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An Intercultural Perspective on Conflicts Between Language Teachers

BY DOUGLAS J. GOODWIN, UNIVERSITY OF GUANAJUATO, MEXICO¹

In order to begin this paper properly the definitions of two primary concepts related to the topic are required—culture and intercultural communication. E.B. Taylor in O’Sullivan offers this definition of culture:

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities or habits acquired by members of a society. (1994:2)

It is these characteristics which are shared by people that form specific groups or communities.

Intercultural communication involves communication between several cultures. The cultures are not necessarily national entities but rather various groups of people who share beliefs, traditions, art, language, behavior, etc. There are three components involved in successful intercultural communication: knowledge of the target culture, awareness of the target culture, and skill in performing in the target culture.

There are three main areas in language education and culture. They are culture as content, culture as communication, and culture as a methodological factor. The focus of this paper is not specifically on cultural studies or communicative language learning but rather it is focused on learning more about and trying to better understand the interculturality where I work. While arguably every workplace in the world has internal conflicts, I believe that there must be a logical explanation for them. I believe the interculturality of the staff is the starting point for trying to understand some of the conflicts that exist between some of the teachers at the Language School of the University of Guanajuato.

I would like to believe that the people who work in the Language School are mostly intelligent, hardworking individuals who try to carry out their labor in the most professional way possible. Therefore, it is my intention with this paper to demonstrate that the conflicts among the teachers on

¹ This is a refereed paper. The author can be reached at goodwin@quijote.ugto.mx.

staff are in fact due to intercultural aspects and not just personal issues or bad attitudes.

There are nine languages taught at the Language School. Of those, English is the department with the majority of the student demand, which also means that it is the department with the most teachers—half of the teaching staff are English teachers. The current director and academic chair are also both English teachers by profession. In addition, since English is the most desired language to study in Mexico, the university appears quite willing to support the department in terms of growth and advancement, as was seen via the enormous amount of support for the completion of a project for a Bachelor's degree in ELT, which began in August 2000.

The above-mentioned information establishes certain cause for some tension between the English department and other language areas, which are made up mainly of Mexican teachers. Resentment might be a better word than tension in this case. That is to say, some colleagues have voiced their objections to having a foreigner as their director, as well as having more importance be given to a department that is made up primarily of foreign teachers.

On the other hand, there are a number of foreign teachers who seem to project certain arrogance to their Mexican co-workers. I will use the terms “foreign” and “U.S.” as synonyms to describe the non-Mexican teachers since most of the foreigners are indeed from the United States. And they come to Mexico with different attitudes about the target culture. There are those who arrive with the well-known attitude, “everything in my country is better,” and they seem to consider everything and everyone here as inferior to them and what is theirs (education, opinions, etc.) There are also those who would question every decision made by a Mexican teacher or Mexican superior because apparently they expect everything at our workplace to be the same as it would be in a workplace in the United States.

There is also the issue of the “defensive Mexican”. Mexicans can be very proud people, but they can be especially nationalistic. If someone from another country appears to be “stepping on a Mexican's toes”, the Mexican can often quickly become aggressive in the defense of his / her national pride, in whatever situation.

Because of these mentioned reasons there are often confrontations between colleagues. Interestingly, during these confrontations, the real feel-

ings of the individuals rarely, if ever, come out. Normally each side of the discussion maintains a superficial “professional” stance while taking turns jabbing each other into arguments about school policy. It is only afterward, while each is in their respective “corner” do the real attitudes surface. When individuals are “safe” within their group they feel secure about voicing what they really feel about the other individuals and the situation.

Here is an example to illustrate a conflictive situation at the Language School. Some members of the English department, who were more or less trained in teaching ELT, offered a methodology workshop to the teachers from another language department made up of entirely Mexican teachers. The immediate response from those teachers was, upon hearing about the workshop, “Why would we attend such a workshop? These people know nothing about teaching our language” (the one they teach). Nevertheless, they were informed that attendance would be mandatory, so their attitude did not improve.

The English teachers, on the other hand, already had (have) their own opinion about the teachers in question. The fact that no one in that department has any training in second / foreign language teaching has led some to believe that they are not competent teachers. While no one from the English department has actually been in the classroom to observe them in action, there have been reports and complaints that have reached the administration, as well as the university Rector, which have fueled the English department’s perception, or misperception, of them and their ability as teachers.

The workshop was given and the Mexican teachers reluctantly attended. While I was not involved in this workshop, I had the opportunity to speak to the people who were involved. The reaction I heard from the attending teachers generally was, “What we saw in there is of no use in our classrooms.” or “Your colleagues think they are superior.” By my “colleagues” they referred to those who gave the workshop, although I sensed they might have been trying to vent their frustration at the entire English department in general. In all honesty, I thought their remarks were very narrow-minded and unfair to say. Especially since the workshop was supposed to be helpful for them. The people who gave the workshop had remarks such as, “Those people just refuse to accept that someone else might be able to teach them something new.” or “They don’t have any idea what they’re doing.” These statements also struck me as unfair. As this story concludes, the English department continues to criticize that department, while those

teachers continue to resent the insinuations that they are not good teachers. The resentment is so much that in social gatherings organized by the Language School, they are always the only people who do not attend, or if they do attend, they usually group together and isolate themselves from the rest.

An Intercultural Perspective

This seemingly constant friction in the Language School, as illustrated above, can be explained from an intercultural standpoint in different ways. There are the cultural differences that exist between Mexicans and people from other parts of the world, mainly the United States. Holliday's (1999) article on "small cultures" provides another valid rationale. The concepts of culture shock and perception / misperception also shed light on explaining why there is so much tension at the Language School.

A comparison of the two main cultures in question here, Mexico and the United States, is carried out using Hofstede's (1986) "four dimensions of national culture." The word "culture" is used loosely in this section primarily to distinguish the different groups or individual teachers at the Language School who come from different countries. This comparison will demonstrate some of the obvious differences. I will then relate them to the Language School and its issues.

First of all, the power distance in each country differs. According to Hofstede (1986), O'Sullivan (1994) and my personal experience, Mexico is a place with large power distance. That is, Mexicans generally accept their inferior position in the chain of command. The United States, on the other hand, has a smaller power distance. An example for Mexico would be the society and its government. The same political party has ruled Mexico for 71 years. Everyone has an idea about the extremes of corruption and violence that the government has carried out in order to stay in power, but they have accepted it as normal and the only way. Only last year, during the presidential campaigns, were there signs of that acceptance declining. However, most of the people I spoke to indicated that although they were going to vote for the opposition party, none of them believed that their candidate would win; or they believed he would win, but he would not survive long enough to be sworn in as president. It was not the skepticism that got my attention, but rather the ease and resignation in their voices when they said it.

Mexico is considered a country with low individualism, while the United States is just the opposite. Hofstede defines a collectivist society as

“...tightly integrated...” (1986) which in my experience describes Mexicans both in country and abroad (e.g., Mexican communities in the United States). I have discovered this to be true thanks, in part, to my wife (who is Mexican) and her family. It would seem that two or three times a year a new “cousin” appears at our door to visit. I was convinced that all of the relatives had attended our wedding, but I was obviously mistaken. Nevertheless, these new “cousins” almost never fail to appear with some sort of special circumstance that requires some kind of assistance. My “individualist-loosely integrated background” (Hofstede 1986) has conditioned me to react quite defensively—and often aggressively—in these cases. I usually behave based on reflex and say something that embarrasses my wife. My wife’s reflex, on the other hand, is to look for a solution to the problem, no matter the sacrifice or cost. She does this knowing beforehand that these people most likely would never have visited us had they not needed something, nor will they likely ever return unless they need something again—to the date I have not seen most of these cousins a second time. My wife and her family do not do these things because they are gullible or because they can not say “no,” but rather simply because they are members of the same family and would expect the same help from their relatives if they were ever in need. For my part, I have learned to accept that my wife is like that, and I now recognize it as a noble quality. Could I be still be learning to adapt to Mexican culture after ten years? —Evidently.

In regard to uncertainty avoidance, O’Sullivan (1994) and Hofstede (1986) list Mexico as strong and the United States as weak. Mexicans, for the most part, are not risk-takers. In fact, they are a strongly Catholic and nationalistic society. Religion and national pride are the main “crutches” of Mexican society. Whenever there is an economic crisis—usually every six years—the people’s attention is seemingly diverted to news and events that would appear to focus on matters distant from their current situation. It is not unusual at these times to note a large amount of publicity for soccer games or other events for entertainment. Likewise, the church suddenly appears in the news more frequently to remind everyone of his or her faith in God; and, without a doubt, more and more people find their way to a church to pray for better times. The praying does not usually work to improve people’s financial situations, but it does tranquilize them and help them learn to live with less in every crisis.

The United States, however, is a more risk-taking society. Religion plays a much less important role, and the people are seemingly more toler-

ant to the advent of something new. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear a Mexican criticize the United States as cultureless without its own traditions and without faith in God. Mainly immigrants who arrived to the continent with their own cultures, traditions, beliefs, etc. form the United States. So, it is understandable why someone from a predominantly Catholic society would criticize a country where more than 250,000,000 people are divided into the numerous religions from around the world. While they do have faith in their own “God” it is not necessarily the same God for everyone.

The one dimension that the two cultures share in common is that of masculinity. Both stress material success, certain competitiveness and assertiveness more than they do “quality of life, interpersonal relationships and concern for the weak” (Hofstede 1986). The already high divorce rate in the United States and the rapidly growing one in Mexico could be one indicator of the lack of interest in interpersonal relationships in both “cultures”.

