

## THE CHILD AT THE MOMENT: SOCIOLOGICAL AND POSTSTRUCTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS

It is hard to disagree with Nelson's (1996) assertion as it relates to language. Individuals each ultimately figure out language for themselves; each is said by linguists to have an *idiolect*, a way of speaking unique to the individual self. Yet researchers in various disciplines outside of psychology (including sociolinguists and anthropologists) argue against the assertion that the processes of becoming members of particular cultures are ultimately either psychological or best described in terms of sequential developmental landmarks. The so-called new sociologists, for example, claim that those who study and teach children have for too long

concerned themselves with the future, with endpoints of a developmental process. These sociologists (e.g., James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) also point out that developmental theories have the inadvertent effect of pathologizing children whose patterns of development do not fit theorists' norms. From this sociological perspective, researchers should focus on the knowledge and social meanings child learners construct at the moment, often in their own highly social worlds, rather than on their processes of becoming in a linear fashion, that is, developing normally into mature and independent beings.

Poststructuralist theorists disagree fundamentally with developmentalists and structuralists in a range of ways. With respect to language, instead of assuming, as structuralists do, a direct relation between the signifier (word) and the signified (meaning), poststructuralists assert that meanings are never stable because the words (signifiers) that make up the text have no fixed relationship to the things and concepts they are meant to signify (Tobin, 1995, p. 233). Meanings exist only in relation to other meanings, and they are always socially and historically located. Thus meanings conveyed by language are not fixed as social facts, and poststructuralists assert that there are no essential Truths, only multiple truths.

Intertwined with a belief in the fluidity of language and meaning is the poststructuralist assumption that human subjectivity is symbolically produced by discourses. Just as there is no stable text, there is no stable being, self, or human consciousness. As language, meaning, and subjectivity are never fixed, poststructuralists assume that power, an underlying factor in all social interaction, is not a commodity that some individuals or social groups possess to control others. Drawing on the work of Foucault, poststructuralists replace this static notion of power with a strategic one in which power is conceptualized as circulating throughout social relations so that individuals both enact and undergo the effects of power (Foucault, 1978; Sarup, 1993).

Poststructural investigations of learning center on relations among language, power, and subjectivity as they are played out in the talk and action of specific classrooms. (For examples of studies in early childhood settings, see Genishi, Ryan, & Ochsner, *in press*.) Few studies within a poststructuralist framework of L2 learners exist, and it may seem unlikely that poststructuralist theory could usefully intersect with theories of language learning. Language learning, after all, is typically cast as a sequential process in which knowledge usually resides within the teacher/expert, who gradually enables the individual novice to learn a new language.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CLASSROOMS: RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

To illustrate how some principles of new sociologists and post-structuralist theory may intersect with both L2 learning and developmental theory, I depart from the work of writers in academe and introduce the work of two teachers in contrasting early childhood settings. Both teach in prekindergarten classrooms in which almost all the children are speakers of a language other than English. One, Donna Yung-Chan, teaches in a public school classroom in which almost all children, like their teacher, are of Chinese heritage and speak Cantonese. She is part of an ongoing collaboration (Yung-Chan, Stires, & Genishi, 1999) to study the ways in which children learn English vocabulary. Thus far, like previous researchers, we are struck by the multiple ways in which the children take up an L2 and concomitantly the diverse ways in which they take up a culture of schooling that incorporates a growing community of English speakers.

What is particularly striking about Yung-Chan is her ability to allow for the fluidity of which poststructuralists write. She sets no firm rules about which language children must speak, and children appear to shift subjectivities, at times joining the discourse of schooling and at other times enacting the discourse of their families and community. The meanings of particular language forms shift depending on who uses the forms and at what point in time. Power also shifts, although the teacher and her aide appear to possess it most of the time. Children often hold onto the power to choose to speak or not, to whom, and in which language.

Ballenger (1999) tells of her experiences as a prekindergarten teacher of children whose heritage is Haitian and who speak Haitian Creole. Her story contrasts with Yung-Chan's in that her own heritage is not that of the children, although she is a Haitian Creole speaker. Ballenger describes the complexities of acquiring language in ways that illustrate well the vagaries of meaning when sociocultural experiences and knowledge differ. As important, she provides examples of talk and interaction that bring to life the notion of *circulating power*. Power and knowledge are shared among teachers in the school, the children's families, and the children themselves. As in Yung-Chan's classroom, however, the most consistent feature of the processes of language learning in Ballenger's setting is its embeddedness in social relationships, the strength of which circulates as noticeably as power.

This commentary only begins to suggest ways in which classrooms may be provocative sites for the illustration and understanding of theories. Teachers and learners are invaluable for their capacities to push researchers to examine the meanings and power within theories. Language

learning in these two teachers' classrooms is located in a complex nexus somewhere between developmental theory, emphasizing the importance of individual meanings and intentions and growth toward future goals, and socially driven poststructuralist theory, foregrounding the relational and the continually shifting present.

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# Exploring Cross-Cultural Inscriptions and *Difference*: The Effects of Researchers' Positionalities on Inquiry Practices

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■ In this commentary, I wrestle with the question, "How do English language learners (ELLs) experience writing?" by probing the effects of researcher positionalities<sup>1</sup> on inquiry practices. I address positionality through disruptions in my own work, disruptions that Miller (1997) claims "constitute the lived practice of our research" wherein "no two days in the classroom are the same and no one theory holds together the disruptions" (p. 199). Risking those disruptions forcefully reminds me of the ways I remain fixed in theoretical stances I claim to work against. Such jarring disruptions leave my work open to unexpected discourses of living practices.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I situate my work within a hermeneutic framework and briefly explore notions of positionality through my experiences with the discourse(s) of *contrastive rhetoric* as a practice of inquiry. Through this exploration, I heed poststructural writers who alert their readers to varied meanings of *writing*, *language*, and *culture*. I conclude with a call for a repositioning of inquiry practices towards Caputo's (1987) radical hermeneutics, which has the potential to address the dynamic complexity of *difference* both as broad universalising cultural categories and as particular hybridising experiences of ELL writing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In turning away from assumptions of a fixed, commensurate discourse, I view positionality as an interplay of dynamic, contested discursive relations that rejects the possibility of consistently held systematised solutions or discursive univocality. I also acknowledge the partiality of positionality and its dilemmatic conditions requiring deliberation and negotiation (Billig et al., 1988). Disruptions, then, become incomplete and dilemmatic discourses of enacted theoretical stances of researchers.

