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Contents/Contenido

Theory Construction in Second Language Acquisition.....	9
Margaret Lubbers Quesada, Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro	
Reading and the “Graphic”: (<i>National Geographic</i> That is!).....	19
Mary Anna C. Dimitrakopoulos, Indiana University South Bend	
Alice in TESOL-Land: A parody of <i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	27
Cyndi Turtledove and Deborah Donnelly de García	
Maestra en Mexico.....	41
Sharon Brawner Sealy	

From the Editor

The Editor

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2) The list of references in an article must appear at the end of the text on a separate page titled "References". Data must be complete and accurate. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of their references. This format should be followed:

For books: Jones, D. J. 1984. How to spell. New York. ABC Press.

For articles: Moore, Jane. 1991. "Why I like to Teach." *Teacher's Quarterly*. June, 6-8.

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Theory Construction in Second Language Acquisition

MARGARET LUBBERS QUESADA,
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE QUERÉTARO¹

Introduction

Language teachers in general have given up trying to find a theory of second language (L2) acquisition upon which to base their language teaching methodology. And it is of no wonder. While the linguists quibble over which sentences are intuitively grammatical and the psycholinguists are trying to figure out if children do imitate adult language or only imitate “deep structure” (Brown 1987), and researchers in L2 acquisition remain deeply divided over whether or not we want to construct a process or a competence theory, language teachers have merely gone about their business which, of course, is teaching. Most language teachers with experience and academic background have no problem finding methods, mostly eclectic, which work with their students.

Language teaching remains, as it always has been and probably always should be, more of an art than a science. However, the current situation does not dissuade those of us who can not stop asking the question: Just how do people learn (acquire, develop, whatever you will) a second language? Unfortunately, as much as we have advanced in the last thirty years, there is still no theory of L2 acquisition, in the sense that the majority of those who work in the field are in consensus that a certain theory has been proven beyond a doubt to account for the phenomena under study. In fact, there have, in recent years, appeared to be two polemic views towards how we might go about constructing a theory: there are those who claim that a theory of L2 acquisition should be a description of the processes that a learner goes through in the development of the second language (Tarone 1982, 1983, 1990; Ellis 1986, 1990 among others). Others believe that a theory of L2 acquisition should be a description and explanation of the learner’s competence (linguistic knowledge) (Gregg 1990a, 1990b). There has been a growing debate on whether we should focus our attention on “processing models” or “competence models.” I firmly believe that any viable account of the L2 acquisition process should include both.

Flynn (1987) presents a detailed and interesting account of two traditional theories of L2 acquisition, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and the Creative Construction Hypothesis, and convincingly shows how these fail to fully account

¹ The author can be reached at the Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios, Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, 16 de Septiembre No. 63, Querétaro, Qro. 76000. Telephone: (42) 12-00-22, Exts. 12/13. FAX: (42) 12-00-22.

for the adult L2 learning process. She proposes a third theory, the parameter-setting model of Universal Grammar, and suggests that “it may explain how and why L2 acquisition appears to be both a contrastive and a constructive learning process” (Flynn 1987: 1).

In this article I will present a brief summary of the three theoretical approaches to the study of L2 acquisition and argue, as Flynn does, that the third is superior to the other two in terms of the contributions it can make towards the construction of a competence theory of L2 acquisition.²

Contrastive Analysis

The main proponents of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis were Charles Fries (1945) y Robert Lado (1957) who maintained that the principal obstacle for the L2 learner was the interference of the first language (L1). This hypothesis had two theoretical bases. First, it was based on structural linguistics whose goal was to describe different languages taxonomically. A language was seen as the sum of its parts. One could divide a language up into its separate components: phonological, morphological, syntactic, etc., describe them and even teach these separate parts to language learners and expect the language learner to add them all together to have a fully functioning language. Languages were distinguished for their differences. The second theoretical foundation upon which the contrastive analysis hypothesis was supported was behavioristic psychology which basically sustains that learning (and language learning as well) is a process of stimulus-response. Language learning is seen as the building up of new habits, one by one.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis maintained that when the structures (basically syntactic and phonetic) of the L1 and L2 were similar, there would be positive transfer and the learner would have no problems in learning the target language structures. When the L1 and L2 differed, there would be negative transfer (interference) and the learner would have difficulties learning these structures. In order to identify these areas of difficulty and to prevent the problems students might have, a procedure was developed where the structures of the two languages under study were analyzed and compared. The hypothesis failed both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, our ideas of what language is were changing with the development of Chomsky's and his followers' work in transformational-generative grammar. In a like manner, our ideas about human behavior and learning were also undergoing dramatic changes. On the practical side, language teachers maintained that the predictive purpose of Contrastive Analysis failed: learners didn't always commit errors that the analysis had predicted they would and they made other errors in areas in which the analysis

2 For a more complete account of these theories see Flynn (1987), Chapter 2: "Traditional Theories of L2 Acquisition."

had predicted they would have no difficulties. And finally, many errors did not reflect interference from the mother tongue at all but rather, were similar to the developmental errors children make in developing their first language.

The Creative Construction Hypothesis

Partially due to the failure of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, in the 1970's, the idea arose that the L2 acquisition process was similar to that of children developing their first language, and that all learners, regardless of their L1, acquired a second language in the same way. The principal proponents of the hypothesis, the Creative Construction Hypothesis, are Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt (1974) and Stephen Krashen (1981, 1982).³ This hypothesis is theoretically based on the generative grammatical framework, but only in a limited sense. It incorporates general notions of universality, innateness, and creative constructive powers to hypothesize, albeit unconsciously, about the language.

Stimulated by the research in L1 acquisition which revealed that children follow a fairly regular route in the acquisition of certain morphemes and grammatical structures, researchers began to look for a similar route among L2 learners. Through error analysis researchers identified that the majority of L2 learners' errors were developmental and not due to interference. Many maintained that this was evidence that the psycholinguistic processes were the same for both L1 and L2 acquisition.

Among the problems this hypothesis has had are that its claims are too general, and not always testable. The evidence is inconclusive, inconsistent and contradictory. Many studies have had highly variable results. It ignores errors that do result from mother tongue interference or dismisses them as minimal or unimportant. And finally, although it claims to be based on current linguistic theory, its treatment of the L2 acquisition process continues to be based on descriptions of surface structure phenomena; therefore, its aims are descriptive and not explanatory.

As can be seen, these two hypotheses are in conflict. The first one claims that the L2 acquisition process in adult learners is greatly influenced by the L1. The second one maintains that the L1 plays a minimal role and that adults go about learning their second language in the same way children do their first. The evidence for one is counter-evidence for the other and vice-versa.

Universal Grammar

³ See also Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982).

Universal Grammar, developed and put forth by Noam Chomsky⁴, but used as a theoretical framework in L2 acquisition research by Flynn (1987, 1990); White (1987, 1990); and Liceras (1986, 1990), can reconcile the two conflicting hypotheses, account for the data derived from both and explain how the L2 acquisition process is both a contrastive and creative one at the same time.

The goals of Universal Grammar are twofold: 1) to describe language as a property of the human mind; and, 2) to explain its source (Cook 1989). It's central concept is that language is a system of principles, conditions, and rules which are properties of all human languages. It distinguishes itself from other grammatical theories in that it is a theory of knowledge, not behavior. Therefore, Universal Grammar contains a set of principles which is common to all languages; and a set of parameters which varies from language to language. It depends on the individual language how it will set the parameters, and it is this difference in the setting of parameters which distinguish the different languages of the world (Cook 1989).

