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Convention Issue, 1995

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Contents/Contenido

From the Editor

This year's MEXTESOL convention in Acapulco was a success, as always, thanks to the hard-work and dedication of a small group of members. As an attendee, I would like to thank them for a wonderful convention. I'm sure that they remember the problems and the small crises that dominated their days, but we only saw the triumphs.

Much came of the convention. Besides some articles that you will be reading in the near future, there have been some serious changes in your Journal. As part of the *professionalization* process, the Journal is to clear up a lot of bureaucratic details that have been ignored for many years. The Journal will soon be copyrighted and have an ISSN registry. We also are planning to initiate a three-tiered system of publication. We will be receiving articles that are refereed, unrefereed and solicited. Refereed articles will be read by members of a new Editorial Board which is being formed from interested professionals throughout Mexico, unrefereed articles will go directly to the Style Editor as they have in the past, and solicited articles will include those we request from plenary speakers, etc. We hope this new system will advance our movement towards becoming a more professional Journal, and will be able to offer you, our readers, a superior Journal. More details of these changes will be published in our Winter Issue.

This issue has some very interesting articles for you. Peter Hubbard has investigated working conditions at some Mexican schools and offers us three case studies. See if you can see your school represented. M. Martha Lengeling of the Universidad de Guanajuato has written an engaging article on cognates and false cognates, *True Friends and False Friends*. We also have an article which was sent to us from Japan. You might think that there can't be that much in common between Mexico and Japan, but you will be surprised when you read Randall S. Davis' article*, Reaching Out and Beyond: Establishing Relationships with Pen Friends*. We also have an interesting interview with Dr. Kenneth "Mike" Jensen, the English Language Program Office from the U.S. Embassy. There are book reviews an*d Teaching Tips*. Enjoy reading. Remember, we would like to hear from you.

The Editor

Editorial Policy

The MEXTESOL Journal is dedicated to the classroom teacher in Mexico. Articles and book reviews related to EFL teaching in Mexico and in other similar situations throughout the world are accepted for publication. Articles can be either practical or theoretical.

Articles and Book Reviews: The Journal welcomes previously unpublished articles relevant to EFL professionals in Mexico. The Editors encourage submissions in Spanish and English. Unsolicited book reviews are also published in either language.

Send three copies of each manuscript, including all appendices, tables, graphs, references, your professional affiliation and an address and telephone/fax number where you can be reached to the following address:

MEXTESOL JOURNAL
San Borja 726-2
Colonia del Valle
03100 Mexico, D. F.
Telephone: 575-5473
Fax: 550-9622
e-mail: mextslj@servidor.unam.mx

If you fax your article, be sure also to mail three copies to the Journal since fax service in Mexico is not always reliable. Whenever possible include the article on either 5.25" or 3.5" diskettes, prepared to be read with IBM or Apple compatible program (Works, Word, WordStar, etc.).

Journal Correspondence: All other correspondence to the MEXTESOL Journal should be sent to Editor at the above address.

Membership: For information on membership in MEXTESOL, contact the *MEXTESOL Membership Service* at the above address.

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Manuscript Guidelines

1) Articles should be typed, double spaced and preferably no more than twenty pages long. References should be cited in parenthesis in the text by author's name, year of publication and page numbers. (For example: "The findings were reported (Jones 1979: 23-24) although they cause no change in policy.")

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.

Note: A copy of these guidelines in Spanish is available on request from *The Editor.*

Si usted quiere obtener la versión de este texto en español, favor de solicitarla a *The Editor.*

Editorial: In Defense of Non-Native Speaking Teachers

JOANN MILLER, EDITOR

Many events have recently made me reflect on my position in the native-speaker / non-native speaker teacher debate. After more than twenty years in the English teaching community and dedicating most of those years to teacher training, I assumed I was quite open-minded and free from any prejudice in this matter. Obviously, I thought, it didn't make any difference if an English teacher was a native speaker or a non-native speaker. Some of my best friends and best students have been non-native speakers. However, I recently found myself saying things I thought I would never say. It happened this way...