<sup>2</sup> I lean heavily on Sumara and Carson's (1997) notion of *living practices* as "focally real events . . . holistic practices that acknowledge the coemergence of form and content . . . ones in which process, producer and product are cospecified . . . —lived experiences that permit an openness to the complexity of the relations among things and people" (p. xv). This researcher positionality "does not mean to suggest that examining the product of holistic practices (like writing) reveals the producer" but suggests that "writing reveals a writer who did not exist, in the same form, before the act of writing." Acknowledging that process, producer, and product can be a focus of research "without knowledge of the other, a deeper interpretation occurs when the relations among them are made available for interpretation" (p. xv).

<sup>3</sup> Caputo (1987) offers radical hermeneutics "as an attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life, and not to betray it with metaphysics" (p. 1).

## DIFFICULTY AND DISRUPTIONS: RESEARCHERS' POSITIONALITIES AT WORK

I try to write like my teacher. I want her correct everything. But my Japanese is big problem. I can't get rid of it. (Yumiko)

I listened to Yumiko dwell in a space of difficulty—writing in-between East and West—and, as her teacher, I struggled to make sense of her “problem.” Yumiko, like other young adults studying in a 4-year academic program at the international Canadian college for Japanese nationals in which I teach, is required to write compositions in subject-area courses on globalisation, experiential learning, and a major area of study in business, cultural studies, or interpretation and translation (English-Japanese). As a regular activity in my classroom, Japanese learners engage in writing content and are guided by well-intentioned pedagogical interventions aimed at “fixing” their ability to write in English what they know—a pedagogical position based on unquestioned assumptions of its possibility. My interest in Yumiko’s and other learners’ comments on what it means to write content *well* comes from a larger inquiry on the ways teachers judge the content writing of ELLs. Hence, my interest was in exploring the notion of writing content well in English from the perspectives of ELLs. Yumiko’s claim of her L1 being a “problem” that could not be “gotten rid of” was an unexpected disruption; it went against my tendency to view writing problems as things that could be fixed. Yumiko continued,

Always I want say different than what is in my English only. Japanese not good in English work, I know, but maybe I can't help. I know how to cover my Japanese with English little. But I can't cover enough. You know, sometime I want my Japanese heard. I get confusing.

The disruption alerted me to the problem of difference as it related to writing in English for Japanese learners, and this became a focus of my research. Turning to contrastive rhetoric as an established approach to exploring L2 writing, I began structuring the problem as questions of difference. What I did not question at the time was my own positionality.

### DIFFERENCE AS/IN UNIVERSALISING CATEGORIES<sup>4</sup>

Perceiving ELL writing to be a complex experience, my questions asked about difference: differences between the English and Japanese languages and cultures, and the different assumptions Japanese writers

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<sup>4</sup>I use *as/in* as an invitation to dwell in the to-and-fro relational movements offered in the *solidus* and consider the what (*as*) and where (*in*)—positionalities of difference.

make about writing in English. Contrastive rhetoric, which claims interdisciplinary and multidimensional approaches and asserts that language and writing are cultural phenomena (Connor, 1996), seemed to offer promise as a method. Kaplan's (1966) early work documented comparative studies of writing styles and patterns that began with a troubling, simplistic view of difference. Others (Liebman, 1992; Purves & Hawisher, 1990) since have argued for a broader scope, recognising the complexity of engaging in contrastive rhetoric studies. Here I comment on a central positionality of contrastive rhetoric by exploring the notion of difference within writing, language and culture. (For a review of contrastive rhetoric, see Connor, 1996.)

My initial interest in difference was embedded in a constructivist approach to contrastive rhetoric that "emphasises the different assumptions that writers from different groups and cultures bring with them" (Connor, 1996, p. 79). In particular, Swales' (1990) notion of *discourse community* and his work in genre analysis was influential in addressing difference through context and situation in various models of writing for ELLs. More recently, Johns' (1997) contribution to notions of academic literacy highlighted the importance of text, role, and context in explorations of difference. Whereas earlier studies of contrastive rhetoric seem to have ignored content, more current work in academic settings has begun to acknowledge a need to "control" content in inquiry practices (Connor, 1996).<sup>5</sup>

My interest in ELLs' perspectives on writing content well led me to begin an action research project that involved case studies of five ELL writers in my classroom. In the classroom, I posed questions to the writers as we conversed about writing, language, and culture while engaged in pedagogic activities of content-based writing. As I listened for the "different assumptions that writers from different groups and cultures bring with them" (Connor, 1996, p. 79), I began to map out categories of cultural assumptions for Japanese and for English. My position claimed at least two primary assumptions: (a) that cultures are distinct and knowable and, once known, (b) that teaching or learning to write well means reducing or erasing traces of the L1, in this case Japanese, in learners' writing. Determined to access the different assumptions Japanese students bring to their English writing, I interpreted the data haunted by Yumiko's words. How would I categorise Yumiko's English writing if she claimed her Japanese was ever present? Is it possible that her writing could no longer claim a space of either English

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<sup>5</sup> The notion that content could and needed to be controlled was a disruption that went against my tendency to view language as constituting content (culture, world view)—another example of the effects of researcher positionality.

or Japanese? How could her writing be understood as both Japanese and English? In questioning my own stance, I realised I still remained entrenched in a central, modernist position of contrastive rhetoric that seemed to advocate universal categories of language and culture; full of promise in its interdisciplinary and multidimensional approaches, it seemed to remain limited within a Cartesian dualism of self and other,<sup>6</sup> replete with deterministic and reductionist tendencies (Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

## DIFFERENCE AS/IN HYBRIDISING EXPERIENCES

Language, in Cartesian terms, assumes the possibility of a technical purity that, according to Spack (1997), “assumes a standard that measures what is different against what is not different” (p. 766). Derrida (1998), in *Monolingualism of the Other*, muses that

We only ever speak one language . . .  
(yes, but)  
We never speak only one language . . . (p. 10)

Derrida considers the impurity of language, a position different from one that views language as a tool that, if written well, can bring closure to meaning. He suggests that learning “one” language may be a continual process of being and becoming a language in translation. Postcolonial writer Trinh’s (1992) work, long considered by publishers to be “not good writing because it’s too impure” (p. 138), was so hybridised by colonial invasion “that [it] would not fit.” She speaks of colonised acts and imposed wor(l)ds wherein “dominated and marginalised people have been socialised to see always more than one point of view” (p. 149). She repositions language and culture so that they are not universal categories of East or West but hybridisations of East and West—a

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<sup>6</sup> With the Cartesian orientation comes a preoccupation with methods of inquiry that contribute to structuring a more accurate representation of the world (reality) and that, in a desire to become more accurate, become more technical in their mechanistic ability to reduce, control, and master objects (the *other*) of inquiry. Smith (1999), claiming to be “a person formed by both Eastern and Western traditions” (p. 12), warns of “the snares and entrapments of Self and Other thinking” (p. 25) in an East-West inquiry of identity within acts of pedagogy, as do Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) in their work on “idealised native speakers, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities” (p. 543).

