

**A Second Thought on
Publication Trends in MEXTESOL JOURNAL,
1994-1999**

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After reading the very thoroughly researched and well written commentary that Christopher Hall published in the Spring 2000 Issue of the Journal, I would like to respond to some of the points that were included in the article. I want to begin by congratulating Chris on the enormous amount of time it took to accumulate and cross-reference all the demography of the authors, the typology of articles, and the assiduous survey of all the topics published in the 21 issues from 1994 to 1999. Also, the 15 graphics he included in the seventeen page commentary complimented and illustrated quite well the trends in the three areas he researched although in preparing them for publication, they did cause me and my student aids more than one headache and other nerve related problems.

On the first page of his commentary, Chris said:

Perhaps the obvious way to gauge the effect of the *Journal* over the last few years would be to ask its readers - apply a questionnaire and collate and report the results. Upon reflection, however, I decided that first we would need to know exactly what the *Journal* was, what it had actually made available to

the readership, before assessing how the readership had used it (...or not) in their daily professional practice and development (Hall, 2000, p. 51).

I found this to be a very interesting point made by the author and one which should be investigated more closely. Through the results published in this article, I can now take his original idea of a questionnaire to the next National Convention in Aguascalientes to assess how the *Journal* readers use the ideas found within it and what part it plays in their professional lives.

Due to the bilingual aspect of the *Journal*, one of the findings I found disturbing in the trends of the issues was that of the 132 articles Chris reviewed only three (2%) had been written in Spanish even though 143 of the submitting authors had Spanish surnames. My initial reaction was to consider why a native speaker of Spanish would prefer to write in English? The challenge? The glory of being published in a second language?

When I asked this question to one of my Mexican colleagues who publishes articles, he responded that it was easier to write academically in English than in Spanish. This is mainly because the articles and books he reads are written in English and he didn't feel he could express himself as accurately in his native language. In other words, his model for academic writing is the style used in English. If we can consider this as the reason why most Spanish speakers prefer to be published in English, then although the *Journal* continually beseeches its audience to submit manuscripts in Spanish, we possibly may never become a truly bilingual journal with half of its articles written in each language. However, we will continue to insist.

The author also found that during the period between 1994 and 1999 approximately 50% of the authors had Mexican institution affiliations while the other 50% were from other countries principally the U.S.A. (25%), the U.K. (12%) and other countries (12%). He attributes this to the following:

The scale of international contributions to the *Journal* is surely connected with the international presence on the plenary dais at the annual conventions The role of promotion and sponsorship of academics by the multinational (i.e. U.S. or British) publishing houses and embassies is also a factor here (Hall, 2000, p. 56).

At this point I would like to point out that since becoming editor even though I have asked plenary speakers to send manuscripts to the *Journal*, I have had little success. During the time from the Spring 1999 issue to the Summer 2000 issue, the *Journal* has only included one article by one MEXTESOL speaker (Spring 1999), one invited speaker to the National Convention (Winter 2000) and one panel speaker (Spring 2000). Perhaps I'm

not good at soliciting, but so far I've had no luck with plenary speakers sending articles. For this reason, I'm not totally in agreement with the above assumption that Chris made. Since the *Journal* came to its new home, the great majority of the international contributions have arrived on their own and were not solicited articles.

Another observation that Chris made and one with which I strongly agree was:

Collaborative projects, especially in the universities amongst *licenciatura* and *maestría* students, and in the schools and institutes amongst teachers, should be encouraged, so that potential contributors don't have to suffer the pain and stress of submitting an article alone (Hall, 2000, p. 67).

In the Spring 2000 issue, two of the research articles were written collaboratively and in Spanish. One was the product of an instructor and his students in a *Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés* program at the University of Sonora and the second was from a group of English teachers in the *Universidad Agraria de Habana*. This was a rare occurrence for the *Journal* and especially considering that they both arrived at approximately the same time and were able to be published in the same issue. I would like at this point to urge teachers in language education programs to encourage their students to do group work on projects which can later be submitted for consideration to the *Journal*. By doing this, the instructors can not only help their students to acquire academic writing skills, but also provide an opportunity for them to be published. We of the *Journal* also provide a mentoring program for new writers and are willing to work directly with the author(s). And remember, the projects can be written in Spanish.

Another point he made in his commentaries was the following:

I think the editorial staff and board can make a difference, by deciding to dedicate one issue per year to an under-represented topic, inviting an expert guest editor to assemble a collection of papers and features around the chosen theme. Such an issue could then, perhaps, replace the Convention Issue as the yearly 'special' (Hall, 2000, p.68).

Again, I totally agree with the idea of an issue by a guest editor. If any of the readers of this commentary has not yet noticed, on page 13 of this issue one of the Editorial Board members, Nancy Hayward of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, has accepted to edit a special edition, ***Issues in Second and Foreign Language Writing***. It's been difficult to find and convince experts in specific areas of language teaching to guest edit and for that reason I wish to extend my congratulations to Nancy for beginning what I hope becomes a yearly tradition. If any readers would be interested in being in charge of a feature issue, please contact me at my email address in order to open a dialog concerning this topic. Also, there has been no Convention Issue since the *Journal* came to its new "home".

In a footnote, Chris Hall mentioned:

Although perhaps more Spanish submissions would be encouraged were the *Editorial Policy* and *Manuscript Guidelines* (and even the occasional *From the Editor* section?) included in Spanish (p. 67).

After I read this very interesting suggestion in the Spring Issue, I discussed the idea with several members of the staff. Their feelings were that it could encourage more submissions, so I would like to call the attention of the readers to the inclusion of an *Editorial Policy* and *Manuscript Guidelines* (pages 6 through 9) written in both English and Spanish in the present issue. However, because the *From the Editor* page is always the very last page that is written for inclusion and I am always in a rush to get the material to the printer, I am not so sure about committing myself to adopt this policy. But, I will consider it for a future time.

Again, I would like to thank Chris Hall for the thorough and time-consuming research that he did for the thought provoking Commentary article published in the Spring 2000 Issue even if, as he said in his acknowledgements (p. 68), I had to constantly harass him until he wrote it.

Reference

Hall, C. (2000). *Publication Trends in MEXTESOL Journal, 1994-1999*. MEXTESOL Journal, 23, (4), 51-68.