My 15-year-old son has just begin his formal English studies. (He speaks and reads English, but he's "grammar illiterate.") After his first class at a well-known language school, I asked the typical questions: *What text are you using?* (*How much did it cost me?*) *How many students are in your class? Is your teacher British?* Wait! What was I saying?! Did I want his teacher to be British? After years of criticizing parents who demanded only native speakers for their children's classes, I was suddenly falling into the same trap.

Well, this started me thinking. Why would I want my son to have a native speaker as a teacher? What would the benefits really be?

In reality, a non-native speaker is probably a better teacher than many native-speakers. The majority of native speakers don't even know what the present perfect is, even if they might (just might) use it correctly. I remember when I first began teaching English seriously. I had been teaching Spanish for a few years at a university in the States and I had some idea of teaching methods (audio-lingual back then) and I had been studying for a doctorate in Spanish linguistics with a minor in English. I knew the differences between *por* and *para* and I could clearly explain the various uses of the past subjunctive. But I clearly remember the first time I was substituting an intermediate English class here in Mexico and I was told to "just teach the past modals." Past modals? Past modals? I didn't even know what a modal was, let alone a past modal. Here I was with graduate studies in linguistics, a passing knowledge of Chomsky and I had no idea what a past modal was. Mexican teachers would have known because teacher training classes and their own experiences as English students would have prepared them for

most grammatical problems. Native speakers have no reason to know the intricacies of their own language. How many native Spanish speakers can explain the subjunctive, or even know what it is?

Another weakness of native speakers as teachers isn't related to their lack of experience with the English grammatical system. It is related to their lack of contact with spoken English. I rarely go to the States and my only contact with English outside the classroom is television, books, magazines and my fellow teachers, most who don't have much active contact with English either. As a "native-speaker" my students and colleagues see me as a gold mine of information. I'm sure they think: "Ah, she knows everything. She's a native speaker." Well, I don't know everything. In fact, I seem to know less and less every year, especially concerning vocabulary and cultural matters. I've been out of the States (or there, but in grad school, which is similar to being in an isolated monastery in the Himalayas) for more years than I lived there and as a result, my English is very limited and out-of-date. Don't ask me what occupations are popular in the computer field or what the parts of a car are or the name of a common tool or even the vocabulary related to having babies. I had my babies in Spanish! Any native speaker who has not had constant, active contact with the States can't know all the new vocabulary that is invented every year. Consequently, it is very easy for those of us who came to Mexico years ago, to never have learned that vocabulary related to experiences which we have lived in Mexico, but never in an English-speaking country. If you are in doubt, listen to two "older", native-speakers who have spent years in Mexico. How long can they speak English without using at least *one* Spanish word?

A native-speaking teacher? Well, there are some advantages. A native speaker can often feel minute distinctions (for example, related to prepositions). A native-speaker usually has a wider vocabulary than a non-native speaker (note the "usually"). However, neither of these advantages is really that important. A native-speaker might say *I clean house every Saturday*. While a non-native speaker might use a more general rule and say *I clean the house every Saturday*, but how important is this to our students? A young practice teacher of mine once told his students that a specific exercise was *as easy as cake*. How important for his students was it that the exercise was *as easy as cake* instead of *pie.* Perfection should always be our goal, but neither a native speaker nor a non-native speaker always reaches it.

These recent reflections of mine have given me a new respect for non-native teachers. I admire them. It probably hasn't been easy for them and they are much more prepared to guide their students over the road they have traveled than I, who took a short cut. They can be more patient than I, who often find myself tearing out my hair when my students just can't understand something that seems so natural to me. They have a love for the language. They chose to study it. I didn't.

Native-speaker or non-native speaker? Does it really matter? Teachers are more than just where or when they learn their English. Teachers are the result of the time and creativity they dedicate to their classes and their own professional preparation. Teachers are understanding of their students and understanding of their students' culture and their problems. Teachers are the love they give their students and their profession. These qualities have nothing to do with what kind of English is spoken. They have to do with being a teacher. Let us leave this myth of the "superior" native-speaking teacher behind us and encourage others to do so too.