<sup>7</sup> The current debate surrounding Spack’s (1997) and Zamel’s (1997) critique of contrastive rhetoric within the context of English teaching parallels questions raised in my own research regarding positionality (see Carson, 1998; Nelson, 1998; Spack, 1998a, 1998b). Following Spack’s and Zamel’s work, I argue that in research practices contrastive rhetoric fails to acknowledge the embodiment of teachers’ and students’ live(d) experiences—a writing-as-living in the two-folds of languages and cultures. Writing so repositioned becomes texts of the planned and the living (the unplanned).



positionality wherein writing has the potential to inscribe meanings beyond writers' knowing (Felman, 1987) and a metonymic space of difference that Aoki (1996) invokes in "In the Midst of Doubled Imaginaries." Could this stance be a space in which Zamel (1997) calls for *transcultural* understandings of difference and that claims the necessity of involving "students in the messiness and struggle of authentic work that begins, values, and builds on their own ways with words" (p. 343)? A possible repositioning of language, culture, and writing emerges in ELL inscriptions in which "language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries. It speaks itself against [their] will" (hooks, 1994, p. 167).

Undoubtedly, ELL writers occupy a messy and difficult space of difference. How researchers make sense of it is influenced by their positionalities, which are themselves complex and incomplete. Claiming that research is constituted in living practices, I view difference within the potentiality of a generative space, alive with possibilities that "re-collect the contours and textures of life we are already living" without "render[ing] such a life our object" (Jardine, 1992, p. 116). Refraining from inquiring into life as factual and objective, my work is positioned in the midst of life, keeping "a watchful eye for the ruptures and the breaks and the irregularities" (Caputo, 1987, p. 1). Resisting the call of scientific discourse to cast ELLs' content-based writing as a technical problem requiring a technical fix,<sup>8</sup> I now see difficulties within ELL writing practices in a generative space of ambiguity in which there is "always something left to say" (Jardine, 1992, p. 119) and where technical words cannot fix all writing problems and bring them to an end. My view is one of radical hermeneutics, "a restoring of life to its original difficulty" (Caputo, 1987, p. 1) that makes it possible to understand the act of writing as a tensioned hermeneutic activity wherein traces of technological and other discourses both mediate and complicate writing, language, and culture relations.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF A RADICAL HERMENEUTICS OF DIFFERENCE

My earlier experiences with the formal schooling of ELLs were bounded by what Davis (1996) calls the *ocular*: "of seeing and observing, of clarity and illumination, of distinct boundaries and solid objects" (p. xxi). My positionality with regard to English language teaching and

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<sup>8</sup> Jardine (1992), heeding Caputo's (1987) message, argues that "technical-scientific discourse offers itself up as a remedy to the difficulties of life" and then reminds us that "rather than simply being a remedy to life's difficulties, [technical-scientific discourse] has rather come to recast the nature of life's difficulties into precisely the sort of thing for which a technical solution is appropriate; that is, life's difficulties are technical problems requiring a 'technical fix'" (p. 117).

learning had become disembodied, univocal, and predominantly prescriptive. Davis's invocation to listen led me to reposition my inquiry practices: Yumiko's problem became a performative disruption within an embodied, generative space. For me as a teacher-researcher, the effects of the repositioning worked to renew ELL inscriptions to their "original difficulty" and claimed ELL written content as "that [which] cannot be mastered but only lived with well" (Jardine, 1992, p. 117). The positionality taken by the researcher engaged in contrastive rhetoric is helpful in constituting general cultural categories of writing difference. But that is not enough. The repositioning of researchers toward a radical hermeneutics of difference opens ELL inscriptions to the possibility of performative movements between particular hybridisations of writing and broad cultural categories—not as a movement from one to the other, as the notion of mastery might suggest, but in a to-and-fro movement that repositions difference so that it acknowledges the interplay of multiple traces of positionalities at work.

## CONCLUSION

I have briefly explored the premise that researchers' positionalities influence their inquiry practices. Positionality as a movement between various stances resists the assumption that fixed standpoints of truth exist. The way researchers ask what it means for ELLs to write should reflect an examination of the *what (as)* and the *where (in)* that underlie methods of inquiry and its interpretations. I believe we as researchers are obligated to acknowledge our tendencies to particular ways of making sense of our work and to reconsider their fragmented instabilities. A turn to radical hermeneutics may help us enter the living practices of research and dwell in spaces of difficulty and disruptions such as those found in the complexity of ELL inscriptions and difference.

## THE AUTHOR

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## REVIEWS

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*TESOL Quarterly* welcomes evaluative reviews of publications relevant to TESOL professionals. In addition to textbooks and reference materials, these include computer and video software, testing instruments, and other forms of nonprint materials.

Edited by DAN DOUGLAS  
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### Conversations of the Mind: The Uses of Journal Writing for Second-Language Writers.

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998.  
Pp. xvi + 215.

■ This wonderful book is well grounded in theory and research, is clearly written, and includes extended examples of the teacher's and students' writing. It reports the results of a teacher-research study in which Mlynarczyk observed and analyzed the journal writing of students in her own two sections of a pre-freshman composition writing course for ESL students at a large, urban public university. The writing itself, and Mlynarczyk's analysis, tell an important story about the meanings and uses of journal writing between a teacher and five very different students.

The 21 students in the class were encouraged to write at least five times a week, for a total of at least five pages a week, during a 14-week semester. Mlynarczyk collected the journals every 2 or 3 weeks and wrote a letter of response, either to the individual student writers or (toward the end of the semester) to the whole class. Students' journals included in-class free writing on prompts that she devised and out-of-class entries about the assigned reading, *A Place for Us* (Gage, 1989), an autobiographical account of a Greek immigrant's assimilation into U.S. culture. Students were to use their journals to write about themselves and their reactions as readers and writers. The appendixes provide samples of the students' journal and in-class writing and Mlynarczyk's responses.