The Structure Dependency Principle

An example of a principle which seems to be common to all known human languages is the Principle of Structure Dependency, which maintains that the "knowledge of language relies on the structural relationships in the sentence rather than on the sequence of items." (Cook 1989: 2) For example, in the following sentences:

- a. Tom will always love teaching.
- b. The new foreign students will arrive next week.
- c. The letter which will help you get the job will arrive tomorrow.

one must have a knowledge of both syntactic categories and the structural relationship of the elements of the sentences in order to transform them into yes/no questions. It's not just a question of moving the nth word of the sentence to the front. In sentence (a) the second word is fronted to get the correct yes/no question⁵, and in (b) the fifth word is fronted⁶. Nor is it a question of moving the auxiliary of the verb phrase to the front of the sentence. One must know which auxiliary verb is fronted. In the case of (c), it's not the first "will" which is fronted⁷, but rather the second one, which is the auxiliary for the main verb

4 The specific proposals of Universal Grammar are set forth in Government and Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981) and developed further in *Knowledge of Language* (Chomsky 1986a) and *Barriers* (Chomsky 1986b).

5 Will Tom always love teaching?

6 Will the new foreign students arrive next week?

7 Which would erroneously give us: *Will the letter which help you get the job will arrive tomorrow?

phrase⁸. Of course, for a speaker to be able to do this, he must understand the hierarchical structural relationship of the elements of the sentence. All languages of the world appear to obey the Structure-dependency principle. However, languages differ in the kinds of structures that can be moved around.

Parameter Setting

Chomsky maintains that the child is born with a certain innate knowledge. This knowledge, which incorporates both general principles and parameters, constitutes universal grammar⁹. Upon acquiring her first language, the child learns how these general principles apply to the language and which values are appropriate for the parameters of the grammar (Cook 1989: 1-2).

An example of a parameter is that of the Head Parameter, which states that phrases can have their heads either to the left or to the right of their complements. Languages differ in that they can be head-first or head-last. English and Spanish are head-first, whereas Japanese is head-last, as evidenced in the following examples:

- a. English: The child who eats the rice is crying. (Cook 1989: 77)
- b. Spanish: El niño que come el arroz está llorando.
- c. Japanese: Go han o tabete iru ko ga naite imasu.
(rice eating is child crying is) (Cook 1989: 77)

In these examples, it can be noted that for both Spanish and English, the subject (the head of the sentence) comes first, followed by the predicate (the complement). In Japanese, the opposite is observed. The complement is first, followed by the head. This ordering of phrases within a sentence is not haphazard. For both English and Spanish, all modifiers follow their heads in noun, verbal, and prepositional phrases and relative, adverbial and adjectival clauses¹⁰. In Japanese, the modifiers precede the heads in these phrases and clauses. Universal Grammar's view of L1 acquisition is that it is a process whereby the child, based on positive evidence (input) from the environment, sets the parameters of the grammar that characterize her language. Those working within this framework in second language acquisition claim that L2 acquisition is a process of resetting the parameters of the L1 to conform with the parameters of the L2 based on the input the learner receives. Where the values of the parameters between the L1 and L2 do not match, the learner must assign a new value to the parameter. Where these values match, no new value will have to be assigned.

⁸ This time giving us the well-formed yes/no question: Will the letter which will help you get the job arrive tomorrow?

⁹ Lower case letters are used when referring to the concept and upper case when referring to the theory.

¹⁰ Hall (1994) points out that for English, one exception to the head-first ordering are adjectival phrases where the modifier comes before the noun. (For a further explanation of the consequences of this exception, see page ten of this article.)

Those researchers who work within this framework claim that both child L1 and adult L2 acquisition are constrained by the principles and parameters of Universal Grammar (Flynn 1987).

In a recent study, Flynn found that Japanese and Spanish speakers learning English were both sensitive to the head directionality of both their L1's and the L2. Whereas the Japanese speakers' errors corresponded to an early level of English L1 acquisition of complex sentences, the Spanish speakers' pattern corresponded to more advanced levels of development. Flynn explains that the differences observed between the two language groups could be explained that for the Spanish group the head directionality of the L1 matched that of the L2 and "learners can consult this in the construction of the L2 grammar. In the case of the Japanese speakers, since the configuration of the L1 does not match that of the L2, a new one must be established" (Flynn 1987: 186-187).

Hall argues that Spanish speaking students of English have problems with adjectival phrases in English because, although English is a right-branching (head-first) language as is Spanish, in English, the adjective follows the noun it modifies. "These students wrongly assume that English obeys the head-first ordering principle as well as their native language does" (1984: 28). These students' knowledge of Spanish as a right-branching language perhaps "interferes" in their L2 learning process of adjectival phrases; however, this knowledge is reinforced by the input they receive from English where they notice that English is also a right-branching language. This "interference", according to Universal Grammar Theory, should help the learners because they do not have to reset the parameter for directionality of heads and modifiers for most clauses and phrases. The students merely must learn the exception that applies in English for adjectival phrases.

It is in this way that Universal Grammar may explain how and why second language learning appears to be both a contrastive and a constructive learning process at the same time.

Conclusion

The theory as a model of second language acquisition is not without its faults and criticisms, of course. Universal Grammar deals with the knowledge and acquisition of a limited aspect of language: syntax, and so far, has only examined an extremely limited number of syntactic structures. It does not attempt to account for how learners acquire syntactic structures outside the realm of Universal Grammar. In addition, although it may be able to account for differences among learners from different native language backgrounds, it does not account for the differences among learners with the same first language, or for the variety in the degree of eventual success. (As opposed to the uniformity

among children in acquiring the syntactic structures of their native language).

Finally, there are those who argue that the adult second language acquisition process is markedly different from that of child first language acquisition, where, in adults Universal Grammar and the innate ability to construct a grammar no longer operate and, only a knowledge of the first language and a capacity for general problem-solving processes substitute for this loss (Bley-Vroman 1990: 54). I believe that this controversy can ultimately be settled through empirical inquiry of the second acquisition process utilizing theoretical models of the type set forth in Chomsky's Universal Grammar. It is only in this way that we will be able to confirm or disconfirm the claims made thus far.

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Reading and the “Graphic” (*National Geographic* That is!)

MARY ANNA C. DIMITRAKOPOULOS, INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTH BEND 1

Encouraging students to read is frequently an arduous task. The challenge confronting the ESL instructor is how to present reading using a combination of relevant context, and authentic linguistic and cultural input (Rounds 1992). Interpretive reading strategies employed by the ESL student may vary (Parry 1991), but the job at hand remains comprehension of and interest in presented subject matter.

As seasoned instructors, and for those embarking upon initial teaching appointments, we are cognizant that not every reading assignment will appeal to the individual reader’s palate. I generally strive to serve up readings of a mixed variety: the arts, science, environment, history, nature, family, education, and travel, for example. I vary the readings; in other words, I would not give a reading assignment in science for two successive class periods, although one science reading may require two class periods to do it justice. Yet what I seek in the readings I select are those of what I deem possess cross-cultural appeal and those that embody universal themes.