Is English Teaching a Profession? Three Mexican Case Studies

PETER HUBBARD, UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA [1]

The following article describes three teaching institutions and the attitude they adopt towards teachers of English. If the case situations in this article bear any resemblance to actual institutions that readers are familiar with, we can surmise that they are not arbitrary figments of the author's imagination. However, if the reader detects differences mixed up with these resemblances, then this may be taken, if wished, as proof that the cases described are merely hypothetical examples adduced for discussion purposes only. In either case, the intention of this article is to criticize--but criticize fairly--certain situations and practices affecting the language teaching profession. And, as is the case with any academic publication, the article itself remains open to criticism and comment.

Case Study 1: A Private Language Teaching Institute

In this institution, higher academics are well-qualified professionals, but are not allowed to apply their professional knowledge and judgement to the teaching taking place under their supervision. Mid-level academic supervisors enforce the policy that teaching must rigidly follow prescribed procedures, with institutional materials. There is no valid and reliable evaluation to show that this approach to teaching English is in fact successful. Evaluation is carried out only in terms of financial success, and the school can be shown to be financially successful. However, it can be demonstrated that approximately one-third of the students drop out before completing the first three courses (about 90 hours of instruction); and the attrition rate above this level is much sharper. Nevertheless, upper management prefer to maintain the policy of leaving the academic curriculum intact, but investing in massive advertising to make up for the loss in student numbers. They are not so much concerned with student learning as with operational efficiency.

Teachers are recruited from any sources available. Qualifications are not regarded as important or even desirable. The institution actually prefers teachers without background experience or training that might interfere with the institutional method. (Close parallels could be drawn between this

1 The author can be reached at Fax: (913) 647-7258/(913) 854-1594. e-mail: peter@fuentes.csh.udg.mx.

attitude and that of a previous era of behaviorist language teaching towards "bad habits" caused by mother tongue interference. This institution is obviously influenced by behaviorism. The idea that a new trainee should be a *tabula rasa* is an example of classic empiricism.) Much more weight is placed on prospective teachers' levels of English, especially their pronunciation., Mexicans with a good level of English are recruited, but native speakers are received with open arms.

Once accepted, new teachers are required to undergo a 30-hour training course that initiates them into "the method". Thereafter, they are closely supervised by mid-level academics (themselves, the majority ex-teachers) to make sure that the institutional materials and methods are strictly adhered to. Teachers' performance is evaluated by these supervisors and the evaluations affect their salaries. However, supervisors are encouraged by management to keep their ratings of teacher performance low so as to avoid the additional burden of bonus payments.

Under these stressful conditions of employment, it is not surprising that teacher turn-over is high. It can be shown that approximately half the teachers who work for the institution have done so for one year or less. However, once again, this does not appear to worry upper management, who attach little importance to seniority or experience. Teaching is regarded as skilled labor, and skilled laborers can easily be replaced.

Case Study 2: A Private University

This institution places a high value on postgraduate qualifications. In fact, because of commitments made to foreign institutions, they are under an obligation to ensure that, within a limited span of time, all staff teaching at undergraduate level have master's degrees and one quarter doctorates. However, within the conditions that prevail and curricular pressure, it is doubtful to what extent these qualified teachers are able to make use of their specialized training in the workplace.

In this institution, the directors are managers at heart and highly conscious of what they are paying for each hour of staff time. This is dedicated primarily to teaching, There is little encouragement within the highly vertical structure to consult at all levels and less time to put such consultations to good effect. The upper management is extremely jealous of the institution's reputation and wish for nothing less than total commitment from their

teachers. Holding more than one job is made practically impossible by the high number of hours that teachers have to put in on campus.

Staff have to put in a fixed number of hours in staff training, The management seems to be unconcerned about the quality or relevance of this, provided that the quantity is right.