For her study, Mlynarczyk selected five students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and different experiences with journal writing, ranging from those who wrote prolifically and reflectively to those who struggled. Her data included the students' journal entries, her written responses, field notes on classroom interactions and writing

conferences, transcriptions of audiotaped class segments and conferences, and interviews with each of the five students.

This book will be useful to community college and university writing teachers, writing researchers, and teachers in adult education programs, including those preparing students to take the General Educational Development Test. For teachers, Mlynarczyk's intense critical reflection on what she and her students were doing and feeling, and her frankness and honesty about her struggles with the fact that some students' journals opened the way to reflection and response whereas others clearly didn't, will provide hope and guidance. For researchers interested in journal and diary writing and in L2 writing in general, she provides a comprehensive review of the literature in both of these fields as well as of linguistic, cognitive, and educational theory. The surprise element that makes this book most compelling, though, is her discussion of the writing in light of the concept of *connected knowing*, presented in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). This discussion is particularly interesting because several of the students whose journals most powerfully reflected connected knowing were male.

In his foreword, John Mayher, Mlynarczyk's dissertation adviser, writes, "In addition to meeting Rebecca, you'll also get a chance to meet her students and watch them learn and grow as speakers/writers of English, and as people. . . . The portraits are so finely and engagingly drawn that they also enable teacher/readers to compare them to our own" (p. ix). A strength of this book is the vitality of the voices that come through in the writing.

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**Immersion Education: International Perspectives.**  
Robert K. Johnson and Merrill Swain (Eds.). Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xvi + 315.

■ Educators in bilingual education, ESL, and foreign language education often find that crossing over into other areas of L2 education produces some amazing insights into the complexity of the language

learning and schooling process. Johnson and Swain's volume on immersion education is a book that offers such an opportunity.

The goal of the work is to present the richness and variety of immersion schooling as practiced in a number of world settings. Such variety is reflected in the organization of the book into sections according to the general relationship between the immersion language and the language(s) and culture(s) in which the immersion language schooling experience takes place. Section I discusses immersion in a foreign language, in which the L2 is clearly removed from general daily life and social use, as in most U.S. foreign language immersion programs and French programs in Australia. Section II considers immersion for majority-language students in a minority language, in which the L2 is used by some of the national population, as in programs in Canada and Finland. Section III reviews immersion for language revival, in which a community offers immersion learning to reconnect itself to a heritage language, as in the revival of the Hawaiian language. Section IV presents immersion for language support, in which the L2 is more widely used in the community and schools seek to support that use, as in Basque and Catalan programs in Spain. Finally, Section V details immersion in a language of power, as in English immersion programs in Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Africa.

Chapter 1 pulls together seminal concepts, categories, and descriptions—core and variable features—that now serve to define immersion education. The chapter also presents a list of research and evaluation issues for immersion learning that masterfully capture the complexity of the educational phenomenon while pointing out the difficulties in examining it. Subsequent chapters describe immersion programs in various national settings in detail and allow the reader to explore the development of each program within its historical and curricular contexts. For each program, the authors delineate instructional practices in L1 and L2, the challenges facing the program, the issues raised by teachers and parents, dilemmas involving instruction and assessment, and research questions that have evolved as the program has progressed. Two of the chapters focus on U.S. settings, with the final chapter (by Maria Kowal and Merrill Swain) illuminating one of the critical issues in immersion education: the delicate balance between content and language and the ways in which immersion teachers can successfully work with both.

The only drawback of the volume might be the absence of a metaperspective that ties the analysis of immersion programs worldwide into a cohesive exploration of the difficulties inherent in educating bilingually. But the lessons to be learned are clearly portrayed in the experiences of those educators who strongly believe in the efficacy of immersion schooling.

Whether they are teaching German in high school, teaching ESL in adult education in Ghana, or discussing whale migration in a French immersion or Spanish bilingual third-grade classroom, L2 teachers will find the book worthwhile reading.

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**Theory and Practice of Writing: An Applied Linguistic Perspective.**  
William Grabe and Robert Kaplan. New York: Longman, 1996.  
Pp. xvi + 487.

■ L2 writing is a relatively new but fast-growing field of expertise. For this reason, few specialized books have presented a systematic synthesis of various research findings and linked theories of writing with instructional practice. To the satisfaction of L2 writing researchers, teachers, and graduate students, 1996 saw the publication of Grabe and Kaplan's *Theory and Practice of Writing*. With the aim of presenting a broad interdisciplinary perspective on the theory and practice of writing, this book immediately attracted the attention of those who are researching, teaching, and studying in the field of L2 writing.

The book's 14 chapters can be divided into two parts. Dedicated to theory, the first (chapters 1–8) provides a coherent overview of the nature of writing, developing a model for text construction and a model of writing. The second part (chapters 9–14) focuses on practice and proposes 75 thematic techniques for writing instruction at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels.

One of the strengths of this book is its innovative applied linguistic approach to synthesizing research findings obtained from a variety of disciplines. Through such an approach, L2 and L1 writing research can be linked systematically rather than being treated as two separate and different areas of expertise. Another impressive feature is the book's comprehensive overview of research findings related to a number of different perspectives, which are combined to fashion models for text construction and writing as communicative language use. This comprehensiveness is also evident in the authors' description of the history of writing and the nature of writing within broad social contexts, as well as the 45-page bibliography, which is a very helpful reference guide.

Apart from these merits, some weaknesses are apparent. One is the inaccuracy in some of the book's descriptions, as when Hong Kong is referred to as a "new nation" (p. 11) and a "country" (p. 29). Another small weakness concerns the use of absolute statements such as "while

any programme would like to assume that all teachers are excellent, well trained in writing instruction (and native speakers of English) . . ." (p. 252). The parenthetical statement could easily cause readers to infer that nonnative-English-speaking instructors do not teach as well as native-English-speaking instructors. A third weakness relates to the section on practical application. The instructional themes the authors present are overwhelmingly derived from L1 teaching, and they have made no effort to collect illustrative samples from real L2 classrooms; hence, the value of the themes in L2 instructional practice still remains unclear.