The students with whom I work are generally in the first year of college studies. The course in which I have successfully incorporated readings from the *National Geographic* is a remedial writing course comprised of both non-native and native speakers. Providing practical, relatively easy to obtain materials may be of more continuing concern for the ESL classroom instructor as well as for the mixed native and non-native speaker classroom teacher. In years past, I have had students read regularly from either *Time* or *Newsweek* magazines. These publications even have an educational program subscription package available with vocabulary and reading comprehension exercises. I have also used articles from *Scientific America* and *Science* magazines. I have even extrapolated material from *Parents Magazine*, a publication devoted to child-rearing and activities. I have also drawn articles from the *Smithsonian* magazine. I have not, however, used a magazine exclusively as a reading tool in the classroom, due in part to the students and department’s desire for a bona fide textbook. One advantage of introducing periodical articles in the classroom is that they can be much more current in profiling and updating aspects of subject matter since textbooks may require a wait of several years before ultimately being published.

1 The author can be reached at the following address: Indiana University South Bend, 1700 Mishawaka Avenue, South Bend, IN 46634, U. S. A. Tel: (219) 237-4409, Fax: (219) 237-4538.

In the course of my endless search for supplemental materials, I have found that educational publications such as *National Geographic Magazine* address global and human interests. In addition, *National Geographic* profiles aspects of life both in the United States and abroad. Advanced level ESL students as well as native English speaking students are able to gain understanding of an article's focus through the synopsis which accompanies each photograph. Additionally, maps that convey historical information related to the pictures and articles are included in each issue (a loose foldout map also accompanies the journal in every second or third issue). Short, often one paragraph only articles, again illustrated with glossy photographs, are also published in *National Geographic*. Selective reading of a picture synopsis and/or short article can generate vocabulary, discussion, map work, and writing assignments both of a pre- and post- reading nature.

I encourage students to indulge in reading entire articles of the *National Geographic* and will provide them with a full-blown story, or direct them toward the library. However, most *National Geographic* articles tend to be quite scholarly in tone and approach, which in and of itself is not prohibitive; however, I also utilize a cross-cultural reading textbook in conjunction with the class. As a result, time constraints often prevent in-depth study of extended *National Geographic* pieces. More often than not, I have found that student interest in further pursuit of *National Geographic* is stimulated by initial presentation of and work related to pictures and accompanying synopsis, maps, and shorter articles within the confines of the classroom.

Since the classes I teach at IUSB meet twice a week, for one hour and fifteen minutes, I distribute an assigned reading at least one class period in advance. Sometimes the readings may consist of several short ones profiling diverse subjects such as an IMAX film of mountain gorillas, life in an ancient Anglo fort, and the Nike shoe-spill from the July 1992 *National Geographic*. A reading from the May 1994 issue was "Out of Darkness: Michelangelo's Last Judgment", from which the photograph/synopsis "A matter of modesty: censoring Michelangelo" has been extracted. This work chronicles the artist's struggles over nudity in the Sistine Chapel frescos and is accompanied by photos.

With this in mind, I give the students free reign to undertake assigned readings outside of class in order to facilitate a more relaxed reading of the material at the individual's own pace. The students' ability to interpolate background knowledge while engaging in reading, and that their control of this process which has direct impact on their comprehension, has been termed metacognition (Block 1992), Metacognition is also simultaneously detaching oneself from the reading (Block 1992). I encourage students to read the assigned material several times at prolonged intervals before class, stressing that this way they will gain further insight and understanding about what they have read. I also

request that they note how their perspective regarding a reading may have altered after distinct study of the text. These varied views have enlivened classroom discussions, to say the least.

Upon commencing a reading, I urge students to merely highlight with a colored marker any words or phrases with which they may be unfamiliar. I used to give students vocabulary lists to accompany each reading. I subscribed to the notion that ESL readers should understand practically every word they devour. Yet over the years, I discovered that as frequently as I had attempted to forecast vocabulary trouble spots, students tended to focus only on those words which they apparently thought I had designated of primary significance. I now attempt to incorporate a more process-oriented approach that permits students to integrate cognitive and metacognitive resources rather than a content-based one that targets linguistic aspects in isolation (Block 1992). Finally, I have dispensed with vocabulary lists for advanced level students. I now leave it to them to discern which vocabulary they need to decipher. Proficiency in the target language occurs when the students process it and assert themselves through it instead of succumbing to the commands of its form (Widdowson 1994). I do, however, make it clear to students that I will assist them, though, if they cannot decode particular vocabulary.

There exists a definite correlation between the quantity of reading done by people and the number of words they know (Parry 1991). Students possess various strategies which may strongly affect the manner in which they learn new vocabulary (Parry 1991). During classroom discussion, native speaker students can often clarify specific vocabulary for the ESL students. This, in turn, aids in communication between native and non-native speaker students. When meeting with an ESL student who may have encountered troublesome vocabulary, I reassure him that vocabulary building demands work, and that I too am continually acquiring new vocabulary. The more continuous the connections and reviewing are, the more proficient the reader will become.

In preparation of engaging students in discussion regarding a selected reading, I jot down a brief outline of topics and sub-points. For example, to return to the subject of life in a fort in what is now northern England, circa AD 90, I initiated discourse regarding education. From there, I questioned the students about what they understood regarding education in the fort, based on the reading. Both the students and I pointed out that children wrote on bark, that they spoke and/or translated Latin, in this particular case, Virgil's *Aeneid*, that the accompanying picture indicated the children wrote in cursive style, and that possibly much of the pedagogical approach employed a rote system of learning. Class members expressed amazement that fort social life sometimes revolved around birthday celebrations in A. D. 90. Students also noted that parcels containing such mundane items as socks and underwear were included in the

correspondence over 1900 years ago. Perhaps the most provocative aspect of the reading occurred when I mentioned the ethics of archaeology and grave tampering. Heated exchanges ensued as we discussed death rituals among North American Indians, Asian views of ancestors, and exhuming bodies in general. Students have become quite passionate over the thought that one day they or their family members could be studied by archeologists of future generations, and their remains relocated.

In the case of the reading, “A matter of modesty: Censoring Michelangelo”, we first discussed who Michelangelo was, the nature of the Renaissance in what is now Italy, the system of patronage, censorship, and tampering with another artist’s work. This particular reading struck a nerve in the native-speaker students because of current controversy in the United States of public funding of art. Class members explained how the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C. has been involved in heated debate with lawmakers over the funding of art which some have deemed pornographic due to style and subject, and/or homosexual in theme. Several non-native speakers pointed out that their countries have also had a history of art, music, and theater censorship.

The class then explored and tried to define what connotes art. Students kept returning to the reading, focusing on Michelangelo’s problem with religious leaders, which also parallels the present day pressure religious lobbying groups exert upon the United States Congress.

The value of such discussion is transformed into the writing assignments students ultimately turn in based on these relatively short readings. Not only do they take a stand on issues discussed in the classroom, but they also attempt to include vocabulary and expand upon ideas brought up in the discussion. Once a chord has been struck within the students, they respond. For example, in the Nike shoe-spill story, students found humor in the drawing of the bird wearing mismatched Nike high tops. However, once I brought up the subject of culpability in the fact that 40,000 pairs of shoes went overboard into ocean waters, students themselves began worrying about marine life becoming permanently embedded inside the shoes, unable to escape. This, in turn, led to the subject of the Exxon Valdez oil spill off the coast of Alaska several years ago. In their writing assignments, students attempted to present suggestions and solutions for curbing maritime oil spillage and desecration of the aquatic environment by whalers and the use of nets in capturing sea life. Perhaps because the dramatic impact of environmental spoilage affects us in the present and in subsequent generations, students of diverse backgrounds and cultures find common ground in wanting to initiate action to save Planet Earth.