It is significant that, despite this strong effort to secure institutional loyalty, backed up by high salaries, a considerable number of English teachers have decided to leave after one or two years working there. Reasons cited for leaving are mostly the heavy demands on staff time, lack of professional autonomy, low intellectual challenge and the continual awareness that their students (or their parents) are paying clients and must be satisfied at all costs.

Case Study 3: A Public University

Fifteen years ago, the teaching of English was condemned by some extremists in this institution as a practice that betrayed the nation to the "enemy of the North". A student leader (who subsequently became Rector) successfully campaigned to have the Licenciatura in English Literature closed down for ideological reasons. English in the high-school curriculum and in other programs was accorded minimum priority. It is not surprising that, when the university belatedly recognized that English was essential for practically all successful education at Licenciatura level, English teaching approaches were found to be wanting and 30 years out of date. The rector, who was the former student leader, took great pains to learn English himself and also began learning French.

Under the administration of the above-mentioned Rector, experts were brought in to set up basic teacher training programs and later establish a *Licenciatura in Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. The Licenciatura program was supported by a cooperation agreement with a foreign university. It went into effect and produced graduates. Some of these worked in their own *alma mater*, but many entered the services of private universities, started their own schools or went on to postgraduate studies.

Despite the expenditure of money and time on this teacher education program, there was institutional resistance to the idea that teaching foreign languages merited the status of professionals studies. Even now when the licenciatura graduates have established for themselves a reputation for pro-

fessionalism at a national level, there are "experts" in the university who maintain that teaching languages is a "technical level" occupation. It is even possible that the above-mentioned licenciatura will be closed down on the grounds that it is not producing a large enough number of graduates and that starting salaries of those who do graduate will not be high enough to merit professional status.

Strong support for this idea has come from the fact that another branch of the university set up its own language teaching operations as a commercial enterprise. Recruiting "teachers" from the university's student body and from foreign students who visit to study Spanish, it has run a successful commercial operation at low cost with non-professional teachers, using the university as a tax shield. If this operation can be "successful", why do we need professionals? At least that is the way the argument seems to run. (Students in the program nevertheless complain that their native-speaking teachers speak their own language beautifully, but cannot explain it when asked to do so.) So the university in question is both producing professional teachers and operating a policy that denies the need for professional training.

Another factor that works against the idea that teachers need professional training is the long-standing tradition in this university that holders of a degree in a subject are automatically *ipso facto* qualified to teach that subject. Since there is a shortage of jobs for graduates of any professional course, a certain proportion opt to enter into teaching in the faculty they have just graduated from. They therefore begin to teach professionals studies without the least bit of experience. At the same time, the idea is reinforced that higher education is merely a process of absorbing second-hand knowledge. If this idea is to be applied to language teaching, the only requirement for teaching a language is knowing the language.

What Can Be Learned from These Case Studies?

These studies clearly illustrate the predicaments of the English teaching profession in Mexico. Although students generally treat their teachers with great respect, teachers' employers seem to regard them as relatively low-level workers, who can easily be replaced and are therefore of no consequence. Language teachers have an especially hard task in convincing society that they are professional. Language teaching institutions seem to regard ability to speak the language as the most important qualification available. If the prospective teachers have a native-speaker-like accent, this will

almost certainly guarantee them a job. It is a fact that the majority of language teachers in this country do not possess a Licenciatura. However, even those who do are facing a difficult task in establishing their professional status.

Teaching is a profession only in theory. It is much more like a vocation, such as the priesthood. People certainly do not become teachers through financial ambition. In some cases, people drift into teaching by default: they do not find anything else they want to do. Teaching seems to satisfy their simple necessities. In other situations, teaching is an option on the road to social respectability, even if it does not bring with it financial rewards. However, teaching for most of us is a highly fulfilling occupation that makes great demands on our time and intellect. It is moreover an occupation that gives us the satisfaction of knowing that our work has an impact on the growth of society, if not today then at least in the future.