Nonetheless, the book's minor weaknesses do not mar its beauty. It has made a significant contribution to the field of L2 writing research by providing some new models, documenting research findings, and attempting to merge theory and practice. As a study with an innovative approach, this book is a valuable resource for anyone who is seriously engaged in L2 writing research and instruction.

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### Revisualizing Boundaries: A Plurilingual Ethos.

Lachman N. Khubchandani. New Delhi, India: Sage, 1997.

Pp. iii + 255.

■ Khubchandani's text, a collection of publications and papers presented at international conferences and seminars in India, Canada, the U.S., and Europe, emphasizes the sociolinguistic facets of the Indian experience, especially those of government policy and implementation. What may at first appear to be simply an interesting discussion of colonialism and its imposition of language and culture on India is in reality a timely presentation of multiculturalism and plurilingualism that ESOL teachers should explore.

Chapters 1–3, dealing with language phenomena, methodology, and concepts, contrast the various literary traditions with the unifying forces of modern media technology in India. Chapters 4–7 present the sociolinguistic dimensions of these issues, including the ecology of language, minority cultures in a multilingual environment, language accreditation by the government intended to transform the country, the tensions among the majority and minority groups within different regions, and Charles Ferguson's concept of diglossia as the "functional compartmentalization by a society of its linguistic resources" (p. 81). The later chapters scrutinize the use of the census as a political tool on individual, state, and national levels. This discussion is especially relevant



for residents of the U.S., where the issue of sampling is a controversial political topic. These chapters also describe attempts to implement standardization programs and their impact on the country's sociolinguistic realities. The author, however, saves his harshest criticism for those experts who debate these issues in academic forums but do not address the grassroots problems of plurilingual societies and oral cultures in an anthropological sense.

Throughout the book, the author contrasts various approaches to the Indian language experience. He discusses the early and continued conflicts between proponents of a national, common medium and those who argued for the use of local languages in daily life and education, for the linking of nonstandard languages to the mainstream language as a transitional measure, and for the use of a diversity of dialects or languages in speaking with standard language skills used for writing. The author's conclusion is that ESL teachers need to view language diversity both as an asset to society and as an issue to be dealt with pragmatically.

The book is difficult for readers in the sense that it assumes a certain degree of knowledge about the Indian situation. Also, and in spite of a valiant effort on the part of the editors, the topics presented are not unified, which is a problem common to any compilation of work presented over a number of years in different venues to different audiences.

As I read, I found myself contemplating the ramifications for the U.S. of having such a variety of competing belief systems with language as an important marker. The U.S. is itself a multicultural and multilingual society that can learn from the experience of other societies such as India. I believe that this book can give teachers, educators, administrators, and policy makers greater insight into both the challenges and possibilities of the U.S. society of the future.

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### Onna Rashiku (Like a Woman):

#### The Diary of a Language Learner in Japan.

Karen Ogulnick. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998. Pp. ix + 154.

■ *Onna Rashiku (Like a Woman)*, a collection of snapshots of the author's learning of Japanese, is a much-needed addition to the list of autobiographical narratives in second/foreign language research. A rare examination of a learner's identity through the window of introspective and heuristic analysis, Ogulnick's diary entries intertwined with scholarly

analysis offer a glimpse into the process of language learning and reveals its core: the learner herself, with her social and affective nature.

Employed for several years as an EFL teacher in Japan, Ogulnick became involved in Japanese culture, society, and language. She paints a picture of language and culture learning as an identity construction in its complex gender, ethnic, religious, and societal dimensions. Ogulnick shows the dynamics of building her fluency in Japanese as a recursive pattern of identity shifts manifested in her interactions with various Japanese in a number of culturally determined situations. Ogulnick's awareness of her female identity, among other aspects of her identity, allows her to negotiate the power relationships in "a culture that enforces codes of femininity . . . explicitly" (p. 138). She found that her Japanese self had to include people's expectations of her acting "like a woman"—a single woman, a foreign woman, and a professional. Ogulnick's experiences led her to professionally and personally enriching reflections on her position in her own culture as she engaged in a "dialogical and dialectical process of constructing an identity in relation to another person or culture" (p. 139). All these reflections and identity negotiations built up into complex nonlinear identity shifts and transformations, which she saw as an intrinsic part of successful language acquisition.

The introduction is a moving piece with a great deal of personal reflection on the effects of the author's childhood, upbringing, and family on her selfhood and womanhood. Ogulnick then reviews her first experiences in Japan in 1985 (chapter 2) and Japanese perceptions of Americans in the light of the history of U.S.-Japan relations (chapter 4). Chapters 4–8 consist of diary entries, postentry analysis, and reflections. Among various linguistic, social, and cultural issues, her diary entries demonstrate the importance of learning sociolinguistic rules (including those related to gender) and pragmatics; her writings emphasize the role of power in communication and ways the language learner can benefit from "more equal structure of . . . [the] relationship and the emphasis placed on communicating, rather than language learning" (p. 91). Chapter 9, "Arrival," draws conclusions from this introspective study: the necessity for the learner to be aware of social and gender identity in communication, the learner's place in social stratification embedded in the language, and one's reactions to "paradoxes of our multiple and shifting identities" (p. 139).

These important awarenesses identified by Ogulnick raise a number of issues relating to the language classroom, including student cultural resistance, the atmosphere of mutuality and communication in the classroom, and situations in which student identities are shifting. *Onna Rashiku* will be an eye-opener for second/foreign language professionals,

practitioners, and researchers alike, and a great help to graduate students and teachers in training as an illustration of the complex processes of language learning and of the theories and hypotheses posed by scholarship.

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### Productive Instructional Practices for English-Language Learners: Guiding Principles and Examples From Research-Based Practice.

Russell Gersten, Scott K. Baker, and Sussan Unok Marks. Reston, VA:  
Council on Exceptional Children, 1999. Pp. 48.

■ The extensive expertise of Gersten, Baker, and Marks in bilingual education research is reflected in *Productive Instructional Practices for English-Language Learners*, a book designed to provide new ESL programs with guidelines and information on how to better serve L2 students. The book is particularly concerned with helping educators teach these students even when they do not speak the students' native language.

The text contains four sections on helping students from diverse linguistic backgrounds learn content material while they acquire English. The first section examines instruction that allows L2 learners to have access to the curriculum in meaningful ways. Section 2 delineates principles aimed at enhancing the quality of instruction for English language learners. Effective strategies for teaching these students are outlined in the third and fourth sections. Section 4 describes what the learning environment should comprise once the principles covered in Section 2 are put into practice.