Map reading too usually elicits waves of excitement among class members. No matter if the map is of a region with which they are familiar or not,

students pour over maps to study, explain, imagine and illustrate. United States maps introduced early on in the semester help pave the way for student interaction. The native speakers in the class are often familiar with diverse parts of the United States. The non-native speakers, on the other hand, are either looking forward to commencing travel in the States, or have at least visited areas where a large concentration of compatriot native speakers live such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and Miami. I have noted, however, that both native and non-native speakers tend to have an interest in the western portion of the United States, particularly North and South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. When I quiz students about their interest in those particular states, they mention ranches, cowboys, big skies and movies they have seen. I infer from this that the myth of the romanticized West is still alive.

“U. S Parks: Stretched Thin” and its accompanying map are taken from a much longer article entitled “Our National Parks” in the October 1994 *National Geographic*. I initiated class discussion by inquiring how many of the students had visited national parks, and which one(s) they had experienced. The next question was whether or not students had been to state parks. I inquired if anyone had gone camping and/or followed nature trails. From that point, class discussion continued virtually non-stop. Class members related brief anecdotes about national and/or state park experiences, family and/or friends who accompanied students on the excursion(s), and their impressions in general of parks. Referring to the map, students pointed out which national parks they had traveled to and mentioned the names of states they had driven through to reach their destination(s).

We then turned our attention to problems confronting the National Park Service such as vandalism and physical attacks by humans (not the wildlife), excessive tourism, funding shortages and pillage. The follow-up writing assignment was to offer solutions for U. S. parks’ woes. Again, since almost all of the students had at least taken advantage of even a city park, the hardships facing our very public natural preserves concerned class members. Several non-native speakers expressed bewilderment as to why North Americans would consider desecrating a national park site by pillage. Native speakers, in turn, explained that North Americans often wish mementos of sites visited, yet they did not condone the idea. This led to the notion of “souvenir-taking” of towels, pillows, pictures and ashtrays from hotels in the United States. Several students voiced their experience with tourists absconding goods from cabin camp sites, which returned us to the notion of park preservation.

I find that students generally take the initiative with map reading. Often a student wishes to relate his travels in a particular region, say the South, and he will orally trace his route for other class members. Questions are voiced by the others, and I usually find that I can easily fade into the background during map

time. Directions, routing, pronunciation, and culture points converge over map discussions. The follow-up writing assignment may incorporate subjects related not only to travel in general, but to specific rites, customs, and cuisine indigenous to a certain region, area, city or people.

Instead of giving a specific writing topic after discussing a *National Geographic* subject, I sometimes ask students to generate a paragraph about an aspect of the article or class discussion that made an impression on them. Students then work on developing a topic sentence for a paragraph in class, subsequently, writing the paragraph outside of class. I subscribe to the notion that teachers must be aware of the relationship between writing assignments they create and the effects implicated in student responses to these assignments (Winer 1992). For writing of an essay nature, I have students break into groups of four or five. They then collectively brainstorm for topics which inspired them in the course of several readings. Usually, the students have several short *National Geographic* works and two or three textbook readings from which to generate topics. Student groups must offer statements relevant to the readings. These statements may, in turn, ultimately serve as a thesis statement of the essay. After the groups have submitted their written topic statements, we as a class determine which statements may have duplicated themselves, which may be combined, or even eliminated entirely. Students often concoct writing topics that reflect an idea gleaned from the *National Geographic*

In short, there are certainly magazines and journals of literary merit to employ in the classroom. Selection of which periodical and articles to choose depends a great deal on needs, subject and availability. The caliber of writing students that I teach, coupled with the mixture of native and non-native speakers, has turned my attention more and more toward *National Geographic*, which is available only through subscription.

Not only have I opted to view the *National Geographics* a supplemental classroom resource tool, I also value the fact that its writing is of a consistently high caliber. Yet I feel compelled to acknowledge that *National Geographic* seems to attempt to translate other exotic cultures into Western mentality and thought. Its photographs frequently try to present what could be loosely termed “the more marginal cultures” as museum artifacts that must be preserved, rather than as indigenous cultures of another mentality. However, in spite of my view that *National Geographic*’s cultural slant may not always be truly authentic, I do feel the publication does try to incorporate something different into Western culture, although slanted toward exoticism.

For these reasons, and because my students embody various cultures and backgrounds, I make a concerted effort to extract readings devoted almost exclusively to the United States, unless a subject such as “A matter of modesty:

censoring Michelangelo” appears. Its theme reverberates loudly today in the United States as the government and public attempt to define the very nature of art itself. I further admit that I do manipulate the reading material in the areas of selection and initial discussion topics in order to contour the focus so that the majority, if not all students, may participate.

While it is true that I design my own questions and writing topics, and have students brainstorm for essay topics, I have discovered that advanced non-native and native speaker students respond more readily orally and in writing to ideas based on *National Geographic* readings. I do not have statistics or charts and graphs to prove this; I am only cognizant of it through my years of teaching composition coupled with reading and vice-versa. To illustrate further, the excerpt “A matter of modesty: censoring Michelangelo” precipitated a discussion about censorship of art, what art is, whether or not censorship of the arts is possible or justifiable, and who Michelangelo was, what the Sistine Chapel represents, and art in religious dwellings. The students cited the text to help draw comparisons between controversial situations in public funding of art today in the United States and the system of patronage during Michelangelo’s lifetime. I believe the students can sense the depth of a reading, even if it is one which may not initially appeal to them.

In conclusion, my methods and means of teaching reading and writing have undergone an evolution, perhaps even a revolution from the point at which I started teaching nearly fifteen years ago. At those moments in my professional life when I seriously contemplated forsaking teaching entirely, a nerve within seemed to trigger a catharsis and lead me to explore fresh paths to reinvigorate myself in the classroom. Sometimes I think that I must reinvent myself as a teacher in order to stimulate students tuned in to a television and video technologically-oriented sphere. I find myself continually searching for classroom materials. Yet I am full of hope for my students and myself. My fondest wish is that others are too.

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Alice in TESOL-Land: A parody of *Alice in Wonderland*

CYNDI TURTLEDOVE AND DEBORAH DONNELLY DE GARCÍA ¹

Note from the Editor: This is the script of a parody of Alice in Wonderland which will be presented at the 1995 MEXTESOL National Convention in Acapulco. The authors requested us to publish it “so that teachers can read it, better understand the idioms, bad puns, etc., as well as have the opportunity of seeing how it is transferred from the page to the stage with actions.”