Teaching differs from other well-established professions in one important respect. Teachers do not enjoy professional autonomy. Whereas most professionals are accorded absolute authority in questions relating to their area, teachers are nearly always supervised by school authorities, government agencies and, even, the parents of the children they are teaching. Teachers, may, in the best circumstances, be allowed autonomy with regard to what happens in their own classes. Nobody may question what they do in the classroom. However, there is always a degree of supervision and on those occasions when a complaint is made it is significant that the school authorities often side with the students or parents, rather than supporting the teacher's position.

What the case studies also show most clearly is the ambivalent attitude towards academic training or teaching qualifications. These qualifications are welcomed as long as they enhance the prestige of the institution in question. However, they are not regarded as particularly necessary for successful teaching to take place. Teachers are not accorded higher status within the institution, if they possess academic qualifications; and they are certainly not paid more. Advancement results from institutional loyalty or personal connections, rather than from demonstrable professional certification.

What Can Be Done to Improve the Situation?

There are a number of measures that could be effective in improving the situation in Mexico, but action would have to be taken in harmony by

all English teaching professionals. A concerted effort is required. Here are a number of suggestions:

* Teachers should make every effort to become more highly trained academically and keep up to date with their profession. To this end, they should be active members of professional associations, such as MEXTESOL. They should also read as much as possible of the academic and professional publications available. They should adopt a critical attitude to all innovations and published materials.

* We need a concerted information campaign to convince employers, students and parents that being a native-speaker of a language is not enough: teachers need professional training. The more this message can come across the radio, into newspapers or television transmission, the better. English teaching institutions should include in their advertising material a list of their teaching staff with their qualifications.

* Those teachers who do not nave a professional degree in teaching English or a subject related to this, should seriously consider enrolling in a degree course. A number of "open" licenciaturas are either in the planning or the implementation stage.

* As professionals, we need a fully accredited Mexican professional association. This will need careful consideration, since many of the professional associations in existence are merely political springboards for the ambitions of a few colleagues. As a first move, efforts are already being made to bring graduates of English teaching licenciatura programs together to form some kind of loosely structured association at a national level.

If readers of this article wish to respond to the ideas presented here, correspondence or further articles in this journal would be most welcome.

True Friends and False Friends

M. MARTHA LENGELING, UNIVERSIDAD DE GUANAJUATO [1]

Often cognates and false cognates are overlooked by the foreign language teacher. Cognates are thought to be so similar in the native and target language that the teacher disregards them completely, but in fact they can cause problems and need special attention. Frequently teachers are unaware of false cognates and little emphasis is given to them. The following article will define cognates and false cognates using examples in Spanish and English.

Richards, Platt and Platt define cognates as "a word in one language which is very similar in form and the meaning to a word in another language because both language are related" (Richards, Platt and Platt 1992: 59). Both Spanish and English are Indo-European languages, while Spanish has Latin roots and English has Germanic roots. Whitley (1986) makes the distinction between a cognate and a borrowed word as follows:

> a word Wx from the Language X and a word Wy from the Language Y are terms "cognates" if and only if they have been inherited from the same ancestor language of X and Y. They are not true cognates, in this sense, if their resemblance is merely a coincidence, or if X borrowed its word from Y, or Y from X, or both borrowed their words from yet a third language Z. (p. 324)

Examples of words that have been borrowed from English and have been incorporated into Spanish are: *sandwich, láser, video* and *líder*. Technology has produced words like *el fax, el disquette,* and *el video* that have merged into the Spanish language. On the other hand, Spanish words that are now part of English are *canyon, ranch, cockroach* and *patio*. Words such as *actor* and *animal* are present in both Spanish and English because they are derived form Latin. Other languages such as French and Italian also influenced Spanish and English with words such as *hotel, control, piano,* and *tráfico/traffic*. All of these examples are words that have similar meaning in both languages.