The Four Dimensions and the Language School

As mentioned earlier, Mexico is primarily a collectivist society, whereas the United States is more individualist. It is not any different in the Language School. The Mexican teachers tend to depend on each other more. They mostly spend their preparation time and / or free time with each other both in their respective language areas and together. The foreign teachers, on the other hand, usually spend their time alone or in small groups. During staff meetings, where a lot of the tensions surface, it is common to see the teachers segregated into groups, either by language area and / or nationality. It has also been common to see a group of Mexican teachers that team together in a debate against one or two of the foreign teachers. The foreigners involved in the debate are usually left to fend for themselves, while the Mexican teachers defend each other to the end. This illustrates one difference between the Mexican and foreign teachers. Perhaps another reason, and more important, for some of the tension is that the collectivist Mexican teachers resent the individualistic attitudes of the U.S. teachers. The Mexican teachers are accustomed to working in unity, developing ideas together, and supporting each other throughout a process. They do not always agree with or appreciate the “lone wolf” approach of individuals who present their ideas without help from the rest. Possibly they perceive that attitude as overbearing and arrogant.

The differences in uncertainty avoidance play a large role in the conflicts at the Language School. Most of the teachers in all of the language ar-

teachers have acquired their knowledge about teaching from their own learning experiences as well as from their hands-on teaching experience. Very few (English teachers included) have had any formal training in teaching second languages. Needless to say, some of those teachers are quite set in their methodology and absolutely refuse to change or experiment with something different. Hence, when someone comes along suggesting that there might be a better way to do their job, or that they are not teaching the way they should be, of course they are going to be resistant, defensive and often times angry. This I believe was the primary reason behind the reactions from the methodology workshop mentioned at the beginning of this paper. This is not just a problem between Mexican and foreign teachers but also between U.S. teachers. There are people who are very comfortable in their methodology, or lack thereof. And they reject any insinuation that they need to improve their teaching.

An interesting thing happens with the power distance at the Language School. Mexico has been labeled as a high-power distance society, but it has been my experience that in the Language School that is not always true. I have worked under three different directors—a Mexican woman, a Mexican man and currently a woman from the United States. In each case the power distance as well as the emotions of the staff have varied. d'Iribarne (1989) in Hofstede (1994) reports that in France “there is an extreme diversity of feelings towards superiors: they may be either adored or despised with equal intensity.” Such has been the case at the Language School, depending on who the director has been at a given time. When a Mexican woman was director the staff mostly respected her authority, but no one respected her ability to manage a language school. This was due in part to the fact that she was an attorney with no language teaching experience. Many teachers, foreign and national, tried to deal with her assistant, the academic chair, instead of with her, with the idea that he knew more about the job. Everybody seemed to like her, especially since she made a lot of effort to be friendly. Even still, few people considered her capable of administering a language school. Later on, when the Mexican man took over as director, there was absolutely no respect for him as an authority or as a person. In fact, to the contrary of what would be typical for a high-power distance society, the Mexican teachers complained bitterly about his performance to university authorities. He lasted only four months at the Language School. Interestingly the foreign teachers complained about him also, but not together with the Mexicans.

Now the director is a foreign woman. There is respect for her authority and for her ability, for the most part, since she is a trained language teaching professional with more than 20 years of experience. However, there is still animosity and there are conflicts between her and some of the Mexican teachers. Some of the Mexican teachers openly question her performance as director among themselves and with other teachers. In staff meetings they seem to seek confrontation with her by challenging anything from policies to registration schedules. When this occurs, usually a foreign teacher gets involved and the debate is transferred from the director onto another individual. While this may appear collectivistic, it is worth mentioning that the individual who gets involved normally battles alone and becomes public enemy number one for a while.

Power distance alone is not the cause for tension; but combined with the dimension of masculinity, I believe it could be a strong factor. Mexico is still a very masculine-oriented society, where women occupy very few positions of power. As Hofstede explains, the role for women in a masculine society is “to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak” (1986). For some of the Mexican teachers at the Language School, it would appear that having a woman as their superior goes against this idea, and it is extremely difficult—if not impossible—for them to accept.

It is possible that the current director sets off the Mexican teacher’s uncertainty alarm bells as well. It is worth noting that the director may be perceived as a power-wielding foreigner by some. Being perhaps the most experienced and most qualified language teacher at the Language School, she can use, and has used her authority to require teachers to take training courses and participate in other activities that they would have otherwise ignored. This creates resentment towards the director and hence the criticism. There are teachers who believe that those (from all departments) without formal training should seek it and we support the director’s decisions in that respect. This support has been cause for animosity from certain groups in the Language School. I would prefer to believe that it is due to those less or non-trained teachers’ ideas about improving or not improving, but I have to recognize that it could be the way that our ideas are expressed to them. I will address this later on in the discussion of Holliday’s small cultures (1999).

A Small Culture Perspective

Another possible explanation for the conflictive situation at the Language School could be found in Holliday's concept of small cultures. Beales et al defines small cultures in Holliday (1999) as "...any social grouping from a neighborhood to a work group" (1967:8). In other words, while the Mexican teachers and the foreign teachers come from their respective "national" cultures, they also come from their own individual "small" culture(s). An example of this would be where one of the Mexican teachers on staff comes from a state in the extreme north of Mexico where most everyone in the small town is involved in the mining industry. Others come from larger more cosmopolitan cities of Mexico. There are others from small farming communities throughout the state of Guanajuato, as well as from City of Guanajuato. Most have completed undergraduate studies in very different fields ranging from History to Business Administration. The same can be said for the foreign teachers, who come from places like New York, Texas, and California, among others. There are even some people from Canada, Japan and the U.K.

What this translates to is that the tensions at the Language School may not necessarily be a result of a Mexican vs. foreigner conflict. Instead it could be a result of a conflict or conflicts between several existing small cultures as well as between the newly formed small cultures there. By "newly formed" I refer to the grouping of individuals from different cultures to form a new small culture such as a work group. An example is the formation of the English department. It consists of more than twenty teachers, each coming from their own set of beliefs, behaviors and language; they come from all of the previously mentioned places. Placing these people into one department provokes a process that involves, as defined in Holliday (1999:248) by Crane, "...each member using her or his culture-making ability to form rules and meanings in collaboration with others" (1994:11). Thus, new small cultures are formed in different language departments, as well as among groups of teachers who do not necessarily work in the same department but for some reason work together.

The conflicts arise when there are differences in the beliefs or behaviors from one small culture to another. A common example of this in Mexico is in the use of the formal "*Usted*" in Spanish. Depending on the region, community or small culture that an individual comes from, the formal structure is used differently. It has been my experience both in and away from work that people from smaller communities tend to use "*Usted*" more often with their superiors, elders and professional people. However, those from

larger, cosmopolitan zones tend to use the informal “*Tu*” form more often. This difference in usage can cause conflict because there are colleagues at the Language School who, because of their age, position or educational level, expect to be addressed in the formal form but they are not. So, they are offended by the “disrespect” towards them and often respond with a negative, sometimes aggressive attitude.

Singer states, “...it almost never occurs to us that anyone could possibly have different core beliefs.” He also includes the statement, “they just don’t think the way we do” (1998). These two quotes sum up the root of many of the conflictive situations at the Language School. Most of them happen because we as individuals do not recognize that people come from different cultures where they hold values that are different from ours. Not only do we not recognize them, we tend not to respect “...that their values are as important to them as ours are to us” (Singer 1998:37).

Along those lines, O’Sullivan (1994) and Hofstede (1991) offer some other perspectives that could serve as possible explanations for some of the conflicts. O’Sullivan mentions the idea that people usually perceive their own cultures in a more positive way than they do other cultures. It is not uncommon to hear people claim that the people in their culture are friendlier, more intelligent, and more hardworking than other cultures (1994:15). There is also the idea of “cultural superiority,” which basically means that people hold their own culture in a much better position than they do other cultures when comparing.

Culture shock is also an important factor. According to Hofstede, foreigners commonly experience some kind of culture shock. While a foreigner may try to learn some of the language or traditions of the new culture, it is probable that he or she will not be able to understand the underlying values. The foreigner basically “returns to the mental state of an infant, in which he or she has to learn the simplest things over again”. This “regression” tends to cause the foreigner to feel “distress, helplessness, and hostility towards the new environment” (1991:209).

Having lived in Guanajuato, Mexico for more than 10 years I have experienced both of the situations described by O’Sullivan and Hofstede. I have also witnessed them with the teachers at the Language School. It is common for the new people (teachers) to go through this. They often arrive with a superior idea about themselves and their culture, and the Mexican (as well as others) teachers usually interpret that as arrogance. This leads to

high tensions because some of the Mexican teachers have the same “superior” ideas about their own culture. Now it is not an issue of arrogance but rather one of “who is right and who is wrong”. The answer, of course, is “Everybody”. I’d like to compare this issue to that of abortion. There will most likely never be an agreement between the two sides on whether it is correct or not, but anti-abortion activists and pro-choice activists will continue arguing, fighting, and even killing over it. I foresee more intercultural understanding in the future, but I believe the conflicts caused by intercultural differences will never end—neither in the Language School or the world. It is possible, however, to reduce the number of conflicts through more intercultural understanding.