Scene 1: *Down the Rabbit Hole*

- Alice: I was beginning to feel very tired, sitting at my desk with too much to do--what with grading papers, doing lesson plans,...and besides (*she begins to get sleepy*) what good is a book without pictures of conversation?
- White Rabbit: (*sings*) I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date! I can't turn in my grades on time, I'm in an awful state! You see, I'm overdue!...My goodness! WHO are YOU? (*She drops keys*)
- Alice: I'm Alice...but... (*Rabbit rushes off stage*)(*Alice picks up the keys*) Oh look! These are the four keys to Language Learning! READING, WRITING, LISTENING AND SPEAKING.. but WHICH one should I use first? And on WHICH door?
- White Rabbit: (*Rushes back on stage*) (*sings*) I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date! And I forgot my Lesson Plan! I hope my class will wait! Oh dear! (*She rushes off stage again*)
- Alice: Let's try the READING key! (*Mimes opening the door*)And look! Here's a book which says “READ ME, READ ME!” OK. I'll read it. (*She reads*) “Methodology and Practical Application of Linguistics must be considered while drinking coffee, but only when the cup is extremely LARGE!...WHAT? (*A huge 'cup' appears with a sign on it which says "DRINK ME! DRINK ME!"*)” OK. I'll drink some. (*She drinks*) Oh no! HELP! I'M SHRINKING! (*She mimes opening a second door*) What now? It's a big piece of paper. It says, “WRITE ME. WRITE ME!” OK. (*She asks the audience*) But what should I write

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about? (*Audience suggests something. She improvises a sentence and writing it*) Oh dear! Now I'm GROWING! BIG...BIGGER...BIGGEST! CURIUSER and CURIUSER!

White Rabbit: (*Rushes back on stage*) WRONG! WRONG! you must say "MORE CURIOUS" and "THE MOST CURIOUS"! Don't you know anything? Syllables! Syllables! CUR-I-OUS! THREE SYLLABLES! Now Alice, pay attention to the way I teach this PRONUNCIATION LESSON. (*She turns to the audience as her class*) Now class, repeat after me...

"T'WAS BRILLIG AND THE SLIVY TOVES... (*Audience tries*) No, no, no! "BRIL-LIG! BRIL-LIG!" (*They try again*) No, no, no. It's "SLI-THY, not SLI-VY!" (*They try again*) "DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE." (*They try.*)

Alice: (*Interrupting*) But WHAT does it MEAN??? WHERE is the CONTEXT?

White Rabbit: Context? Context?? We have the TEXT! I don't see WHY we need a CON!

Alice: Well, maybe a SONG would help? Songs are good teaching tools!

White Rabbit: A Song? Yes! Just the thing! Good idea!
(*White Rabbit SINGS A SONG using AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION.*)

Scene 2. *By the sea.*

Alice: That was a very good song!

White Rabbit: Thank you, Alice. My keys, please? (*Alice gives her the keys*) Now! Let's go the SEA!

Alice: To SEE who? Er...to SEE what?

White Rabbit: To THE sea, Alice. To the ocean! To the beach!

Alice: Oh great! I love the SEA!

White Rabbit: Good. Then you'll love meeting the MAD HATTER, THE LOBSTER and THE MOCK TURTLE. They are always AT SEA! (*They all meet and introduce each other. White Rabbit exits.*)

- Mad Hatter: Now, Alice, when you used the White Rabbit's KEYS, you practiced REELING and WRITING, so it's time to practice LISPING...
- Lobster: And SNEAKING!
- Alice: I think you're pronouncing them wrong. It's READING, WRITING, LISTENING and SPEAKING!
- Hatter/Lobster: That's what we said: REELING (They FISH), WRITHING (They WIGGLE), LISPING (They LISP) and SNEAKING (They SNEAK)
- Alice: SPEAKING!
- Mad Hatter: YOU are SPEAKING. We are SNEAKING! Can't you SEE the difference?
- Alice: But...but...but...
- Lobster: Don't sputter. You must learn your LESSONS.
- Alice: Oh yes! I have THREE Teaching Certificates!
- Mad Hatter: And yesterday, you had FOUR!
- Alice: What?
- Lobster: That's the thing about LESSONS. They LESSEN every day!
- Alice: I don't understand.
- Mad Hatter: Yesterday you had FOUR Teaching Certificates.
- Lobster: Today, you have THREE!
- Mad Hatter: And tomorrow you'll have TWO, and by (*the next day*) you'll have ONE, and by (*the day after that*) you'll have NONE AT ALL!
- Alice: That doesn't make sense!
- Mad Hatter: Of course it doesn't make CENTS! Or DOLLARS either! It barely makes PESOS!
- Lobster: You didn't become an English Teacher to make SENSE, did you?

- Mad Hatter: NON-sense is more like it!
- Alice: Oh dear. I'm so confused. Everything is backwards here!
- Lobster: The MOCK TURTLE has a question for you. He's one of your students.
- Alice: Is he? I don't think I've ever seen him before. No, he's not in my class.
- Mad Hatter: Don't be a SNOB, Alice. He may not have a lot of money, but he's still in your CLASS!
- Alice: I didn't mean that he wasn't in my SOCIAL CLASS. I meant he wasn't in my ENGLISH CLASS!
- Mock Turtle: Please, Miss Alice. I need to talk to you about my GRADE!
- Mad Hatter: Your GRADE? You mean you MARK, don't you?
- Lobster: GRADE!
- Mad Hatter: MARK! (*Lobster and Hatter exist, repeating GRADE! MARK! Arguing.*)

Scene 3. The Duchess, Sheep and Pepper

- Mock Turtle: Miss Alice, I'm so worried! My father will KILL me!
- Alice: Oh, poor Mock Turtle! What's the matter?
- Mock Turtle: Oh, I'm not so poor. My parents paid a lot of money for me to study English but I only got a "9" on my Final Exam! I have to get a "10"! PLEASE HELP ME! My father will KILL me, and then he'll take me out of school!
- Alice: NONSENSE! Parents don't kill children because of grades!
- Mock Turtle: Will you, won't you...will you, won't you...will you, won't you CHANGE MY GRADE?
- Alice: Well, um...I think we'll have to take this up with my Superior, the DUCHESS! (*They move to another part of the stage where the DUCHESS is sitting*) Now, Turtle, you can ask the DUCHESS!
- Mock Turtle: Good morning, Your DUCHESSNESS! Will you, won't you...will you, won't you...will you, won't you...CHANGE MY GRADE?

- Duchess: (*Snaps her WHIP*) Can't be bothered. Can't be bothered. I am sitting in the shade!
- Mock Turtle: (*On his knees, BEGGING.*): P-L-E-A-S-E!!!
- Duchess: Amuse me with a POEM, and I'll think about it.
- Mock Turtle: (*Recites*) The time has come, the student said,
To talk of many things...
Of Nouns and Verbs and Novios
Of romances in Spring.
And WHY we have to COME TO CLASS...
And WHETHER I will ever PASS...
- Alice: Now, Turtle, you shouldn't be thinking about your GRADES, you should be thinking about LEARNING something!
- Duchess: We'll talk about your grade, after the TEA PARTY, when the CROQUET GAME is played!
- Alice: But I don't know how to play croquet!
- Duchess: (*Angrily*) WHY NOT? Didn't you have a Methodology Course? Didn't you learn how to teach English by playing GAMES? What do you think this is...a SERIOUS TOPIC?
- Mock Turtle: I just want my grade changed.
- Duchess: (*Snaps her WHIP again*) Then write a quick essay on "WHETHER PIGS HAVE WINGS." (*Turtle writes one quickly, then hands it to Duchess.*)
- Duchess: (*SINGS, to the tune of "Buttons and Bows."*)
"Pigs have wings, and Mice have toes,
And the wrong ones we have chose.
Let's go where the pigs keep wearing those
Wings and things, like rings in their nose..."
Not bad, Turtle, not bad.
- Alice: But, Duchess, you're holding a SHEEP, NOT a pig! (3 "*students*" enter to stand by the Duchess. They have 'Sheep coverings' on.)
- Duchess: That's right! Students are SHEEP, not pigs! But they must NOT be allowed to act like SHEEP! (*She talks to Alice with this advice, but HITS the Sheep Doll and the Student Sheep with her WHIP.*)

Be cruel when your students talk,
And BEAT them when they CHEAT!