In Section 1, instruction using comprehensible input as a means to provide L2 learners with meaningful access to the curriculum is illustrated both in terms of the most common problems districts face in the implementation of comprehensible input and in terms of alternative approaches that can overcome such problems. The section ends with a discussion of the key concepts underlying the notions of cognitive academic language proficiency and basic interpersonal communication skills development in L2 education.

Seven principles, introduced in Section 2 and discussed broadly throughout the rest of the text, are recommended as a basis for helping English language learners access the curriculum. These principles are (a) vocabulary instruction, (b) the use of the students' native language, (c) consistent language use, (d) opportunities to speak and use academic language, (e) visual aids, (f) ongoing assessment, and (g) the building of home-school connections.

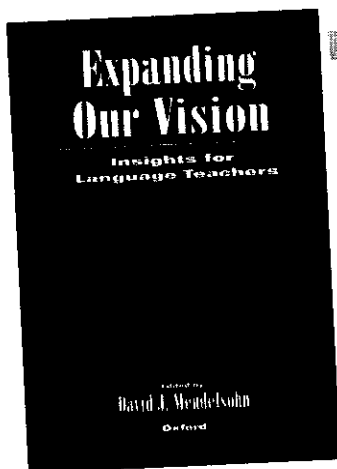
The third section emphasizes such strategies as scaffolding and the use of visuals for the teaching of vocabulary and other fundamental concepts. To help students learn new terminology as they actively apply it in their assignments, the authors recommend the presentation of new vocabulary in visual display. Visual organizers (e.g., semantic maps, text structures, and story maps) are suggested as a way to encourage learners to link language and content learning.

Section 4 summarizes the application of the instructional principles discussed in Sections 1–3 and covers additional points deemed crucial in teaching limited-English-speaking immigrants, such as using think-alouds, presenting concepts in context, approaching instruction with sensitivity, integrating language with content instruction, and using peer and cooperative learning techniques. A discussion of federal policy regarding education issues pertaining to this student population concludes the section.

New ESL programs will find this book especially useful. One of only a few of its kind, it represents an invaluable resource for teachers facing the challenge of educating ESL students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

FERNANDO POLITO

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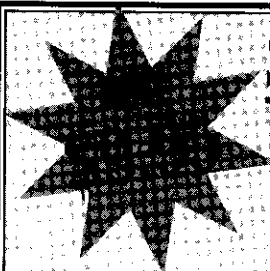
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## BOOK NOTICES

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*TESOL Quarterly* prints brief book notices of 100 words or less announcing books of interest to readers. Book Notices are intended to inform readers about selected books that publishers have sent to TESOL and are descriptive rather than evaluative. They are solicited by the Book Review Editor.

### Focus on Form in Second Language Acquisition.

Catherine Doughty and Jessica Williams (Eds).

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. Pp. xiv + 301.

■ This volume presents original research and discussion by experts in classroom second language acquisition on the benefits of connecting grammatical form to meaning during primarily communicative tasks. The authors of the articles in the book argue collectively for the need to move beyond both traditional, grammar-only approaches and purely communicative, experiential language teaching. Issues investigated include whether ever to focus on language form, which linguistic forms to target, the optimal degree of explicitness of attention to form, appropriate timing of focus on form, and the integration of a form focus into L2 curricula.

### Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Michael Byram. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1997.

Pp. viii + 124.

■ The main purpose of this book is to define what intercultural competence involves, what role foreign and second language teaching has in learners' acquisition of that competence, and how it can be assessed. It suggests a detailed approach to the development of syllabi and curricula. It defines appropriate modes of assessment of intercultural competence, whether acquired inside or beyond the language classroom. The book carries forward earlier work on the aims and methods of cultural studies in foreign and L2 education. It is written for teachers, curriculum developers, and assessment designers.

## The Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Handbook.

Lynne T. Diaz-Rico and Kathryn Z. Weed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1995. Pp. xviii + 334.

■ Diaz-Rico and Weed have written a comprehensive handbook that brings together theories, ideas, and resources for promoting cross-cultural awareness, language development, and academic progress. Written for the regular classroom teacher, the guide details the effects of cultural differences on learning and presents a treatment of cultural diversity and learning styles. Features include a chapter on content area instruction, a section on assessment that describes relevant state mandates, a chapter on bilingual education that gives teachers a variety of ways to organize models and deliver instruction, and a discussion on working with other professionals and paraprofessionals.

## Beyond Training: Perspectives on Language Teacher Education.

Jack Richards. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Pp. xvi + 208.

■ This book examines the nature of L2 teacher development and the ways teachers' practices are influenced by their beliefs and principles. The book seeks to move discussion of language teacher development beyond the level of *training*, which reflects a technical view of specific teaching practices. Instead, it takes a more holistic approach to teacher development built on the notion of the teacher as critical and reflective thinker. The argument pursued throughout the book is that teacher education needs to engage teachers not merely in the mastery of techniques but in an exploration of the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that underlie their teaching practices.

## Psychology for Language Teachers:

### A Social Constructivist Approach.

Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. ix + 240.

■ This important book brings together some of the most recent developments and thinking in the field of educational psychology with issues of concern to many language teachers. It considers various ways in which a

deeper understanding of the discipline of educational psychology can help language teachers. The first part of the book presents an overview of educational psychology and discusses how different approaches to psychology have influenced language teaching methodology. Following this, four themes are identified: the learner, the teacher, the task, and the learning context. Recent psychological developments in each of these domains are discussed, and implications are drawn for language teaching.

### Second Language Learning Theories.

Rosamond Mitchell and Florence Myles. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. xii + 228.

■ This introduction to the field of L2 learning focuses on major current schools in L2 learning theory, offering outlines of different theoretical perspectives with an element of evaluation of the area explored. Starting with an overview of key concepts and issues in L2 learning and of how research in the area has developed over time, the book then deals with current concerns in universal grammar and cognitive approaches, the input and interaction hypotheses, and functionalist, sociocultural, and sociolinguistic perspectives. The authors end by looking toward the future of L2 learning research.

### Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom.

Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xv + 238.

■ This examination of extensive reading shows how reading large quantities of books and other materials can provide students with essential practice in learning to read as well as help them develop a positive attitude towards reading. The authors first examine the cognitive and affective nature of reading and the nature of good reading material, which they term *language learner literature*. They then offer practical advice for implementing extensive reading with L2 learners. Suggestions are provided for integrating extensive reading into the curriculum, establishing a library, writing and selecting reading material, keeping records for purposes of evaluation, and supplementing individualized silent reading with a variety of classroom activities.