New foreign teachers often go through culture shock. When the frustration of not really knowing what is going on around them in the new culture sets in, hostility towards the new culture seems to be a common defense mechanism. It is, however, a poorly received mechanism by the host culture (Mexico) and leads to confrontations between teachers at the Language School. It also occurs between students and teachers, but that is an area too broad to include in this paper. It is not unusual for foreign teachers to return to their native countries after only one or two semesters, probably due to their inability to adjust to the new environment. I have heard several former co-workers say, as they were leaving the Language School and Mexico, “This place is backwards” , or variations of that sentiment with diverse language forms. I translate those words into “I can’t adjust or they won’t adjust to me” . It reminds me of the previously mentioned Singer quote, “...they just don’t think the way we do” (1998:41).

One last area which plays an important role in explaining possible reasons for conflict in the Language School is that of perception—or perhaps more importantly—misperception. Singer explores this area defining perception as a “process by which an individual selects, evaluates, and organizes stimuli from the external environment” (1998:10). He also mentions:

It is not the stimulus itself that produces specific human reactions and / or actions but rather how the stimulus is perceived by the individual that matters most for human behavior. It is perhaps the most basic law of human behavior that people act or react on the basis of the way in which they perceive the external world. (1998:10)

In the Language School the way we, the teachers, perceive each other's actions, language, attitudes, etc. dictates our response or behavior towards each other.

The point I am trying to arrive at is that while we all perceive, we do not all perceive in the same manner. Singer supports this notion in mentioning, "No two humans can communicate 100 percent accurately because no two humans have learned to perceive identically" (1998:24).

Knowing this, I suggest that another of the principal problems resulting in miscommunication and conflicts where I work are "misperceptions." Misperception is defined as when people are "wrong in the way they perceive situations, motives, or intentions" (Singer1998:49).

An example of misperception at the Language School involves me personally. Since beginning an M.Ed. program at the University of Manchester, I was really excited with some of the subjects and offered small workshops to my English department colleagues to share the new ideas with them. The response was overwhelmingly positive, so I decided to offer a one-hour presentation on using video in the classroom to all of the other language departments. The response from those who attended was positive. However, when I saw a member of another language department who had not attended, I commented to him, "Too bad you couldn't make it. Let me know if you'd like me to schedule another workshop". His response was, in a surprisingly aggressive tone, "Don't bother. I don't need you to tell me how to teach!" What I had intended to be friendly idea sharing was somehow perceived as prepotency. Of course, I was offended and immediately reacted defensively. We misperceive usually because we assume that our perceptions are always the correct ones. But if we all perceive differently, how can we all be right? Singer states:

We know that we perceive; we don't know what we don't perceive. Since there is no way that we can know what we don't perceive, we assume that we perceive "correctly"—even if we don't. (1998:26)

Hence, the source of disagreement and conflict. We are always right, and they are always wrong.

What Path to Take?

I have taught at the Language School since the latter part of 1992, and it is safe to say that there have been tensions and conflicts consistently since then. There have been periods when the problems are less frequent

and periods when they are exaggerated. Often the conflicts involve only a few people, but they sometimes extend to entire groups.

A goal now would be to share some of this information with my colleagues. The trick is going to be presenting the information without encountering the same defensive attitude as in the past with other situations. The information needs to be presented in a way so that it does not appear pretentious.

I would begin with a series of example scenarios such as those mentioned by Goodman in Brislin and Yoshida (1994:129-147). However, it might be appropriate to include scenarios that come from or could be easily compared to the classroom situations at our work place. Obviously, this approach begins with teacher-student interaction, which is not addressed in this paper; however, I see it as a way to introduce the subject and lead my colleagues into a discussion on intercultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Then a discussion on some of the possible causes for breakdowns in intercultural communication would follow.

The objective of the discussion is not to resolve the conflicts but rather to provide people with information on which to reflect. My hope would be that upon reflecting and discussing a little, people will have another perspective when they experience something that is considered different from what would be “normal” in their own culture. I would like to present the information so that they apply it to conflicts they perceive instead of giving them my possibly biased version of the conflicts. Ideally, the discussion would lead to a brainstorming session of conflicts and tensions they have detected at work. Then, we could address some of the possible reasons for them. However, if the response to this discussion is similar to previous responses to other activities, then I may have to settle for whatever participation I can obtain. If nothing else, I plan to continue talking to colleagues over coffee, and I’ll hope that they will experiment with the ideas and that word-of-mouth will spread the word to other colleagues.

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El retrato del profesional en la enseñanza en lenguas¹

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Buenas tardes. Me da mucho gusto estar aquí con ustedes hoy y participar en esta importante conferencia sobre la educación del maestro de lenguas. Creo que la educación del maestro es una de las funciones más importantes que una sociedad puede emprender, y es por ello que estoy muy contenta de poder compartir mis ideas hoy con ustedes.³

La pregunta que quisiera explorar esta tarde es la siguiente: “¿Cómo se deben estructurar los planes de estudio para la Licenciatura en Lenguas?” En otras palabras: “¿Qué experiencias se deben incluir en la educación del maestro de lenguas?” La respuesta a esta pregunta ciertamente no es simple. Una manera de acercarnos a una respuesta puede ser observar las metas que tenemos para los estudiantes que eligen esta ruta de estudio. Específicamente, examinar lo que pensamos que un maestro de lenguas debe saber y poder hacer—y entonces desarrollar un plan de estudios diseñado para alcanzar estas metas. Para hacer esto, podemos hacer de cuenta que vamos a examinar un retrato de un maestro de lenguas. Claro que no hablo de un retrato verdadero que podamos ver y apreciar con nuestros ojos sino un retrato hablado con la descripción de las cualidades—el conocimiento y las habilidades—que un maestro de lenguas eficaz debe poseer. ¿Qué características encontraríamos cuando examinemos este cuadro?

En mi perspectiva hay cinco aspectos que son primordiales en la formación de profesores: La lengua, la cultura, la lingüística, la educación, y el profesionalismo.

¹ Lo que a continuación se presenta es el texto de una conferencia plenaria dada en el Encuentro Internacional para Licenciaturas en Lenguas: “Perspectivas en México” que tuvo lugar en Zacatecas el 11 y 12 de mayo del 2001.

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La Lengua

Por supuesto, puesto que estamos hablando de maestros de idiomas, la primera expectativa que tenemos es que hablen la lengua meta—y bastante bien. Pero ¿qué quiere decir “bien”? Los profesores necesitan ser modelos competentes para sus estudiantes. Esto significa que deben controlar la gramática básica de la lengua meta, tener un vocabulario amplio que aumente constantemente, al igual que un conocimiento de las reglas sociolingüísticas que gobiernan el uso del idioma. Ahora bien, ¿cómo describimos este nivel de competencia o habilidad? Una de las mejores maneras para definir un nivel del control de la lengua es referirse a las guías de consulta de la habilidad elaboradas por ACTFL (*the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages*—el Consejo Americano sobre la Enseñanza de Idiomas Extranjeros). Este conjunto de guías de consulta, que aparecieron a principios de los ochenta, está bajo revisión constante y se puede encontrar en la página de Internet de ACTFL (<http://actfl.org>). Dichas guías de consulta definen cuatro niveles de habilidad: principiante, intermedio, avanzado, y superior. La clasificación de los hablantes en uno de estos niveles se hace de acuerdo con su uso del idioma en cuatro áreas: las funciones que se pueden realizar con la lengua meta, los contextos sociales en los cuales puede utilizar el idioma, la exactitud con la cual hablan, escriben y entienden dicho idioma, y el tipo de texto que pueden producir. Los principiantes son aquellos que pueden utilizar unas pocas palabras y frases memorizadas (por ejemplo, los saludos, o los números), pero que aún no pueden conectar estas pocas palabras en nuevas frases para expresar sus propios significados. Los hablantes de nivel intermedio han aprendido a unir frases memorizadas para formar sus propios significados—así, pueden “crear” con el idioma. Sin embargo los temas que los hablantes en este nivel pueden manejar se limitan al aquí-y-ahora (por ejemplo, interacciones básicas en la cultura meta, tales como hacer compras o las necesidades de un turista, cuando no se presenta ninguna complicación como una compra defectuosa o una regadera que no funciona). Su pronunciación, errores gramaticales que siguen un patrón, y la elección de vocabulario hacen que a menudo los hablantes en un nivel intermedio no sean comprensibles por un hablante nativo del idioma. Quienes están en un nivel avanzado tienen un mayor control de la gramática de la lengua meta, aunque aun cometen algunos errores con el mismo patrón. Pueden expresar el significado en la mayoría de las situaciones y expresarse en todos los tiempos verbales importantes y, aunque hablan con acento, su pronunciación, gramática y la elección de vocabulario les permite darse a entender con la mayoría de los hablantes nativos de la lengua meta. Los

hablantes del nivel superior cuentan con un control del idioma similar al de los nativos de éste. Pueden realizar casi todas las funciones realizadas por los nativos, aunque todavía pueden incurrir en equivocaciones pequeñas de vez en cuando. Este no es un nivel fácil de alcanzar y la mayoría de la gente que ha alcanzado este nivel ha estudiado el idioma durante muchos años y ha vivido en la cultura donde se habla dicha lengua.

¿Cuál de estos niveles sería adecuado para los estudiantes que planean ser profesores? Aunque el nivel superior es ideal, no es factible para los estudiantes que tienen solamente cuatro años para prepararse para la enseñanza de una lengua. Así, parece que la meta a fijar más apropiada para los estudiantes de licenciatura es cuando menos el nivel avanzado. Por supuesto, como profesionales de lenguas, se debe exhortar a los estudiantes a seguir desarrollando sus habilidades en el lenguaje a lo largo de su carrera para que logren llegar al nivel superior estudiando y tal vez viviendo en el país donde se hable la lengua meta. Así pues, cuando decimos que un profesor debe hablar “bien,” nos referimos a que debe tener, por lo menos, un control del idioma correspondiente al nivel avanzado. La mayoría de los programas de inglés como idioma extranjero que he visto en México están haciendo un trabajo maravilloso en preparar a los estudiantes y en ayudarles a adquirir un nivel avanzado. Por lo tanto, los cambios que se requieren son mínimos. Estos programas de EFL podrían proporcionar buenos modelos para los programas de otros idiomas.