They only do it to annoy...
Don't let them act like SHEEP.

Sheep Students: *(They open GIANT ACCORDIONS like the little ones sometimes used for cheating)* Bl...eee...t! Bl...eee...t!

Ch...eeeeaaa...t! Ch...eeeeaaa...t!

(Duchess hits them with her WHIP. Alice is HORRIFIED.)

Alice: Oh! Don't do that! They'll never learn English THAT way!

Duchess: Alright...Then I'll PEPPER THEM! *(She sprinkles PEPPER on the Sheep Doll and Student Sheep. The Student Sheep SNEEZE a lot!)*

Alice: *(Even more HORRIFIED)* Please! Please! Duchess! Let me try my VISUAL AID!

Duchess: What? Well, I hope it starts with a "T".

Alice: Here it is. *(She shows the AUDIENCE her sign which says, "WE ALL WANT A RAISE!")*

Duchess: What does that have to do with Students cheating?

Alice: Nothing! I just thought we should change the subject! *(Students exit.)*

Duchess: Hmm. It's a good VISUAL AID, but it doesn't start with a "T", so you CAN'T take it to the TEA PARTY! However, let's try it. *(She points to the signs and instructs AUDIENCE to say it)* Now! SAY IT! *(AUDIENCE says "We all want a raise!")*

Then STAND UP! IMMEDIATELY! RIGHT NOW! STAND UP! *(AUDIENCE stands up.)*

THERE! You've had a RAISE! Now SIT DOWN!

Alice: *(Disappointed)* Well, maybe that will at least help them stand up for themselves!

Mock Turtle: *(Returning to his usual theme)* But will you...won't you. (etc.) *(Duchess pushes Alice offstage, and they exit, ignoring Turtle.)*

Duchess: You think changing a grade is a problem? JUST YOU WAIT until you meet our new School Administrator, the QUEEN OF HEARTS! *(THEY EXIT, Mock Turtle following them, still begging.)*

Scene 4. *In the Queen's Throne Room*

Queen of Hearts: I am the MOST SUPERIOR of all the SUPERIORS! I don't like Students! And most of all, I don't like TEACHERS!

(*SINGS, to the tune of "Just You Wait" from "My Fair Lady".*)

Just you wait, all you teachers, just you wait!
You'll be sorry, but your tears will be too late!
You will substitute for money. Will I pay you? Don't be funny!
Just you wait, all you teachers, just you wait!

Just you wait, all you teachers, just you wait!
You'll get contracts, but they'll all arrive too late!
When you yell you want vacation, I will LAUGH at your frustration!

Just you wait, all you teachers, just you wait!

One day you'll be working, you'll be proper and prim...
Preparing your classes, though you want to go to the Gym.
I will call SEVEN MEETINGS, and you'll have to be there!
But I will never, ever tell you WHERE! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Oh, all you teachers. Just you wait until those meetings come around!

Oh, all you teachers. And you bring me the ideas you have found!
I will steal them. Yes, you said it!
Will I ever give you credit!

Oh, ho, ho, all you teachers. NO, NO, NO, all you teachers, just you wait!

You will get your LEVELS jumbled!
You'll be FIRED if you GRUMBLE!
Oh, all you teachers, JUST... YOU... WAIT!

Scene 5. *The Mad Tea Party*

(*The MAD HATTER, WHITE RABBIT, DUCHESS, ALICE, LOBSTER, TURTLE, AND DOR-MOUSE are seated at a big table. DOR-MOUSE is in a TEA-POT with a lid that opens and closes on her head. During the Scene, they CHANGE SEATS a lot.*)

(*They are all TALKING AT ONCE, improvising about their problems.*)

Mad Hatter: ORDER! ORDER!

Duchess: Vegetarian for me.

Dor-Mouse: Hamburger, French Fries and TWO cokes!

Alice: Excuse me, but I think he's trying to call the meeting to order!

- White Rabbit: That's ridiculous! Meetings don't order! We haven't enough food for them too!
- Duchess: Where is the Queen of Hearts, or administrator? She could have brought the TARTS to tea!
- Mad Hatter: I didn't know girls like THAT had been invited! (*He passes them mime cookies and tea*) Will you have a PAST PERFECT or a PRESENT PROGRESSIVE?
- Alice: Oh dear. I thought it was TEA!
- White Rabbit: It IS tea! TEA BE...or NOT TEA BE! That is the question! I'll have a NEGATIVE INTERROGATIVE with a READING COMPREHENSION, if you please.
- Dor-Mouse: (*Waking up*) Statistics prove that POSITIVE AFFIRMATIVES...
- All: (*Slamming the lid down on her*) Shhhhh!
- Alice: Well, I don't see how I can have ANYTHING if I don't understand what I'm having!
- Mad Hatter: You're having a nervous breakdown!
- White Rabbit: If not, you soon will.
- Dor-Mouse: (*Waking up again*) Statistics prove that 30% of ESL teachers are subject to nervous breakdowns in their first three hours of teaching when they have classes of 40 or more students with MIXED LEVELS and...
- All: (*Slamming the lid on her*) Shhhhh!
- Mad Hatter: (*Takes a mime cookie*) I'll have a MIXED LEVEL myself. Very tasty. (*To Alice*) Will you have a CAMBRIDGE PREPARATION?
- Alice: (*Hungrily*) Oh yes! I don't mind if I do!
- White Rabbit: You MUST mind! You must MIND your Academic Director.
- Mad Hatter: Did you all bring your "T" things?
(*They each show a VISUAL AID with a picture of their item on it.*)
- Duchess: I took a TAXI from the TAVERN.
- Dor-Mouse: I took a TOOTHBRUSH for my TEETH.
- White Rabbit: I took a TEST! What a treat!
- Alice: I took a TESOL TERMINOLOGY.

- Mad Hatter: TAKE A SEAT! (*They all change seats and SING to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw".*)
- All: Take a taxi to Tavern,
Take a Toothbrush to your teeth.
Take a Turkey to the Table,
Take a Test, now that's a Treat.

Take your Temperature each morning,
Take a Termite from your house.
Take a TESOL Terminology...
- Alice: Take the DOR-MOUSE! (*They all try to grab the Dor-Mouse who screams loudly.*)
- Dor-Mouse: AAAHHHH! Wait! Help! No! I don't start with a "T"!
- Duchess: Then perhaps you'd like to start with a COFFEE instead?
- White Rabbit: Take a Tablet!
- Lobster: Take a Time Sheet!
- Mock Turtle: Take a Telepathic Tasmanian Testimony!
- Dor-Mouse: TWINKLE...TWINKLE...TWINKEEES!
- Mad Hatter: (*Banging loudly on the table*) ORDER! ORDER!
- All: We already DID!
- White Rabbit: This is a Tempest in a TEA pot!
- Mad Hatter: The next item on the agenda is...
- Alice: Excuse me, but the GRIFFEN, who is missing...
- Duchess: WHO is he missing? His wife?
- Mad Hatter: He's not married. GRIFFENS never marry!
- Alice: Please! Let me finish! The Griffen wanted me to tell you that he needs a SUBSTITUTE for his class tomorrow...
(All turn their heads to the right, look away, ugly expression)
at 7:00 AM in the morning!
(All turn their heads to the left, with audible snarls, since nobody wants to substitute at that hour)
- Mad Hatter: WHOM did you say was missing?
- Duchess: NO! It's WHO is missing!
- Alice: Well, ah...the Griffen, I believe!

