

The *MEXTESOL Journal*: Birth to 1991

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Abstract

Forty years ago this year the MEXTESOL Journal was born. This year in commemoration of the Journal's founding, we will be publishing a series of articles recounting the Journal's history, many written by the Editors who have guided it. We also will be publishing invited papers by past authors in many ELT fields reflecting on how the ELT world has changed in the last forty years. The history of the Journal and the articles it has published reflect the history of ELT in Mexico. From 1976 to the present, we will see how ELT has changed and grown, how methods have come and gone, and how technology has changed how we teach our classes. We hope you enjoy the articles and learn a little how your profession has changed in forty years.

Resumen

Hace 40 años nació el MEXTESOL Journal. En este año, en conmemoración a su fundación, estaremos publicando una serie de artículos rememorando la historia del Journal, muchos escritos por los editores que le han conducido. También publicaremos trabajos invitados de autores anteriores en muchos campos la enseñanza del inglés (ELT) que den luces sobre como ha cambiado el mundo ELT en los últimos 40 años. La historia del Journal y los artículos que se han publicado refleja la historia del ELT en Mexico. Veremos cómo ha cambiado y ha crecido, de 1976 al presente, cómo han surgido y desaparecidos métodos y como la tecnología ha cambiado nuestra manera de enseñar nuestras clases. Esperamos que disfruten los artículos y aprendan un poco sobre la manera que nuestra profesión se ha modificado en 40 años.

The Origin of the *MEXTESOL Journal*

Writing history is not easy. Sometimes a lack of documents or witnesses makes it almost impossible. This is what has happened to the *MEXTESOL Journal* (MJ). For some reason its beginnings are blurry. In fact, if Enrique Gutierrez, MEXTESOL's third President, had not decided to give a plenary about the history of MEXTESOL from its earliest roots during the Third Annual Convention in Guadalajara, Jalisco in 1976, and if MJ had not decided to publish it in Volume 1, Number 3, this article might not have been written. Gutierrez describes not only how MEXTESOL began, but also the motivation for creating a professional journal that was more than just an organizational newsletter. The first part of this article is based on that plenary address (Gutierrez, 1977).

The inspiration for MEXTESOL came after a group of teachers from Mexico attended the 7th Annual TESOL Convention in Puerto Rico in 1970. On returning, they were inspired to form a professional organization such as TESOL in Mexico. In 1973 they had their first meeting and Harley Stevenson was elected President. At that time, three chapters were formed: Mexico City, Tampico, and Toluca. The first MEXTESOL Convention was soon held in Tampico and 280 teachers from all over the country attended. James Alatis and Clifford Prator, both well-known experts in the field, were also present.

MEXTESOL grew rapidly. At that time there were around 35,000 English teachers in Mexico and soon new chapters were formed in Ensenada, Comitán, Mérida, and Monterrey. The most active chapter was that of Mexico City; up to 300 people attended their Saturday meetings!

This fast growth caused an urgent need for increased communication among chapters and with the membership. Remember, back then there was no email or *WhatsApp*, no

cellphones, and regular long-distance calls were expensive and usually made with one eye on the phone and one on the clock. The mail service was better than it is today, but days would pass from when a letter was mailed to when it was received. In order to increase communication, a *MEXTESOL Bulletin* was created, but that was not enough.

At the Second Annual Convention in 1975 in Cocoyoc, there were 400 attendees of approximately 700 teachers who were members of MEXTESOL. All agreed more communication was needed and as Gutierrez (1977) wrote: "The *MEXTESOL JOURNAL*, a professional publication aiming to serve as a forum for disseminating new ideas and techniques in English Language Teaching, serving the specific needs of those working in Mexico, was created" (p. 50). This was the beginning.

The first Editor of the *MEXTESOL Journal* was Dr. Eugene Long, the Associate Editor was Josephine Claudio, and the Methodology Editor (who produced a column called *Chalk Talk*) was MJ's good friend, Paul Davies. The first issue was published in April 1976. Unfortunately for us, it has been impossible (up to this moment) to find a copy of this issue, so it is not in our archives (www.mextesol.net), and no one knows what the first articles published by MJ were. We are still waiting for an email from anyone who knows of the whereabouts of the first issue. However, Gutierrez (1977) reports:

The Editor received many letters from all over the Republic, the United States and other countries praising the Journal and encouraging us to continue the effort. Ruth Crymes, Editor of the TESOL Quarterly, wrote a very impressive letter congratulating us and saying that the articles seemed to her "very practical and meaty,...An excellent contribution to professionals in our field." (p. 50)

Whatever the contents of the first issue, they were of sufficient quality to impress even the most important editors. The fact that Ruth Crymes says they were both "meaty" and "practical" defines the kind of article published during in the early issues of MJ. In those days there were very few research articles in ELT and most smaller journals, like MJ, concentrated on publishing articles for the classroom teacher.