Una vez que se ha elegido una meta respecto al nivel de habilidad, entonces debemos preguntarnos: “¿Cómo podemos diseñar un plan de estudios que ayude a los estudiantes a alcanzar un estatus avanzado?” Claramente, los cursos de lenguas desarrollados para llevar a los estudiantes a este nivel tendrán que ir más allá de los objetivos tradicionales de la instrucción. Esto es, que los estudiantes hablen con buena gramática y pronunciación correcta. Siguiendo las guías de consulta de ACTFL, debemos planear la instrucción del lenguaje de tal manera que incluya prácticas en la utilización del lenguaje con funciones comunicativas en una variedad de entornos sociales y en conversaciones y discusiones abiertas de modo que los estudiantes desarrollen la capacidad de hablar o de escribir de manera coherente. Con el término ‘función,’ nos referimos a lo que se puede hacer con el idioma; por ejemplo, podemos saludar, podemos discutir sobre algo, podemos pedir información, podemos hacer un elogio o una invitación, etc. Todas éstas son funciones que realizamos con el lenguaje. Los filósofos del lenguaje llaman a estas funciones “acciones de discurso”

(*speech acts*) a diferencia de las acciones físicas (como caminar o saltar) o de las acciones mentales (como el pensar o albergar una esperanza) (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Algunas funciones, como los saludos, son universales, pero se pueden realizar de diversas maneras en idiomas diferentes y en culturas diferentes. Los estudiantes necesitan aprender que: así como *How are you?* en inglés y *¿Cómo está usted?* en español no es una pregunta dirigida realmente a saber sobre el bienestar de una persona, sino un saludo formulario. Otras funciones pueden ser específicas de la cultura. Por ejemplo, un “acción de discurso” que es común en América Latina conocido como *el piropo*, no se utiliza normalmente en la cultura norteamericana, así que los estudiantes del inglés deben aprender que si transfieren este acto de discurso en los contextos extranjeros, pudiera no producir el efecto esperado. Así pues, los estudiantes necesitan dominar no solamente la gramática y la pronunciación de la lengua meta, sino que también deben darle un uso comunicativo a ese conocimiento. Para poder aprender esta habilidad, los estudiantes necesitarán tener la oportunidad suficiente de practicar y usar la lengua meta para lograr metas más específicas.

Además de las funciones del lenguaje, se debe enseñar a los estudiantes las reglas sociolingüísticas que guían el comportamiento lingüístico. Dichas reglas varían de una cultura a otra e incluyen fenómenos tales como las reglas en español que gobiernan el uso de *tú* y *usted*. Por supuesto, estas reglas varían a partir de una cultura de habla hispana a otra. Esto constituye un problema de comunicación principalmente para los angloparlantes que estudian español puesto que no están acostumbrados a indicar formalidad mediante el uso de pronombres. (el inglés, por supuesto, tiene solamente una forma, *you*, para la segunda persona.) La violación de reglas sociolingüísticas puede tener consecuencias sociales desastrosas! Por ejemplo, he observado que cuando los estudiantes latinoamericanos que estudian en los Estados Unidos se dirigen a sus profesores, a menudo usan frases tales como “Profesor” o “Señorita” sin incluir el apellido del profesor. Los profesores norteamericanos esperan que los estudiantes se dirijan a ellos usando su título y apellido y se sienten ofendidos cuando los estudiantes parecen no saber sus nombres. Así, la ignorancia de esta regla sociolingüística puede poner a los estudiantes en una gran desventaja con sus profesores. Así pues, los instructores de los futuros profesores del idioma deben planear una serie de cursos, de lecciones, y de tareas que ayuden a los estudiantes a dominar estas reglas y a alcanzar el nivel Avanzado.

Los programas de idioma para los futuros profesores deben también ayudarles a aprender a utilizar el idioma de formas cada vez más coherentes de modo que puedan tener la producción lingüística característica de un estudiante en un nivel avanzado—es decir, hablando y escribiendo en párrafos coherentes. Para producir un discurso relacionado, los estudiantes necesitan aprender las transiciones que les permitan expresarse de una manera lógica usando los modelos retóricos característicos de la cultura meta. Los instructores necesitan proporcionar múltiples y variadas oportunidades para que los futuros profesores del lenguaje desarrollen sus habilidades tanto orales como de redacción en respuesta a preguntas abiertas y en conversaciones y discusiones sobre asuntos de interés.

Cultura

Otra área de importancia en la educación de los futuros profesores del lenguaje es el estudio de la cultura. En muchos sentidos, los profesores de idiomas extranjeros son embajadores de la cultura meta en sus aulas, así que necesitan tener una comprensión completa y una apreciación de esa cultura con toda su diversidad. Así, el aprender a entender, a hablar y a escribir en la lengua meta no son suficientes para ser un buen profesor de esa lengua, los profesores también necesitan desarrollar un sentido de la importancia de las contribuciones que esa cultura hace al resto del mundo. Cuando hablamos de la cultura, debemos distinguir entre la “alta” o la cultura de la *C mayúscula* y la cultura de la *c minúscula*, o la cultura en el sentido antropológico (Wardhaugh 1992). La Cultura (con C mayúscula) crece a partir de la cultura (con c minúscula) y abarca sus mejores ejemplos. Generalmente la Cultura consta del arte, la literatura, y la música compuestos por los nativos de la lengua meta, las filosofías características de las culturas de la lengua meta, los descubrimientos científicos e inventos hechos también por los parlantes de esta lengua, etc. La cultura se refiere a aquella en el sentido antropológico—la forma de vida de un grupo de gente—e incluye costumbres como el matrimonio, la educación de los niños, la comida típica de la gente, las reglas de etiqueta, etc. Tradicionalmente, los programas de idiomas se han concentrado en la Cultura y han abordado temas relacionados con la cultura sólo de manera casual. Sin embargo, la cultura es la que se encuentra más estrechamente atada al idioma y a su función en la vida cotidiana, y es—quizás—más importante para los profesores de idiomas que la Cultura.

La Cultura ha sido enseñada tradicionalmente en programas respetando los cánones—las obras maestras literarias de la cultura. Mientras

que esto es importante y debe continuar, es también importante que los estudiantes aprecien trabajos más recientes y más diversos de la literatura. Si tomamos la cultura francesa como ejemplo, los estudiantes deben leer un muestreo de su literatura, de principios europeos a sus manifestaciones más modernas y más diversas en Francia, África y el Caribe, por sólo mencionar estas tres áreas entre otras. Puesto que la literatura es una expresión de la gente que habla el lenguaje, ésta permite que los lectores obtengan la visión mundial asociada a la cultura. Por lo tanto, puesto que la escritura ayuda a introducir a los aspirantes a los mejores exponentes de literatura, la familiaridad con las tradiciones literarias de la cultura meta forma una parte importante de la educación del maestro de lenguas.

El desarrollar el sentido de la Cultura también significa aprender acerca de la historia de las personas que hablan la lengua meta. Si continuamos tomando el francés como ejemplo, los estudiantes que estudian para ser profesores de francés deben desarrollar un conocimiento de la influencia de Francia a través de su historia política, no solamente en Europa, pero también en el continente Americano, en África, y en el Este lejano. Entender el lugar de los parlantes de la lengua meta y su historia en el mundo es importante para la preparación de estos profesores porque los permitirá contextualizar la información que trasmitan a sus estudiantes.

Mientras que la literatura, y en menor grado la historia, ha tenido siempre un lugar importante en el aprendizaje de idiomas, muchos de los aspectos de la cultura han sido ignorados o se han incluido solamente de vez en cuando en cursos de idiomas. Esto es, quizás, debido al hecho de que las manifestaciones culturales (de la *c* minúscula) son más difíciles de definir y de discutir que trabajos de literatura. En cualquier caso, es importante que la cultura esté incluida en la educación de los profesores de lenguas de manera ordenada. Es difícil comenzar a entender otra cultura hasta que aprendemos a entender nuestra propia cultura objetivamente—o tan objetivamente como sea posible, puesto que todos somos etnocéntricos. Así, el estudio de la antropología o del lenguaje y cultura forma una parte esencial de la educación de un profesor de idiomas. Los profesores del lenguaje deben aprender a analizar la cultura meta en términos de sus propias opiniones del mundo de tal manera que puedan explicar las diferencias a sus estudiantes. Por ejemplo, ¿cómo podría un profesor de español norteamericano explicar una corrida de toros a sus estudiantes? Hecha correctamente, la explicación debe basarse en una comprensión de los papeles diversos de los animales en la visión mundial entre las dos

culturas. Para los norteamericanos, los animales casi son gente—los animales domésticos se consideran miembros de la familia y se tratan generalmente como casi humanos. Incluso existen organizaciones para proteger el bienestar y los derechos de los animales. *The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (ASPCA) fue fundada en 1866 (<http://www.aspca.org>); más recientemente se fundaron dos organizaciones más: *The Humane Society of the United States* en 1954 (<http://www.hsus.org>) y la organización internacional con base en los Estados Unidos que se llama *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* en 1980 (<http://www.peta-online.org>).