- White Rabbit: You should never believe the Griffen. He always lies.
- Duchess: Really? With WHOM does he lie?
- Alice: (*Getting the idea*) That's RIGHT!
- Mock Turtle: What?
- Dor-Mouse: (*Waking up*) That's RIGHT! WHO is the subject of the sentence. WHOM are we discussing?
- Alice: This is a TRAVESTY!
- Mad Hatter: GOOD FOR YOU! Travesty starts with a "T".
- Alice: What?
- Mad Hatter: Never mind. You said you needed a substitute?
- Alice: No, not ME! The GRIFFEN needs a substitute!
- Duchess: Here's some NUTRISWEET for your TEA. THAT's a good substitute! And don't argue!
- White Rabbit: (*Taking a big watch on a chain out of her pocket*) 7:00 A. M., you say? Why it's NOT 7:00 A. M. at all!
- Alice: I didn't say it WAS!
- Duchess: You didn't say it WASN'T either!
- Alice: (*Angrily*) It WASN'T either! There!
- Mock Turtle: Where?
- Mad Hatter: Wake up, DOR-MOUSE. It's TIME to TEACH!
- Dor-Mouse: (*Waking up*) You might just as well say that "I TEACH WHILE I SLEEP is the same thing as saying "I SLEEP WHILE I TEACH!"
- Alice: Oh no, it's NOT the same at all!
- Duchess: If you were TEACHING while you were SLEEPING, you would be DREAMING that you were teaching!
- White Rabbit: And if you were SLEEPING while you were TEACHING, you would be FIRED! It's the WORD SEQUENCE that matters!
- Mad Hatter: SEQUENCE! SEQUENCE! IT'S ALL WORD SEQUENCE!
- All: SEQUENCE! SEQUENCE! IT'S ALL WORD SEQUENCE!
- Alice: So what's NEXT in this SEQUENCE OF EVENTS?
- All: The QUEEN'S CROQUET GAME! Let's go! (*All exit*)

Scene 6: *The Queen's Croquet Game (Last Scene)*

(All the characters are in this scene. The WHITE RABBIT, making sure that everyone has arrived ON TIME, takes out a LARGE CARDBOARD CLOCK, shows it to the AUDIENCE, then puts it down on the floor, where everyone tries to fit on to it.)

White Rabbit: All right, everyone! Hurry up! We must be ON TIME!

(All SALUTE as the QUEEN OF HEARTS enters)

All: Your Majesty!

Queen: WICKETS? WICKETS? WHERE ARE THE WICKETS?

(The WICKETS are PHRASAL VERBS. Teacher volunteers play the WICKETS, bending over like wickets, with PHRASAL VERBS SIGNS attached to their sides. They have NO lines, but they MOVE whenever anyone tries to hit a BALL through them)

Lobster: Here they are, you QUEENLINESS!

Queen: WHERE ARE THE MALLETS?

Duchess: *(Bringing in the MALLETS, which are long sticks with ERASERS on the bottom.)* Here they are, your MAJESTY!

Queen: And the BALLS? WHO has the BALLS?

Mad Hatter: *(Bringing in a basket of SPIT BALLS)* I have them, of course, your SUPERIORNESS!

Queen: And about TIME too!

White Rabbit: *(Sings)* For every season, TURN, TURN, TURN,
There is a TIME, TIME, TIME!

All: SHUT UP!

Alice: That's a PHRASAL VERB!

Queen: Very GOOD, Alice! Very GOOD! You're PICKING it UP rather quickly! *(Hatter hands BALL to each player, Duchess hands MALLETT to each, as they begin to play)*

Hatter. TAKE your TURN! *(Mad Hatter TURNS AROUND HIMSELF)* NO! NO! NO! OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

Mad Hatter: Sorry, your BOSSYNESS! *(He tries to hit BALL through WICKET with sign that says "STAND UP", but the WICKET stands up and runs away)*

Queen: You MESSED UP on that one! DUCHESS, next!

(Duchess tries to hit BALL through WICKET with sign that says "THROW UP". She misses because the WICKET moves and mimes THROWING SOMETHING UP in the air and then mimes THROWING UP-vomiting)

Queen: You should be THROWN OUT of the game!

Duchess: Sorry, your ROYALNESS!

Queen: DOR-MOUSE, NEXT!

Dor-Mouse: But...but...but...

Queen: Don't SPUTTER!

(The Dor-Mouse is so nervous that she drops her MALLET. The White Rabbit picks it up and the Queen says to the Rabbit)

HAND IT OVER!

White Rabbit: *(Mimes putting her hands OVER something)* Over WHAT, your Majesty?

Queen: GIVE IT TO HER! *(Rabbit gives MALLET to Dor-Mouse)* GO ON! GO ON!

Dor-Mouse: On...on...on WHAT, your GRACIOUSNESS?

Queen: CARRY ON! CARRY ON!

(Mock Turtle rushes on with a TRAY, gives it to Dor-Mouse. Dor-Mouse puts her BALL on the TRAY and tries to CARRY it around)

Queen: OFF WITH THEIR HEADS! OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

Alice: Oh please, your Majesty! Please...LOOSEN UP!

Queen: Why, Alice! That's another PHRASAL VERB! Very GOOD! I shall try to LOOSEN UP! DOR-MOUSE! CONTINUE!

(Dor-Mouse hits BALL to WICKET with sign that says "BACK OUT" but the WICKET moves and BACKS UP instead)

Alice: Your Majesty! Your REGALNESS! The wicket BACKED UP! It didn't BACK OUT! Besides, you can only BACK OUT of a contract or an agreement!

Queen: *(Hugs Alice)* EXCELLENT, Alice! You're CATCHING ON beautifully!

(As they hear the word 'CATCHING', everyone rushes to try to CATCH a WICKET, but they run away. Queen is furious.)