Of Editors, Issues, and Conflicts

For the first years of MJ, Editors and Associate Editors changes almost annually. Eugene S. Long was followed, after a brief interim stint by Josephine Claudio, by Peter A. Shaw and Jerrilou Johnson, who with a group of alternating Associate Editors, gave MJ stability by holding the Editor's post from 1978 to 1982. A summary of the Editors and Associate Editors can be found in Table 1.

| Vol. (No.) | Years | Editor | Associate Editor(s) |
|------------|-----------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1(1)-2(1) | 1976-1977 | Eugene S. Long | Josephine Claudio |
| 2(2) | 1977 | Josephine Claudio (interim) | |
| 2(3) | 1977 | Peter A. Shaw | Jerrilou Johnson |
| 2(4)-3(1) | 1978 | Jerrilou Johnson | Peter A. Shaw |
| 3(2)-3(4) | 1978-1979 | Jerrilou Johnson | Jeremy Harmer |
| 4(2)* | 1979 | Jerrilou Johnson | Lyn McLean |
| 4(3) | 1980 | Jerrilou Johnson | Jeremy Harmer-Guest Editor |
| 4(4)-5(1)* | 1980-1981 | Jerrilou Johnson | Lyn McLean |
| 5(4)-6(2) | 1982 | Jerrilou Johnson | Joaquin Meza Coria |

| | | | |
|---------------|--------------|------------------------|--|
| 7(1)*-8(2) | 1983-1984 | Leslie Adams | David Howard |
| 8(3)** | 1984-1985 | David Howard | |
| 10(1)-10(4) | 1986 | Leslie Adams | Phyllis Ryan |
| 11(1)-13(3) | 1987-1989 | Leslie Adams | Susan Stephens |
| 14(1) | 1990 | Alison Lane | |
| 16(2)-17(3) | 1992-1994 | JoAnn Miller | Ulrich Schrader |
| 17(4)-22(3) | 1994-1999 | JoAnn Miller | Elinore Duque |
| 22(4)-24(4) | 1999-2001 | Connie R. Johnson | Various |
| 25(1)-25(2) | 2001-2002 | Natalia Martínez León | Various |
| 25(4) | 2002 | JoAnn Miller (interim) | |
| 26(1)-31(3) | 2002-2007 | Ulrich Schrader | Ma. Guadalupe Santos Espino |
| 32(1)-34(2) | 2008-2010 | Ulrich Schrader | M. Martha Lengeling, Saúl Santos |
| 35(1)-39(1) | 2011-2015 | M. Martha Lengeling | JoAnn Miller, Ma. Guadalupe Rodríguez Bulnes |
| 39(2)-present | 2015-present | M. Martha Lengeling | JoAnn Miller, Josefina C. Santana J. |

Table 1. Editors and Associate Editors of the *MEXTESOL Journal*.

For many years MJ published four issues a year. Each volume began with the school year in September. That is why when you look at the MJ Archives, two issues are published in one year and two in the following.

When Jerrilou Johnson left, the position of Editor was taken over by Leslie Adams and Associate Editor by David Howard. It is here that a dark period in the history of MJ began. Leslie was Editor for a year, and in the last issue of this period (Volume 8, Number 2, 1984) David Howard was already taking a lead in the publication of MJ. He wrote the *From the Editor* section in that issue. By the next issue he was the sole Editor with no Associate Editor and the tone of MJ changed. Then apparently there were no more issues published until 1986 when Leslie Adams returned as Editor with Phyllis Ryan as Associate Editor and began publishing Volume 10. As far as our research has discovered there were no issues in Volume 9.

It is impossible in this short article to further describe the details of these events, but the reader is invited to visit the Archives and look through 1984, Volume 8, Numbers 3 and 4 to see the changes made in MJ's content. The first issue in Volume 10 contains both comments from the incoming Editors as to why Mr. Howard was removed from his position, but also includes a more detailed description of the causes from MEXTESOL's Executive Committee.

These writings are offensive and in bad taste, and are not the kind of material which should appear in a serious academic journal. The views expressed are those of David Howard and are not shared by Members of the National Executive Committee or any other member of the Association as far as is known. They were published in the Journal without prior knowledge of any MEXTESOL officer and the other co-editor was not consulted. (Stromberg de Villavicencio, 1986, p. 5)

After this uncomfortable period, MJ returned to relative normalcy. Leslie Adams continued on as Editor until 1989; Phyllis Ryan was Associate Editor for one year and was followed by Susan Stephens. In 1990 Alison Lane entered as Editor with no Associate Editor. She was only Editor for one year and when she had to leave the post and since apparently no one else was interested in the position, MJ had to all

appearances published its last issue. Of course, that was not the case as will be seen in our next issue.