En muchas otras culturas, los animales y la gente son considerados como seres muy distintos—tan diferentes que existen palabras diversas para señalar las partes del cuerpo de un ser humano a aquellas de un animal. Por ejemplo, en español tenemos *pata* para un animal y *pierna* o *pie* para la persona; igualmente, tenemos *lomo* para animal y *espalda* para la persona. En países con esta perspectiva cultural de los animales, la gente puede ir a las corridas de toros a ser testigos de la valentía de un hombre o mujer que se arriesgan a ser lastimados o morir al enfrentarse con estos animales peligrosos. Sin embargo, muchos norteamericanos, si eligieran asistir a una corrida, probablemente sentirían lástima por el toro—un pobre animal que está siendo atormentado y que muere a manos de humanos bien armados para su entretenimiento. El maestro de lenguas no debe tratar de cambiar la cultura o la opinión de sus alumnos, sino que deberá poder explicar las perspectivas de la cultura meta para que sus alumnos puedan desarrollar una mejor comprensión y así respeten los fenómenos culturales.

Una de las mejores maneras de adquirir otro lenguaje y de entender otra cultura es el experimentarla de manera directa. Es decir, el estudiar o trabajar en un ambiente donde se habla la lengua meta. La visión lograda al vivir en otra cultura aclara la propia cultura de una manera imposible de adquirir simplemente estudiando la cultura meta. Por lo tanto, en tanto sea posible, se recomienda que los estudiantes estudien al menos un semestre o tal vez un año en la cultura de la lengua meta. Gracias a que existen más programas de intercambio disponible entre las universidades de diferentes países, debería ser posible que los estudiantes aprovecharan estas oportunidades.

Lingüística

Así pues, los maestros de lenguas necesitan hablar la lengua a un nivel avanzado en la escala de ACTFL y además necesitan saber algo de la cultura de los nativos de la lengua. Sin embargo, el solo hecho de hablar la lengua no nos califica como buenos maestros. Cuando estudié francés, recuerdo lo frustrada que me sentía pues no entendía a mi maestra quien era nativa de la lengua. Era una parisina que hablaba muy correctamente pero nunca estudió la estructura de su propia lengua y por eso no nos la podía explicar. Estoy segura que ella también estaba frustrada por no poder explicarnos y porque comprendía nuestra frustración pues no estábamos aprendiendo. No fue una situación fácil. Esta historia ilustra la necesidad de preparar a los maestros de lenguas que deben de conocer los fundamentos de lingüística, el estudio científico de la lengua humana. El estudiar la lingüística ayudará a los futuros maestros a adquirir un conocimiento profundo de su lengua.

El eje lingüístico en el plan de estudios de las Licenciaturas en Lenguas debe incluir por lo menos el estudio de la lingüística general, el estudio del lenguaje y cultura así como el estudio del lenguaje en sociedad. Los estudiantes deben comenzar con la lingüística general, que les proveerá la oportunidad de estudiar semejanzas y diferencias entre lenguajes humanos, y los que conducen a descubrir modelos lingüísticos dentro y a través de las lenguas. Al estudiar la lingüística general adquirirán un marco contextual que les permitirá continuar analizando los nuevos fenómenos lingüísticos que encuentren en su camino hacia el nivel superior de competencia lingüística. Estudiando lingüística general, los estudiantes aprenderán a notar y observar modelos en la fonología, (el sistema de los sonidos de lenguajes), la morfología (los sistemas gramaticales de señalamientos de las palabras, por lo regular los sufijos de las palabras), el sintaxis, (el orden de las palabras en frases y oraciones) y la semántica (sistemas del significado de las palabras). Al conocer esto, podrán aplicar estos conceptos a los diversos lenguajes y, eventualmente, comparar su lenguaje nativo con la lengua meta, que darán como resultado mejores planes para su clase. El estudio de la lingüística general proporcionará los fundamentos para cursos mas enfocados al lenguaje y cultura (de la que hablábamos previamente) y en la sociolingüística.

Como mencioné anteriormente, el estudio del lenguaje y de la cultura es esencial para un profesor de lenguas. El lenguaje y la cultura están íntimamente ligados y es imposible aprender a utilizar el lenguaje

eficientemente sin un cierto conocimiento de la cultura de la gente que lo habla. Estudiando la interacción del lenguaje y la cultura, los estudiantes desarrollarán un sentido del pluralismo al descubrir que la gente de dos culturas diversas pueden dividir los mismos fenómenos (colores, por ejemplo) en diversas categorías (con diferentes palabras). Así mismo, pueden descubrir que una cultura puede tener una palabra para un fenómeno (como el definir el significado de la palabra *tía*) que está dividido en dos o más términos en otras culturas. Entre otras cosas, los futuros profesores aprenderán que el hecho de traducir simplemente una palabra de una cultura a otra no es una tarea fácil!

Igualmente importante para los futuros profesores del lenguaje es el aprender las diversas maneras en que se utilizan los lenguajes. Por ejemplo, en México y los Estados Unidos, un estornudo es una situación que requiere una “contestación” como “Salud!” o “*God bless you!*” En las culturas del Este Lejano, se hace caso omiso a los estornudos—el estornudar no se considera una ocasión que requiera de una “contestación.”

Aquí está otro ejemplo que enfatiza una diferencia entre el uso mexicano y norteamericano de la lengua. Al llegar a una fiesta, un mexicano cortés saluda individualmente a cada uno de los presentes. Sin embargo, un norteamericano en la misma situación tal vez sólo diga “Hi, everybody” y no siente que sea necesario el saludar personalmente a cada invitado. Esto no es considerado como comportamiento “grosero” en los Estados Unidos. La comprensión del uso de la lengua basado en el contexto cultural es vital para los futuros profesores para que puedan lograr el nivel avanzado en la lengua meta.

La sociolingüística, el aspecto de la lingüística que se refiere a la interacción del lenguaje y de la sociedad, es también un componente extremadamente importante en la preparación de los futuros profesores del lenguaje. No hay un lenguaje vivo que sea monolítico—todos hablamos de manera diferente en tiempos y lugares diferentes. Pensemos en la manera que uno habla con los amigos y contrastémoslo con la manera que uno hablaría en una entrevista de trabajo. Puede ser que me refiera a mi *chamba* al hablar con mis amigos, pero a *mi trabajo* en una entrevista formal. Las dos situaciones representan dos diversos niveles de formalidad y el lenguaje varía de manera predecible para reflejar esta diferencia. Los futuros profesores del lenguaje necesitan desarrollar una comprensión de este fenómeno de modo que puedan aprender a hablar apropiadamente en varias

situaciones sociales, de tal manera que puedan enseñar el reconocimiento de la variación a sus estudiantes futuros.

El estudio de la sociolingüística también abarca la variación regional y social en lenguaje. La gente en diversas regiones de un país habla a menudo con variaciones de pronunciación y vocabulario distinto, pero es menos común que la gramática varíe. Por ejemplo, yo soy de Ohio y en esa parte de los Estados Unidos, bebidas como Pepsi genéricamente son llamadas *pop*. Ahora que vivo cerca de la costa del este, a las mismas bebidas se les llaman *soda*. Además de esta variación regional, los estudiantes necesitan desarrollar un reconocimiento para la variación social en el discurso. La gente en diversos estratos sociales utiliza lenguaje de manera distinta—algunas personas usan variaciones del lenguaje que no se consideran estándar. La gente nativa que habla variedades no estándar elige a veces aprender la variedad estándar y utilizarla profesionalmente, pero continua utilizando formas no estandarizadas en ambientes menos formales para mostrar que continúa siendo parte de una comunidad determinada. Este uso del lenguaje para indicar la pertenencia a un grupo social determinado es especialmente cierto para los norteamericanos de origen africano que utilizan un inglés vernáculo y que se sienten orgullosos de su herencia étnica y sus valores culturales. Por ello, utilizan este tipo de lenguaje entre sí para promover un sentido de comunidad. Los futuros profesores de lenguas necesitan desarrollar el reconocimiento de las formas en que la lengua puede ser utilizada para incluir y para excluir y su capacidad de reflejar el orgullo étnico.

El estudio de la lingüística también proporciona la base para dos áreas plasmadas entre el estudio de la lingüística, por sí mismo, y el estudio de la educación. Estas áreas son el estudio de la adquisición de una segunda lengua y el estudio de la metodología de la instrucción de lenguas. El estudio de la adquisición de la segunda lengua abarca el estudio de cómo la gente una vez cumplida la edad de doce años aprende a hablar otro lenguaje. Durante los últimos cincuenta años, muchas teorías han procurado explicar este fenómeno. En los cincuenta y los sesenta, muchas personas inmersas en la profesión de la enseñanza de lenguas aceptaron la perspectiva del Conductivismo como un conjunto de hábitos de tal forma que el aprender una nueva lengua era como aprender un nuevo conjunto de hábitos. Esta perspectiva en lenguas y su aprendizaje dio lugar al surgimiento del método Audiolingüístico para la enseñanza de lenguas (Richards and Rodgers 1986). La profesión estaba unificada en la creencia

que una lengua era un conjunto de hábitos y que el método Audiolingüístico era el enfoque científicamente correcto para enseñar lenguas. Sin embargo, ni la teoría del lenguaje ni la metodología basada en ella sobrevivió las expectativas y, por los años setenta, había sido rechazada en gran parte. Desde su desaparición la profesión de la enseñanza de lenguas ha tomado simultáneamente otras teorías para explicar cómo los adultos aprenden otra lengua. La profesión de la enseñanza de lenguas ha entretenido simultáneamente varias otras teorías para explicar cómo los adultos aprenden otro lenguaje.