Not CATCH UP WITH! Not CATCH! Alice is CATCHING ON! OFF WITH THEIR HEADS! You teachers can be replaced

- by a VIDEO COURSE! For only \$99.00 pesos students can receive 12 ESL Video Cassettes, and they won't need you!
- All: That's HORRIBLE!
- Queen: But WAIT! There's MORE! They also receive 7 Cantinflas Videos, 6 Audios and a Partridge in a Pear Tree!
- Mad Hatter: But, your ROYALNESS, there is NO interaction with a Video Tape Course! There is NO SUBSTITUTE for a LIVE teacher!
- Queen: Nonsense! The Dor-Mouse will substitute, won't you?
- Dor-Mouse: (*Waking up*) ACQUISITION. PREPOSITION. NUCLEAR FISSION.
- Queen: (*More furious than ever*) DUE TO THE DEVALUATION, NO TEACHERS WILL RECEIVE A RAISE THIS CENTURY!
- White Rabbit: But how can we GET BY with no raise, and all this inflation?
- Queen: Get BY? Get by WHO? Er...Get by WHOM? Er...
- Alice: (*Whispering to Queen*) Ah, no, your LOVELINESS, GET BY...GET ALONG WITHOUT...ummm...LIVE ON...so little money!
- Queen: (*Delighted with Alice*) ALICE! My dear! THREE PHRASAL VERBS IN A ROW! YOU HAVE JUST WON THE GAME!
- Turtle and Lobster: But we haven't had a TURN yet!
- (*Queen TURNS each one of them around and around until they are dizzy*)
- Queen: There! Now, everyone, TURN IN your mallets and balls! ALICE is the WINNER! (*She takes off one of her big RED PAPER HEARTS and pins it on Alice*) AIN'T SHE SMART?
- (*Last SONG and CHARLESTON DANCE to tune of "Ain't She Sweet?"*)
- All: Ain't she smart? And she's even got a HEART!
Now we ask you very confidentially, ain't she smart?
She has WIT! And she's not afraid a bit!
So we ask you very confidentially, ain't she fit?
She knows her Verbs and her Conjunctions,
Vocabulary Words, and Grammar Functions! (La la la la)
She can TEACH! And she has such lovely SPEECH!
And there ain't a goal in Language Teaching that she can't reach!

Just cast a look in her direction!
Her Lesson Plans will bear inspection! (La la la la)

We repeat. Don't you think she's kind of neat?
And there ain't no problem in her teaching she can't defeat!

Duchess: Alice, tell us. How did you get to be such a GOOD TEACHER?

Alice: Well, MEXTESOL really helped me a lot! I go to all the Conventions!

Queen: Absolutely correct, Alice. MEXTESOL helps all of us, and every English Teacher should join it!

All: (*SING*) MEX-TE-SOL! You should join it, one and all!
Participate the WHOLE YEAR ROUND, not just in the Fall!

Queen: Alice, if you could live through this crazy play, you can do ANYTHING!

All (*SING*) Ain't she smart? And she's even got a HEART!
And her students love her MONUMENTALLY!

Queen: WHY?

All: Because... (*SING*) SHE'S GOT HEART!!!!

The End

Maestra en Mexico

SHARON BRAWNER SEALY

(Sometimes it is good to see ourselves as others see us. This article is reprinted from TESOL Matters (February/March 1994). It relates the visit of an American teacher to a “secundaria” in Matamoros.)

I recently made a rather unusual “home visit” with one of my English as a second language students from a middle school in Athens, Georgia. After teaching English to María and her brother Juan during the school year, I was invited to their former hometown and school in Matamoros, Mexico. María, her mother and sister, another teacher, and I traveled for 34 hours by bus to reach our destination.

Matamoros, Mexico is a quiet little town separated from Brownsville, Texas by the Rio Grande. Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara, a public school for grades 7, 8, and 9, sits amidst the town. Our host, María’s aunt, is a secretary at this school, so we were invited guests who dropped in many times during our week’s visit.

On my first visit to the school, I was immediately impressed by the overall warm welcome we received. The assistant principal, Guillermo Ceballos, spent several hours discussing the curriculum and answering questions about the school. The students were friendly and polite and tolerant of my rusty Spanish. I toured many classrooms and talked with students and teachers who wished to practice their English and share the practices and customs of their school. I was accompanied by another teacher whose fluent, native Spanish skills were indispensable.

The curriculum at this school includes the usual academic subjects—Spanish, history, science, and math—in addition to vocational classes such as ironworks, sewing, typing and woodworking. I was amazed at the calculus and advanced algebra in the math books. A visit to the small school library, however, reflected the extremely limited resources available in many Mexican schools. Books lined only one wall and were well worn from use. After our initial tour, we were asked to come back the next day and help teach a ninth grade English class.

Eduardo Fernandez, the English teacher, met us at the office and escorted us across a large concrete patio to his class. Because of the warm climate, the school is built California style—all the classroom doors lead to the outside—there are no hallways. When we arrived, all the students stood up and said, “Good morning, Teacher” and waited for Eduardo to tell them to sit down. Students have

a great respect for their teachers, and endure many hardships to obtain their education. The classroom conditions are oppressive compared to US standards. Forty-four students, in six rows, crowded into Eduardo's classroom. His desk was raised on a concrete stage that further limited the area for the students. Windows ran down both side walls giving minimal hope for a breeze of cool air in this unconditioned room. The room was bare except for the students' desks, the teacher's desk, and a blackboard. No supplemental materials, books, or dictionaries were available.

This school runs double sessions: the morning session starts at 7 am and finishes at 1 pm; the afternoon session begins at 1 pm and finishes at 7 pm. There are no school buses to take students to school in Matamoros. The students either walk or their parents bring them. I did see some students taking the Maxi Taxi, which is the city bus. The fare is 1 peso 9, or about 33 cents [*Editor's note: in 1994*]. There was no cafeteria at this school, just a small canteen offering cokes, ice cream, chips, and snacks during break time.

For the first few minutes of class, I went around the room and asked the students typical questions in English: "What's your name?", "How old are you?", "How are you?". Some students were eager to show their English skills, some hoped I would not address them. Overall, the English skills were comparable to the skills of US students in a foreign language classroom. Few students were fluent and most had poor accents. The teacher was not fluent and had studied English only in Mexico. What impressed me was the students' eagerness to use their limited language skills to communicate with me and ask me questions. One student (prompted by the teacher) asked me how old I was, and I replied, "Sweet Sixteen".

The lesson for the day was on the when to use *was* and *were*. The teacher had prepared five questions for the students to answer using the correct verb. "Were Babe Ruth and Beto Avila football players?" the teacher asked. The students replied in unison, "No, they were not. They were baseball players." I was asked to read the questions to the students and have them tell me the correct answer using *was* or *were*. The lesson was well planned and the use of current sports stars for the questions made the lesson interesting for the students. Nevertheless, the focus of the class was on written exercises on grammar.

The students were well behaved and showed a great respect for the teacher. The students called Eduardo *maestro* rather than by his last name it is considered a title of respect. Now I have an understanding of why María's mother always calls me *teacher* instead of *Mrs. Sealy*.

Although we were crowded into a small room. The students' behavior was exceptional. It was clear certain rules had been established. For example, one girl

was excused from class to go to the restroom. Upon her return, she stood at the door and waited until the teacher gave her permission to enter the classroom.

The students were all wearing the required uniform for the public school system in Mexico. The girls wore a pinafore type dress with a white blouse. The pinafore is pink for seventh grade, blue for eighth grade, and burgundy for ninth grade. The girls have their uniforms made for them by a family member or friend. All of the boys, regardless of their grade, wore beige shirts and pants that looked similar to military fatigues.

Students in the US are usually offered a foreign language in high school, but all students in Matamoros are required to take English every year beginning with first grade. Students attend English class three times a week for 1 hour. The focus is more on written grammar and reading than oral skills, as many of the teachers who conduct the classes are not fluent in English. All students must pass a written English exam before graduating from each school—primary, middle and high school.

As I left the school grounds, Eduardo told me I could have a job teaching English at this school anytime. The assistant principal asked if we would be interested in a teacher exchange program. Maybe when I finish my dissertation I will take him up on that offer.

References

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