ELT in 1976

For the readers who were not alive yet in 1976, the reality of ELT in Mexico was very different that it is today. The author of this piece was here and has memories of a completely different country. As has been mentioned, the technology we take for granted now, did not exist. For example, the cassette tape recorder had been on the market since 1962 (Wikipedia), but in my recollection they were not common the classroom until around 1979 which means there was very little realistic practice in listening comprehension.

In the first Volume of MJ Barbara Langworthy (1977) published a state-of-the-art article on English teaching in Mexico. The information Table 2 summarizes that article.

| | K-6 (Primaria) | Middle School (Secundaria) | High School (Prepa) | Higher Ed (Universidad) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--|------------------------|---|
| Public/Private | Private only | Public | Public | Public |
| Total number of students | 725,144 | 1,898,053 | 606,796 | 542,292 |
| Taking English | around 350,000 | 1,518,424 (80%) | 250,000 – 300,000 | |
| Syllabus | None official | Official | IPN thinking about one | |
| Hours/Week/Year | Varies | 3 hours per week for 3 years (180 hours) | Varies | Varies |
| Teachers | | around 10,000 | | |
| Special conditions | | 55-65 students in some classes | Focus on ESP | 72 institutions in country; 11 in Mexico City, 34 in states; ESP very popular |

Table 2. English teaching in Mexico, 1976 (summarized from Langworthy,1977).

As can be seen from the table, English was not taught at this time in public primary schools and it was taught in only about half of the private primary schools. Langworthy reported that the Mexican Ministry of Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública-SEP*) was studying the possibility of writing a syllabus for elementary schools. This only recently has become a reality.

The report for public middle schools (*secundarias*) seems familiar, at least as to number of hours. Today most middle school students do study English and in most cases the class size has decreased. In high school (*preparatoria, bachillerato*) teaching English was not a priority. Now most public schools and almost all private schools include English in the curriculum. This, of course, is due to the realization that English is a necessary skill today due to globalization. In 1976 the focus was on teaching only reading; this tendency is not as strong and most classes are dedicated to the four skills.

These days English is widely taught in higher education or at least students are required to pass a proficiency exam in order to get their degrees. In 1976 Langworthy mentions

only two institutions of higher learning that had language centers: The *Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras* (CELE) at the National University (UNAM), and a language center at the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* (IPN). She states that other universities expected their students to study English independently at private institutes, such as the *Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales* (IMNRC) in Mexico City and the *Anglo Mexicano de Cultura* with, at that time, seventeen academies throughout the country.

One of Langworthy's (1977) greatest concerns was related to teacher education.

It is estimated that not more than 10% of all the teachers of English in Mexico at the junior and high school levels have taken methodology course at one of the twenty Escuelas Normales Superiores [Advanced Normal Schools] that now exist. Not more than half of these twenty normal schools have methodology courses for English teaching, and perhaps not more than 100 teachers at Normales Superiores teach these courses in all of Mexico. (p. 40)

My personal experience is that at this specific time and for many more years, very few English language teachers had university degrees. The best qualified teachers with some exceptions usually had one or more teaching certificates from private institutions. Those who had university degrees did not have them in the teaching of English, but rather in areas such as English Literature, Linguistics or other unrelated fields such as Veterinary Medicine or Law. Only in the 1980s and 1990s did public universities, mostly out of the Mexico City area, begin offering degrees in language teaching. Now many teachers have undergraduate degrees and Master's in ELT and the number of professionals with a Ph.D. from prestigious international universities is growing.

The MEXTESOL Journal Archives: A reflection of the evolution of ELT

As has already been mentioned, English language teaching has changed a lot since the first issue of the *MEXTESOL Journal* appeared in 1976 and MJ reflects those changes in the articles that are stored in our Archive. Appendix 1 has a list of a few of the most representative articles.

As has already been mentioned, technology is one of the most obvious areas of change. When MJ started there were no personal computers available in schools and, consequently, no internet or video to use in the classroom. In fact, in 1976, except perhaps in a few privileged schools as has been mentioned, there were not even cassette tape recorders. The VCR did not appear until the 1980s or later. It can be seen in Appendix 1 that most articles dealt with the use of the overhead projector and the language laboratory.

In theory, it must be remembered that when MJ first was published, the Audio-lingual Method, which was based on habit-formation through the memorization of dialogs and repetitive drills, had been used almost exclusively for almost thirty years and was starting to be replaced by the Communicative Approach. Articles in MJ reflect this change with innovative topics such as communicative competence, functions and notions, and discourse. There also are articles for teachers who are having a hard time adjusting to the changes. It must be mentioned that the Audio-Lingual Method did not disappear from one day to the next. MJ has a large number of articles reflecting the discussions that were circulating at the time between those reluctant to change and those supporting the new communicative ideas. There are also articles that reflect a

social phenomena that was happening in Mexico at the moment—the defense of Spanish from the onslaught of foreign influences—especially the English language. The practical articles related to classroom techniques tend to reflect the dying Audio-Lingual Method. Most deal with techniques for teaching dialogs and aiding memorization.