Algunos investigadores del aprendizaje de idiomas intentan ampliar la hipótesis de la gramática universal de Noam Chomsky—que postula que los niños nacen con una capacidad natural de aprender una lengua materna—a los adultos. Otros creen que las capacidades cognitivas de un adulto en general son la base de todo lo que aprenden, incluyendo el aprendizaje de idiomas. Aun otros investigadores buscan el papel de la actividad del cerebro en el aprendizaje de lenguas y tratan de construir modelos de computadora para el procesamiento de palabras. Otras teorías sostienen que el aprendizaje de idiomas es socialización y que las variables sociales y afectivas tienen un gran impacto en el éxito de los estudiantes (Omaggio Hadley 2001). Los futuros profesores del lenguaje necesitan aprender la historia de los intentos para explicar el aprendizaje de idiomas y de aprender sobre actualizaciones de la investigación sobre la adquisición de una segunda lengua de modo que puedan apreciar discusiones actuales del tema. De esta manera, desarrollarán las bases para entender y evaluar las teorías rivales sobre el aprendizaje de idiomas, y, sobre todo, estar abiertos, y tal vez en un futuro contribuir para explicar el fenómeno del aprendizaje del segundo idioma en el adulto.

El estudio de la lingüística es especialmente importante como base para la metodología de la enseñanza. Además de desarrollar la comprensión de las teorías actuales de la adquisición de segundas lenguas, los estudiantes necesitan estar conscientes de las implicaciones de estas teorías para el salón de clase. Los futuros maestros necesitan investigar formas en las que las metodologías pasadas y las recientes reflejan las teorías en las que están basadas. Por ejemplo, necesitan saber que el método Audiolingüístico para la enseñanza de la lengua está basado en la teoría de aprendizaje del Conductivismo y que la enseñanza Comunicativa refleja la perspectiva de Halliday quien sostiene la idea de que la mejor forma de describir las lenguas es en términos de las nociones y las funciones que representan

(Richards and Rodgers 1986). El vincular esta conexión con la teoría del aprendizaje y la metodología de la enseñanza es esencial si queremos que los futuros maestros de lenguas tomen decisiones apropiadas en cuanto a la elección de las metodologías en el futuro con conocimiento y profesionalismo.

Los futuros maestros de lenguas también necesitan tomarse un tiempo para observar clases de otros maestros y practicar las diferentes metodologías de enseñanza. Este proceso debe comenzar en cuanto los estudiantes aprendan a seleccionar los objetivos relevantes y a planear lecciones comunicativas para los mismos. Los objetivos pueden incluir funciones, aspectos de la cultura meta, alguna regla sociolingüística, un patrón de entonación, un punto gramatical, vocabulario, etc. Los aprendices de maestros pueden formar parte de micro enseñanza y si la oportunidad existe, deben trabajar con algún maestro con experiencia. De esta manera, pueden obtener práctica con estudiantes reales al presentar porciones de alguna lección de vez en cuando. Dichos aprendices de maestros deben saber seleccionar el método más apropiado para presentar cualquier lección y poder explicar sus razonamientos. Esta habilidad implica el poder basar la práctica en la teoría y es la insignia de un profesional en la enseñanza de lenguas que es, a fin de cuentas, nuestra meta.

Otra de las habilidades que deben aprender es el seleccionar textos y otros materiales apropiados para las clases que enseñen. También aquí, los alumnos necesitan aprender a basar estas decisiones en las teorías del aprendizaje de lenguas que ellos consideren apropiadas. Si uno cree que la Enseñanza Comunicativa de Idiomas (Communicative Language Teaching) es la metodología apropiada para un grupo de alumnos, sería muy difícil enseñar una clase utilizando este método si el libro de texto está basado ¡en el método Audiolingüístico! Esto es, los futuros maestros necesitan aprender a seleccionar libros de texto y a adaptar los materiales que mejor satisfagan sus necesidades. Es imposible encontrar un texto que sea “perfecto” para un grupo de alumnos, así que los ajustes siempre son necesarios. Una vez más, es extremadamente importante que los futuros maestros aprendan a hacer estas adaptaciones a la luz de un conocimiento profesional y no sólo por un capricho o para terminar el programa más rápido.

Muchos textos modernos tienen material extra en forma de discos compactos o en videos. Para poder aprovechar este material, los futuros maestros necesitarán poder utilizar video caseteras y computadoras. Por lo

tanto, una parte importante de su educación es familiarizarse con la tecnología educativa en general. Además de saber meramente como operar el equipo, necesitarán saber cómo utilizar la tecnología para mejorar sus clases. Dado que la escritura académica es un aspecto tan importante en la vida profesional de un individuo, la enseñanza de la escritura ha sido revolucionada por el uso de los procesadores de palabras. Al redactar en una pantalla de computadora, los estudiantes escriben más fluidamente y pueden producir borradores de su trabajo más rápidamente. Estos borradores pueden ser transferidos a otras computadoras para que los compañeros o los maestros lo revisen antes de que sean revisados y editados. Las herramientas de edición y revisión (subrayar, enfatizar, o eliminar etc.) disponibles en muchos procesadores de palabras pueden ser de gran asistencia en este proceso y los futuros maestros deben tener práctica en utilizarlos. Necesitan también aprender a utilizar programas (*software*) que ayuden a los alumnos a organizar sus ideas durante el proceso de redacción y llegar a familiarizarse con las herramientas de referencia, tales como el corrector de ortografía, diccionarios, sinónimos y antónimos, enciclopedias que están disponibles en discos compactos.

Finalmente, los estudiantes deben aprender a formular exámenes de lenguas para medir las funciones comunicativas que han enseñado a sus alumnos. El poder crear exámenes ha sido tradicionalmente tratado muy superficialmente en los cursos para maestros, pero en realidad merece más atención porque los exámenes son a menudo el mensaje mas importante que enviamos a nuestros alumnos. Si los alumnos saben que algo va a estar en el examen, lo aprenden. Así que tenemos que asegurarnos de que estamos examinando las habilidades lingüísticas que decimos que estamos enseñando. Esto pareciera obvio, pero no sucede muy a menudo. Muchos maestros, por ejemplo, dicen que están enseñando a sus alumnos a hablar, pero nunca evalúan la expresión oral. Los exámenes son, muchas veces, hojas de papel que miden el conocimiento de las formas gramaticales (como los tiempos de los verbos), pero no evalúan el uso de las funciones del lenguaje. El diseñar un examen para medir la habilidad de utilizar la lengua meta requiere de razonamientos específicos así como el poder evaluar los resultados de los mismos. Necesitamos enseñar a nuestros futuros maestros a enfrentar el reto de diseñar exámenes para medir las funciones del lenguaje en lugar de utilizar exámenes, que parecieran más sencillos, en donde sólo se requiere completar espacios con formas gramaticales.

Educación

Hemos visto que los futuros maestros necesitan desarrollar la habilidad de expresarse oralmente en la lengua y cultura meta y que necesitan tener los antecedentes lingüísticos para comprender la estructura de la lengua y las relaciones que existen entre el lenguaje, la cultura y la sociedad. Este conocimiento forma las bases para el estudio de las teorías de aprendizaje de lenguas y la metodología de enseñanza de las mismas. Pero, los futuros maestros también necesitan saber sobre el estudio de educación en general. Por lo tanto, el estudio de la sociología de la educación, la historia de la educación en México, y psicología educativa deben ser incluidos en la curricula de la Licenciatura en Lenguas.

Al estudiar la sociología, los alumnos se dan cuenta de las fuerzas sociales que guían y limitan la practica educativa en general y particularmente en México. Como ejemplo de estas fuerzas están la distribución de la riqueza en la sociedad y la influencia de las categorías sociales en instituciones educativas tales como la edad, la raza, y el género. Los estudiantes también deben estudiar la historia de la educación en México y cómo ha evolucionado al presente. Los futuros maestros necesitan desarrollar un entendimiento del lugar de las instituciones educativas dentro de la sociedad.

Los futuros maestros también necesitan tener conocimientos sólidos en la disciplina de la psicología. Necesitan estudiar psicología general e intentar comprender el comportamiento humano, las diferencias individuales, el comportamiento social, los procesos grupales, y teorías de la personalidad entre otros tópicos. Este conocimiento mejora considerablemente los planes de clase y su efectividad en el salón. Además de la psicología general, se necesitan tener fundamentos fuertes de psicología educativa, adaptación social, teorías de aprendizaje generalizadas, las inhibiciones y problemas de aprendizaje. El estudio de estos temas ayudará a los futuros maestros a entender mejor a sus estudiantes y planear la enseñanza de manera efectiva.

Los estudiantes deben de tener amplia oportunidad de observar y analizar las clases en la lengua meta antes de hacer sus prácticas como maestros. Pueden comenzar observando clases en la universidad, pero deben también hacerlo en las escuelas primarias, secundarias y también en preparatorias. Los estudiantes no deberían ser enviados simplemente a observar las clases sin ninguna guía. Deberán ser instruidos, al principio, en cómo observar algún aspecto de la clase en particular. Por ejemplo, a identificar cual es el objetivo de la lección o el método que utiliza el

maestro para mantener orden en el salón. Después, los estudiantes pueden observar segmentos más largos y pensar en las formas que ellos utilizarían para enseñar el mismo material. Esta experiencia contribuye a preparar al alumno para sus prácticas profesionales, las cuales deberán permitir poner en práctica lo que aprendieron en su salón de clase.