## Errors in Language Learning and Use.

Carl James. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.

Pp. xiv + 304.

■ This book is an introduction and guide to current approaches to the study of errors in language as well as a critical survey of previous work. Relevant questions addressed include whether native speakers make errors and whether “good English” for the native speaker is also good for the foreign learner. The reader is led from the definition of error and related concepts to explanations of types of linguistic deviance, error gravities, the utility of teacher correction, and the writing of learner profiles. Throughout, the book is guided by considerable practical experience in language education in a range of classroom contexts worldwide.

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# INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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## EDITORIAL POLICY

*TESOL Quarterly*, a professional, refereed journal, encourages submission of previously unpublished articles on topics of significance to individuals concerned with the teaching of English as a second or foreign language and of standard English as a second dialect. As a publication that represents a variety of cross-disciplinary interests, both theoretical and practical, the *Quarterly* invites manuscripts on a wide range of topics, especially in the following areas:

1. psychology and sociology of language learning and teaching; issues in research and research methodology
2. curriculum design and development; instructional methods, materials, and techniques
3. testing and evaluation
4. professional preparation
5. language planning
6. professional standards

Because the *Quarterly* is committed to publishing manuscripts that contribute to bridging theory and practice in our profession, it particularly welcomes submissions drawing on relevant research (e.g., in anthropology, applied and theoretical linguistics, communication, education, English education [including reading and writing theory], psycholinguistics, psychology, first and second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and sociology) and addressing implications and applications of this research to issues in our profession. The *Quarterly* prefers that all submissions be written so that their content is accessible to a broad readership, including those individuals who may not have familiarity with the subject matter addressed. *TESOL Quarterly* is an international journal. It welcomes submissions from English language contexts around the world.

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Carol A. Chapelle  
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The following factors are considered when evaluating the suitability of a manuscript for publication in *TESOL Quarterly*:

- The manuscript appeals to the general interests of *TESOL Quarterly*'s readership.
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- The content of the manuscript is accessible to the broad readership of the *Quarterly*, not only to specialists in the area addressed.
- The manuscript offers a new, original insight or interpretation and not just a restatement of others' ideas and views.
- The manuscript makes a significant (practical, useful, plausible) contribution to the field.
- The manuscript is likely to arouse readers' interest.
- The manuscript reflects sound scholarship and research design with appropriate, correctly interpreted references to other authors and works.
- The manuscript is well written and organized and conforms to the specifications of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (4th ed.).

**Reviews.** *TESOL Quarterly* invites succinct, evaluative reviews of professional books. Reviews should provide a descriptive and evaluative summary and a brief discussion of the significance of the work in the context of current theory and practice. Submissions should generally be no longer than 500 words. Submit **two copies** of the review to the Review Editor:

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**Review Articles.** *TESOL Quarterly* also welcomes occasional review articles, that is, comparative discussions of several publications that fall into a topical category (e.g., pronunciation, literacy training, teaching methodology). Review articles should provide a description and evaluative comparison of the materials and discuss the relative significance of the works in the context of current theory and practice. Submissions should generally be no longer than 1,500 words. Submit **two copies** of the review article to the Review Editor at the address given above.

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**The Forum.** *TESOL Quarterly* welcomes comments and reactions from readers regarding specific aspects or practices of our profession. Responses to published articles and reviews are also welcome; unfortunately, we are not able to publish responses to previous exchanges. Contributions to The Forum should generally be no longer than 7–10 double-spaced pages or 3,400 words. If possible, indicate the number of words at the end of the contribution. Submit **two copies** to the Editor of *TESOL Quarterly* at the address given above.

Brief discussions of qualitative and quantitative **Research Issues** and of **Teaching Issues** are also published in The Forum. Although these contributions are typically solicited, readers may send topic suggestions or make known their availability as contributors by writing directly to the Editors of these subsections.

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**Special-Topic Issues.** Typically, one issue per volume will be devoted to a special topic. Topics are approved by the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Quarterly*. Those wishing to suggest topics or make known their availability as guest editors should contact the Editor of *TESOL Quarterly*. Issues will generally contain both invited articles designed to survey and illuminate central themes as well as articles solicited through a call for papers.

## General Submission Guidelines

1. All submissions to the *Quarterly* should conform to the requirements of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (4th ed.), which can be obtained from the American Psychological Association, Book Order Department, Dept. KK, P.O. Box 92984, Washington, DC 20090-2984 USA. Orders from the United Kingdom, Europe, Africa, or the Middle East should be sent to American Psychological Association, Dept. KK, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 8LU, England. For more information, e-mail [order@apa.org](mailto:order@apa.org) or consult <http://www.apa.org/books/ordering.html>.
2. All submissions to *TESOL Quarterly* should be accompanied by a cover letter that includes a full mailing address and both a daytime and an evening telephone number. Where available, authors should include an electronic mail address and fax number.
3. Authors of full-length articles, Brief Reports and Summaries, and Forum contributions should include **two copies** of a very brief biographical statement (in sentence form, maximum 50 words), plus any special notations or acknowledgments that they would like to have included. Double spacing should be used throughout.
4. *TESOL Quarterly* provides 25 free reprints of published full-length articles and 10 reprints of material published in the Reviews, Brief Reports and Summaries, and The Forum sections.
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## Informed Consent Guidelines

*TESOL Quarterly* expects authors to adhere to ethical and legal standards for work with human subjects. Although we are aware that such standards vary among institutions and countries, we require authors and contributors to

meet, as a minimum, the conditions detailed below before submitting a manuscript for review. TESOL recognizes that some institutions may require research proposals to satisfy additional requirements. If you wish to discuss whether or how your study met these guidelines, you may e-mail the managing editor of TESOL publications at tq@tesol.edu or call 703-535-7852.

As an author, you will be asked to sign a statement indicating that you have complied with Option A or Option B before TESOL will publish your work.

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- B. If you are not bound by an institutional review process, or if it does not meet the requirements outlined below, you have complied with the following conditions.