Our field has come a long way from those first years, but it is important for all of us, professionals and students, to be aware of our professional origins. The Archives of the *MEXTESOL Journal* are one place to find our history. These older articles would be ideal for students looking for thesis topics about the history of ELT. For this reason, we are trying to complete the Archives. Unfortunately many issues are missing. Appendix 2 has a list of missing or possibly missing issues (we cannot know exactly how many numbers were published in a volume if we only have Number 1 or Numbers 1 and 2). Please look through those old boxes hiding in the back of your closets or ask at your school library. We would love to see our Archives complete.

In the next issue we will continue the story of the *MEXTESOL Journal*. The story will continue at the low point that has already been mentioned, but soon events will happen that lead to another step forward that was taken toward MJ becoming a modern professional journal. The objective of this article was to explore the origins of the *MEXTESOL Journal* and reflect on its evolution.

References

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Appendix 1. Some Early *MEXTESOL Journal* Articles

| Theory | | |
|---|------------|---|
| Elizabeth Brody | 2(1), 1977 | <i>Communicative competence, presuppositions and language teaching</i> |
| Robert J. Di Pietro, | 2(2), 1977 | <i>Communicative competence: The need for a comprehensive definition</i> |
| Javier C. Bravo | 3(1), 1979 | <i>On contrastive analysis</i> |
| L. G. Alexander | 3(3), 1979 | <i>A functional/notional approach to course design</i> |
| Margaret Best & Silvia Gutiérrez | 3(3), 1979 | <i>In support of a cognitive approach to EFL based on Piagetian theories</i> |
| Paul Davies | 4(4), 1980 | <i>Grammar, notions, functions, discourse: some perspectives</i> |
| Pamela Urdal | 4(4), 1980 | <i>Cognitive lifeboats for the sinking audio-lingual ship</i> |
| Mary Varela | 4(4), 1980 | <i>The disadvantages of the functional approach</i> |
| Ocie Posener Woodyear | 6(1), 1982 | <i>Suggestopedy</i> |
| Luis Fernando Lara | 7(1), 1983 | <i>La defensa del español y la enseñanza del inglés</i> |
| Technology | | |
| William R. Bacon | 1(4), 1977 | <i>"Olaf" and the instantaneous measurement of spoken skills</i> |
| Janet McAlpin | 3(1), 1978 | <i>The OHP in the advanced reading class</i> |
| Anne Fraenkel, Mary Underwood & Norman Whitney | 3(4), 1979 | <i>Practical considerations for the selection and use of taped materials</i> |
| Robert N. Vanderplank | 5(4), 1982 | <i>Using the language laboratory (or Rolls Royce bumpers make very good bottle openers)</i> |
| Classroom Techniques | | |
| Grace C. Scott | 1(2), 1976 | <i>Say it with gestures, part 2</i> |
| Peter Shaw | 2(1), 1977 | <i>A typology of dialogues in a postulated oral communication scale for a structural-situational approach to EFL</i> |
| Robert C. Weissberg | 2(3), 1977 | <i>Progressive decontrol through deletion: A guided writing technique for advanced ESL learners in technical fields</i> |

Appendix 2: Missing or Suspected Missing Issues of the MEXTESOL Journal

| Missing | | | Maybe Missing | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Volume | Issue(s) | Year | Volume | Issue(s) | Year |
| 1 | 1 | 1976 | 6 | 3, 4 | 1983 |
| 4 | 1 | 1979 | 8 | 4 | 1984 |
| 5 | 2 | 1981 | 11 | 2, 3, 4 | 1987 |
| 5 | 3 | 1982 | 12 | 3, 4 | 1988 |
| 7 | 2, 3 | 1983 | 13 | 4 | 1989 |
| 10 | 2 | 1986 | 14 | 2, 3, 4 | 1990 |
| 12 | 1 | 1988 | 27 | 4 | 2004 |
| 13 | 1, 2 | 1989 | 28 | 2, 3, 4 | 2004-2005 |
| 15 | any | 1991 | 29 | 3, 4 | 2005 |
| 16 | 1 | 1992 | 30 | 3, 4 | 2006 |
| 16 | 3 | 1993 | 31 | 4 | 2007 |
| 23 | 2 | 1999 | 32 | 3, 4 | 2008 |
| 25 | 3 | 2002 | 33 | 2, 3, 4 | 2009 |
| 26 | 2 | 2003 | | | |
| 27 | 2 | 2003-2004 | | | |