Profesionalizo

Uno de los aspectos más importantes para llegar a ser un maestro de lenguas es el desarrollar el sentido del profesionalismo. Los profesionales son aquellos que continúan buscando su conocimiento aún después de terminar su educación formal y que están dispuestos a participar y apoyar los esfuerzos de sus colegas para elevar la profesión. Tal vez la mejor manera de impulsar el profesionalismo en los maestros de lenguas del futuro es el ejemplo. Los miembros de las academias deben ser miembros activos de organizaciones profesionales (como MEXTESOL, por ejemplo) y deben animar a sus estudiantes a ser miembros activos de estas organizaciones. Los estudiantes pueden participar en los puestos honorarios o realizar presentaciones académicas en los congresos o actividades académicas.

Los estudiantes deberán también tener la oportunidad de aplicar el conocimiento que han adquirido en la universidad a problemas prácticos para que aprendan a tomar decisiones basadas en sus conocimientos cuando tengan sus propias clases. Aun cuando los alumnos se sientan incapaces de criticar un libro publicado por una editorial prestigiosa y escrito por un nativo de la lengua meta, deberán ser animados a hacerlo. Como futuros profesionales tendrán que tomar diferentes decisiones como la adopción de un texto, y necesitan aprender a tomar decisiones que beneficien a sus estudiantes. De igual manera, los futuros profesores deberán ser animados a mejorar sus habilidades lingüísticas participando en organizaciones donde la lengua meta sea hablada, buscando interactuar con nativos de la lengua y oportunidades para viajar, estudiar o tener una estancia en el país donde se habla la lengua.

El ser profesional implica estar dispuesto a ser mejor y dar lo mejor de sí en todo momento. Un maestro es siempre un modelo a seguir y que mejor que su ejemplo sea un modelo de superación para que sus alumnos imiten sus buenos hábitos y hereden su sed de conocimiento.

Conclusión

Tenemos pues un retrato del maestro de lenguas. Este debe tener control de la lengua meta en un nivel avanzado en la escala de ACTFL. Esto significa que además de hablar con la gramática correcta y con buena pronunciación deberá hablar de una manera apropiada culturalmente siguiendo las reglas de la sociolingüística. Además, el maestro ha desarrollado una apreciación de la cultura de las personas nativas de la lengua meta con estudios de literatura, historia, sociolingüística. Tiene también fundamentos sólidos de la lingüística general, las teorías del aprendizaje y la metodología de la enseñanza así como un conocimiento de psicología educativa.

Pero, principalmente es un profesional dispuesto a ser responsable de su propio desarrollo personal y académico, consciente de su rol en la sociedad como embajador de una cultura y que anima a sus alumnos a conocer su propia cultura respetando y tolerando otras culturas diferentes.

Hemos visto como una Licenciatura en Lenguas debe dar cada pincelada para obtener ese retrato del maestro en lenguas, que no es una utopía, sino una realidad y una necesidad inminente.

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The Art and Science of Teaching EFL

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The concept of the art and science of language teaching is usually nonexistent in the minds of teachers who lack a wholehearted interest in their work and relationship with students. However, there are those who do care about their professional development including their knowledge, skills and interaction with learners. This genuine concern about the art and science of teaching EFL or any other subject matter.

This article presents first the viewpoints of noted authors who differentiate and at the same time blend the art and science of language teaching. They have written books on teaching English, teacher education, linguistics and teaching in general. The second part is the writer's point of view on this distinction and also merging, all of which is based on the writer's experience of teaching different levels and areas of EFL such as teacher training, phonetics, literature, conversation, writing and the history of the English language in the United States and Mexico City. Much experience was also gained from workshops given at MEXTESOL conventions in various Mexican cities.

Noted Authors' Viewpoints

"If language teaching is in the hands of an enthusiastic, competent and caring teacher, it will always be an art, but it is a science in that it can be described in detail and be evaluated objectively," (Finocchiaro, Bonomo 1973).

"Language teaching is an art because it is a highly skilled activity which is learned by careful observation and patient practice. Linguists provide a growing body of scientific knowledge about language which can guide language teachers." (Corder 1985).

"Teaching is both a science and an art because it demands a delicate balance of many factors while the teacher is performing. The art of teaching involves personal style, developed largely through the decisions the teacher makes." (Pullias, Young 1968).

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“The art of a language lesson lies rather in detecting the first possible moment when learners want to break out of the mold and use language for themselves... to say something, to communicate.” (Celce-Murcia, McIntosh 1979)

“The craft (science) of teaching is related to the teacher’s specific knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge on teaching that subject matter and knowledge on teaching in general. The art of teaching involves the combination of knowledge and experience in the many decisions that teachers make as they interact with learners.” (Lange 1990).

“I believe that teaching is an art, not a science... teaching is not like inducing a chemical reaction: it is much more like painting a picture or making a piece of music, or on a lower level like planting a garden or writing a friendly letter. You must throw your heart into it...” (Heighet 1950).

The Writer’s Viewpoints

The art and science of teaching EFL are linked to teacher development. The art of teaching is the development of personal qualities and attitudes and their effect on the students and the students’ effect on the teacher. These are love for students and the English language, enthusiastic outlook, encouragement and praise, firmness, friendliness, sense of humor and creativeness. They help form the appropriate classroom atmosphere for arousing the students’ interest, challenge and enjoyment. All of these factors lead to the idea that “to teach is to touch all life forever”. Perhaps it would be more fitting to say “to teach well is to touch a life positively”.

Although the art and science of teaching are distinct, they combine to form a completeness. From my point of view the science embraces the teacher’s skills, knowledge and related activities which can be described in the following manner:

1. Being a reflective teacher, concerned with what happens in the classroom: alternative means of achieving goals or aims: assessing origin, purposes, consequences of teaching at all levels. (Barlett 1974)
2. Knowing the students’ human and language needs—self-esteem, belongingness, self-realization, security and the basic skills, the appropriate class level, choice of learning styles, preference for participation or observation in class level, multiple intelligences.

3. Knowing Spanish or L1 speakers' problems with English – L1 interference with vocabulary, structure, pronunciation and culture and ways to surmount them.
4. Knowing Spanish or L1 and English languages on a comparative basis.
5. Knowing the history and modern development of English.
6. Applying an eclectic approach in methodology—all approaches have their positive and negative features.
7. Planning lessons, examinations, tests (oral, written). (Nunan 1994).
8. Applying pedagogical, psychological, linguistic principles of learning and teaching—student's need to communicate; functions and structure analysis: task based instruction; clear objectives for students; formal and informal registers.
9. Knowing paralinguistic aspects of teaching and learning EFL—proxemics (use of space), haptics (sense of touching), oculistics (use of eyes), (Farre-Rigau 2001).
10. Knowing how to manage the classroom—the roles of the teacher: manager, model, monitor, counselor, informant, facilitator, social worker, friend: organization of activities; individual, pair, group work, discipline.
11. Using the teacher's listening ear and listening heart (Finocchiaro, Bonomo 1973) – error correction, understanding, compassion, insight into students' problems.
12. Applying different methods of error correction – teacher's correction, self correction, peer correction, and feedback; errors causing communication breakdown, recurring patterns.
13. Using creative materials and electrical (electronic) equipment – anecdotes, stories, jokes, posters, realia, skits, role plays; video, TV, tape recorders, computers, internet, OHP.
14. Including the content of various texts, not only one- different illustrations, presentations, exercises.
15. Meeting with other teachers to discuss problems, making decisions and having new insights.
16. Knowing one or more of the liberal arts: philosophy, history, science, literature, the arts, languages.

17. Differentiating between teacher training (TT) and teacher development (TD)—TT and TD: two complimentary components of a complete teacher education; TT: essentially knowledge of topic to be taught, its methodology, classroom skills and techniques. TD: classroom atmosphere, effect of teacher on learner and vice versa, related to presence and people skills. (Head, Taylor 1997)
18. Participating in professional activities – attending conventions, special lectures: reading journals, books on language, teaching, learning: giving talks workshops, demonstrations; writing articles: observing other teachers.

Conclusion

Although we have seen that the art and science of teaching EFL are two distinct sides of the same coin, we can also see that personality traits, classroom atmosphere, skills and knowledge merge into a harmonious whole. Thus, an awareness of this art and science as a means of development is the way to become a professional teacher.

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What Every EFL Teacher Should Know about Using the Mother Tongue

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Should I give a direct translation of an English word when my learners do not understand?

Should I use the mother tongue in presenting a language structure that does not exist in L1?

Should I translate instructions into L1 in a written test?

Should I use English or mother tongue in setting discipline problems?

I am sure there are more SHOULDs that worry EFL teachers all over the world. My article is concerned with the role of the mother tongue in teaching and learning English. It summarises general opinions on this topic and focuses on effective ways of using L1 as a valuable tool in facilitating learning English as well.

It goes without saying that the best way of learning a foreign language is to stay for a long period of time in a target language country. Unfortunately not many of our learners had or have an opportunity to experience learning English this way. Most of them have to undergo that well-known painful process of sitting and studying it at home or in the classroom. The higher our level of English is the more we realize how L1 hinders or accelerates our learning. The move from intermediate to higher levels of competence in English is closely associated with the ability to make choices regarding vocabulary and collocation. While in the early stages of study this is not an issue, the more advanced learner is constantly using L1 knowledge to help make these choices. The use and influence of L1 simply cannot be neglected.