#### Participation in the Research

1. You have informed participants in your study, sample, class, group, or program that you will be conducting research in which they will be the participants or that you would like to write about them for publication.
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5. You have explained to participants if and how their confidentiality will be protected.
6. You have given participants sufficient contact information that they can reach you for answers to questions regarding the research.
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8. You have explained to participants any possible direct benefits of participating (e.g., receiving a copy of the article or chapter).
9. You have obtained from each participant (or from the participant's parent or guardian) a signed consent form that sets out the terms of your agreement with the participants and have kept these forms on file (TESOL will not ask to see them).

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10. If you will be collecting samples of student work with the intention of publishing them, either anonymously or with attribution, you have made that clear to the participants in writing.

11. If the sample of student work (e.g., a signed drawing or signed piece of writing) will be published with the student's real name visible, you have obtained a signed consent form and will include that form when you submit your manuscript for review and editing.
12. If your research or writing involves minors (persons under age 18), you have supplied and obtained signed separate informed consent forms from the parent or guardian and from the minor, if he or she is old enough to read, understand, and sign the form.
13. If you are working with participants who do not speak English well or are intellectually disabled, you have written the consent forms in a language that the participant or the participant's guardian can understand.

## Statistical Guidelines

Because of the educational role the *Quarterly* plays modeling research in the field, it is of particular concern that published research articles meet high statistical standards. In order to support this goal, the following guidelines are provided.

**Reporting the study.** Studies submitted to the *Quarterly* should be explained clearly and in enough detail that it would be possible to replicate the design of the study on the basis of the information provided in the article. Likewise, the study should include sufficient information to allow readers to evaluate the claims made by the author. In order to accommodate both of these requirements, authors of statistical studies should present the following.

1. a clear statement of the research questions and the hypotheses that are being examined;
2. descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations, and sample sizes, necessary for the reader to correctly interpret and evaluate any inferential statistics;
3. appropriate types of reliability and validity of any tests, ratings, questionnaires, and so on;
4. graphs and charts that help explain the results;
5. clear and careful descriptions of the instruments used and the types of intervention employed in the study;
6. explicit identifications of dependent, independent, moderator, intervening, and control variables;
7. complete source tables for statistical tests;
8. discussions of how the assumptions underlying the research design were met, assumptions such as random selection and assignment of subjects and sufficiently large sample sizes so that the results are stable;
9. tests of the assumptions of any statistical tests, when appropriate; and
10. realistic interpretations of the statistical significance of the results keeping in mind that the meaningfulness of the results is a separate and important issue, especially for correlation.

**Conducting the analyses.** Quantitative studies submitted to *TESOL Quarterly* should reflect a concern for controlling Type I and Type II error. Thus, studies should avoid multiple *t* tests, multiple ANOVAs, and so on. However, in the very few instances in which multiple tests might be employed, the author should explain the effects of such use on the probability values in the results. In reporting the statistical analyses, authors should choose one significance level (usually .05) and report all results in terms of that level. Likewise, studies should report effect size through such strength of association measures as omega-squared or eta-squared along with beta (the possibility of Type II error) whenever this may be important to interpreting the significance of the results.

**Interpreting the results.** The results should be explained clearly and the implications discussed such that readers without extensive training in the use of statistics can understand them. Care should be taken in making causal inferences from statistical results, and these should be avoided with correlational studies. Results of the study should not be overinterpreted or overgeneralized. Finally, alternative explanations of the results should be discussed.

## Qualitative Research Guidelines

To ensure that *Quarterly* articles model rigorous qualitative research, the following guidelines are provided.

**Conducting the study.** Studies submitted to the *Quarterly* should exhibit an in-depth understanding of the philosophical perspectives and research methodologies inherent in conducting qualitative research. Utilizing these perspectives and methods in the course of conducting research helps to ensure that studies are credible, valid, and dependable rather than impressionistic and superficial. Reports of qualitative research should meet the following criteria.

1. Data collection (as well as analyses and reporting) is aimed at uncovering an emic perspective. In other words, the study focuses on research participants' perspectives and interpretations of behavior, events, and situations rather than etic (outsider-imposed) categories, models, and viewpoints.
2. Data collection strategies include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Researchers should conduct ongoing observations over a sufficient period of time so as to build trust with respondents, learn the culture (e.g., classroom, school, or community), and check for misinformation introduced by both the researcher and the researched. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods and sources such as participant-observation, informal and formal interviewing, and collection of relevant or available documents.

**Analyzing the data.** Data analysis is also guided by the philosophy and methods underlying qualitative research studies. The researcher should engage in comprehensive data treatment in which data from all relevant



sources are analyzed. In addition, many qualitative studies demand an analytic inductive approach involving a cyclical process of data collection, analysis (taking an emic perspective and utilizing the descriptive language the respondents themselves use), creation of hypotheses, and testing of hypotheses in further data collection.

**Reporting the data.** The researcher should generally provide “thick description” with sufficient detail to allow the reader to determine whether transfer to other situations can be considered. Reports also should include the following.

1. a description of the theoretical or conceptual framework that guides research questions and interpretations;
2. a clear statement of the research questions;
3. a description of the research site, participants, procedures for ensuring participant anonymity, and data collection strategies, and a description of the roles of the researcher(s);
4. a description of a clear and salient organization of patterns found through data analysis—reports of patterns should include representative examples, not anecdotal information;
5. interpretations that exhibit a holistic perspective in which the author traces the meaning of patterns across all the theoretically salient or descriptively relevant micro- and macrocontexts in which they are embedded;
6. interpretations and conclusions that provide evidence of grounded theory and discussion of how this theory relates to current research/theory in the field, including relevant citations—in other words, the article should focus on the issues or behaviors that are salient to participants and that not only reveal an in-depth understanding of the situation studied but also suggest how it connects to current related theories.

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Publishers are invited to send copies of their new materials to the *TESOL Quarterly* Review Editor, Dan Douglas, Iowa State University, at the address listed in the Information for Contributors section. Packages should be labeled REVIEW COPIES.

*TESOL Quarterly* readers are invited to contribute review articles and evaluative or comparative reviews for consideration for publication in the Review section of the *Quarterly*. These should be sent to the *TESOL Quarterly* Review Editor, Dan Douglas, Iowa State University, at the address listed in the Information for Contributors section.

TESOL gratefully acknowledges receipt of the following publications.

- Benson, M. (1998). *Standard English–Serbo Croatian, Serbo Croatian–English dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blue's ABC Time Activities [Computer software]. (1998). Woodinville, WA: Humongous Entertainment.
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