On the one hand, in the past, the L1 was seen as an integral part of the teaching (the Grammar Translation Method). On the other hand, this use of L1 was later rejected as a phenomena that hinders and slows foreign language learning. In current reference books on the EFL methodology, we can

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find suggestions on how the teacher can avoid using L1 more frequently than how to use it effectively. One obvious reason is that a vast majority of native teacher do not speak the language of their learners. In the past, the mother tongue was an integral part of locally published course –books used at all levels (Strakova 2001). At the same time translation from and to L1 had a long history in European educational culture and it was quite a common classroom activity in the past. At present new teaching ideas and materials has led to a rejection of mother tongue in Slovakia. However, it seems we are rediscovering its value at present.

In general there are two major trends nowadays. The first one suggests that English should be the only means of communication in the classroom. In fact there are many teachers who feel guilty about saying a word in L1. They feel it is old fashioned and not in keeping with modern trend. Using English exclusively is the only way to fulfil all the principles and requirements of the revered communicative approach. The second trend is represented by those teachers who from time to time use L1 in the classrooms for various reasons such as checking understanding, clarifying meaning, chatting and so on.

In my opinion both trends are natural and teachers or supporters of either group can be identified all over the world.

The first opinion is underpinned by the following arguments:

- listening to English is learning English
- teacher's use of L2 is a natural and real example of language that learners are exposed to
- use of L2 helps to create a foreign language atmosphere in the classroom and helps learners to adapt to real situations outside the classroom

The second opinion is underpinned by the following arguments:

- using L1 is sometimes more efficient in terms of time
- some learners prefer “to translate”

- L1 gives less capable learners an opportunity to show they are intelligent – translate a word or a sentence, shout out a solution in L1 etc.

From our perspective a third argument – we can say a humanistic one – seems to be very strong as we try to bring humanism back into the school the classroom situations when L1 can function effectively can be listed as follows:

- presenting and practicing language items
- eliciting English
- giving or checking instructions
- checking understanding in general
- using translation activities
- using dictionaries
- giving and getting feedback

Obviously, all of this can be done in English with higher level students. However, in some situations, careful use of L1 will help learners to get the maximum benefit from the lesson. Perhaps the most important point to be made on the rights and wrongs of using the mother tongue is that teachers should keep in mind the aim of the lesson, the level of students, stages of the lesson, learning activities and mood of the learners. They have to be very flexible and try to react properly to every situation in the classroom.

This article has taken a broad, generalized and, I hope, balanced view. I would like to highlight the word **BALANCED** as this is the approach we should adopt when using L1 in the classroom. The teacher should use all the means at hand for the learner to achieve all that he or she is capable of achieving and L1 can be one of the tools that makes it happen.

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Helping Teachers Understand Learning Processes in Large Classes

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A major impetus to the development of learner-centered language teaching came with the advent of communicative language teaching. The enhancement of the role of the learner in the language learning process has compelled both classroom researchers and curriculum developers to focus their attention on the process of learning. Since learning cannot be empirically observed in action, the necessary indirectness of such attention has, in turn, encouraged teachers as well as researchers to take the issue to the learners themselves.

All English departments in Egyptian universities face the problem of dealing with large numbers of students, a reality that will remain with us in the foreseeable future. Teachers are faced with the dilemma of dealing with large numbers of students while attempting to develop linguistic and academic skills. In most cases teachers do not have the time or the training to assess their students' learning process and they need support and help.

Teachers use a number of resources in their teaching, but are sometimes frustrated because the activities they introduce are not met with enthusiasm on the part of the students. There is an obvious need for a better understanding of our learners so that teachers will more aware of the dynamics they are dealing with.

The following tools were used to provide a profile of learners in the Egyptian setting:

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Rebecca Oxford, 1990.

Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSP), Joy Reid, 1985.

Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale, Christopher M. Ely, 1995.

¹ This article has been reprinted from the *English as a Foreign Language Newsletter, The Official Publication of the EFL Interest Section of TESOL*. Vol. 21, Number 2. February 2002. pp. 6 – 7.

Right/ Left Brain Dominance Test, adapted from E. Torrance, 1987.

The study described below was done with first year students in the English department of the Faculty of Education. The goal of using these tools with students is to provide teachers with an educated insight into their students and a bases on which to plan future activities and teaching materials. It should be mentioned here that the students in the sample are considered to be among the highest academic achievers in the system and their high grades in English ensure acceptance in the English department. In spite of this, a lot can be done to help make them more competent learners.

In response to the SILL the Egyptian learners rank very high on the memory strategies, not surprising given the educational system they have followed. Affective and social strategies rank very low on the scale and this certainly suggests that both areas need a fair amount of strategy training.

The responses to the Perceptual Learning Style questionnaire revealed that both the male and female students prefer a haptic (kinesthetic & tactile) learning style. They agreed that group learning is a negative learning style preference and expressed a great preference for individual learning. A point worth noting is that auditory learning style ranked fourth in the list of preferences, rather surprising, considering that in the Egyptian educational context teachers usually resort to lecturing in their teaching. This seems to suggest that there is a significant teaching/learning mismatch. It has been pointed out that learning styles and teaching styles can be developed and expanded; moreover, learning styles appear to shift and even change with age and environment.

Several studies have indicated that ambiguity tolerance is positively related to L2 success. It is claimed that the students who have a high intolerance of ambiguity may have a great deal of difficulty dealing with the ambiguity in the second language classroom. Other studies found that the correlations between ambiguity tolerance and end of semester scores were significantly positive. The Tolerance of Ambiguity questionnaire indicated that among the Egyptian students in the study there is a high intolerance of ambiguity, some 70% falling within the range that indicates intolerance of ambiguity, leaving a minority of the sample who are ambiguity tolerant. This suggests that the learners need to be trained to be more tolerant of ambiguity to achieve better performance in English.

The results of the brain hemispheric specialization revealed that 80% of the Egyptian sample are definitely left hemisphere dominant. The left

hemisphere is view as oriented toward logical, analytical, linear information. It has been found that activities associated with both the right and left hemispheres are equally necessary to reach advanced levels of proficiency in language study.

Teachers fully realize that they cannot achieve all they want in the limited time they have with their students. Thus there is a need to encourage learner autonomy by making our students better learners; this is a goal that requires a good understanding of our students so that we can stretch their present capabilities and assign them tasks that will produce effective results.

The purpose of the present study is to offer the teachers a profile of a set of students; this knowledge can guide the selection and implementation of effective instructional methods and materials. Additionally, through identifying students' learning processes, teachers can use this understanding as an instructional strength upon which to build the motivation and trust so necessary with students facing the risk taking inherent in foreign language learning.

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Book Review

Dave Sperling. Dave Sperling's Internet Guide (Second Edition). Prentice Hall Regents, 1998.

Reviewed by M. Martha Lengeling and Douglas Goodwin, Universidad de Guanajuato

Dave Sperling's Internet Guide contains a wealth of information on how to use the Internet, how to create your web page, and lists of valuable sites. It is intended for an audience of novice Internet users in the ESL/EFL profession. Basic information and instructions are provided for the user to actively engage in the world of the Internet and explore the possibilities that the Internet offers to assist ESL/EFL professionals. For the person who has a fear or phobia of computers or computer language or is not on the cutting edge, this book is organized and written in a user-friendly style.

There is a rich source of sites for job opportunities throughout the world, chat groups, test preparation (TOEIC, TOEFL), book stores, ESL/EFL programs, cultural themes, dictionaries, conferences, resources, and teaching activities, just to name a few of the many categories. At the end of the book, one can find a number of appendices for country codes, error messages, definitions of Internet 'slang' terminology (netspeak) bibliography, definitions for errors encountered while surfing, as well as a glossary of Internet terms. All of these things make exploring on the Internet easier and more fun.

This book includes a CD-ROM which comprises of a list of ESL/EFL related links, also located in the book. For those people who prefer to read first and do later, this book provides them with step-by-step instructions that they can study before switching on their computer. At the same time it includes numerous interactive tips for readers to try while on their computers which help build the confidence of the user.

Information on 'links' (well over 100 pages) that make surfing for readers much less complicated is given in Dave's book. Some might say these links ruin the fun of surfing and searching on the Web, but we feel this gives the novice user a jump start. Another comment is about the provided links. The author offers a disclaimer about the changing Internet and how not all sites may function forever. Be aware of this possibility in the ever changing world of the Internet.

Likewise the inclusion of HTML code for web page design might be useful for a more advanced Internet user; however, the mention of some of the various software packages that facilitate web page design for 'HTML-illiterate' users is more than enough for the intended audience. HTML code can be very intimidating for novice users.

Another complement to Dave's book is a workbook with tasks for students. These tasks encourage students to interact on the Internet communicating with 'key pals'. Students can search for information on the web related to each unit, learn new vocabulary, as well as participate in writing and group discussions designed to reinforce information viewed during other activities in this workbook. Many of these activities could be an added component to a self-access center.

This book would be useful addition to any TESOL degree program that has a class on educational technology or computer-mediated communication. The language is informal and the book is easy to read. This book would be an appropriate addition to the suggested reading for any student, who is mostly a first-time computer user.

Dave Sperling has made a place for himself in the ESL/EFL profession with the use of the internet. With few other options on the market, this book is much more than the other how-to-do Internet books because of the enormous section of ESL/EFL links and the helpful and insightful tips for the ESL/EFL professional or student. Dave has written this book with a lot of enthusiasm, which encourages readers to experiment with the Internet and shed their fears.

To conclude, we all know how the Internet is part of our lives and for that reason we recommend this book for those with limited experience in this area. Even though it may be a little outdated (1998), it is a tool for the EFL/ESL teacher that is well worth the time and money. It serves as a reference guide to getting started and using the Internet. In our opinion this book would be a great addition to the novice user's library.