Textbooks often include a section for the learner showing how these cognates are similar and how they make the learning of a foreign language

[1] The author can be reached at the Centro de Idiomas, Universidad de Guanajauto, Lascurain de Retana 5, Guanajauto, Guanajuato, 36000 Mexico. Fax: (473) 2-72-53.

easier. A few cognates that are easy to recognize in English and Spanish are: *rose/ rosa, horoscope/horóscopo, secret/secreto,* and *course/curso*. The learner can easily recognize these words and understand them in the target language because the meanings and spellings are similar in both languages. From the beginning teachers can help students learn vocabulary by letting the students guess the meaning of these cognates. Learning them helps in the building of vocabulary and they are easy to remember. However, Norman Coe (1992) comments that "while this fact (Spanish is developed from Latin) offers the learner a large access to a large passive vocabulary, it also tends to make his or her language sound formal" (p. 87). Coe (1992) gives an example of a learner who may use a formal word such as "extinguish" instead of a more commonly used word such as "put out" causing his or her speech to sound more formal. Relying on cognates is beneficial to the student, but at the same time the use of certain cognates may cause the speaker's speech to appear stilted and not authentic. Another problem that arises is the pronunciation of these cognates which Whitley (1986) calls "phonetically seductive, inviting transference of a source-language pronunciation" (p. 325). Learners may make an overgeneralization and form a new word that does not exist in the target language. An example of this from an English-speaker learning Spanish is the word **aborción* which should be *aborto* in Spanish. Cognates can be helpful and learned with little effort, but at the same time students and teachers must be aware of the problems these words can create.

A further problem arises for the learner due to the presence of false cognates, also known as false friends, or *faux amis.* Reid (1968) calls them "deceptive demons" (p. 280) because they are misleading and cause problems for foreign language students. Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) define a false cognate as "a word which has the same or very similar forms in two languages, but which has a different meaning in each" (p. 136). The two words *librería* and *library* seem equivalent and both come from Latin but they have different meanings. *Librería* refers to a store where books and periodicals can be purchased (bookstore) whereas a *library* is a place where books can be consulted or borrowed, but not bought. In Spanish, the word *asistir* means "to attend class" but it is often confused with the English word *assist*, which is synonymous with "help". Often Spanish speakers will produce a sentence such as " I assist my English class four times a week". False cognates cause problems in communication because the learner thinks these words have the same meanings in the target language as in their first language whereas in fact these words mean something different.

One can see how the use of a false cognate in Spanish creates a different meaning if used in English. These different meanings may lead to misunderstandings in communication which is a type of mistake that needs to be clarified. In English the word *history* refers to a subject or the past events of a group of people; the equivalent word in Spanish is the same but also refers to a story. The Spanish speaker will use *history* instead of *story*. Another example is with the word *sensible* in Spanish which is synonymous with *sensitive*; *sensible* bears a strong surface similarity to the English word *sensible*, but in fact they have different meanings. Some false cognates such as *history* or *investigation* might be confusing because the semantic meanings are related but not similar. For example, the word *investigation* refers to looking for information, which is usually done by a detective or one who is acting like one; *research* is also looking for information, but at an academic level.

Emphasis should be given to the teaching of false friends so that EFL learners can improve their vocabulary. Teaching of these cognates will help the learner become aware of the problems that arise with cognates. If the teacher is teaching a homogeneous class and has a good knowledge of the native language of the learners, then this emphasis on false cognates will benefit all of the class. Teachers can begin to collect false cognates that cause problems and incorporate the teaching of these words in the classroom. Lists of false cognates between two specific languages such as those of Reid, Marín, and Prado (Reid 1968: 280-297, Marín 1980: 65-98; Prado 1988: 721-727) can be useful to the teacher, but must be used carefully so as not to overwhelm the learner with long lists that will not be of significant use. Depending on the time and the level of the class, a couple of false cognates can be discussed quickly and easily in class. It can be explained to students how these words are different and what the correct word is for the corresponding word in Spanish. These false cognates can be recycled in the class to avoid any problems that might arise with their use. Error analysis can be used to test or explain these cognates. Teachers can give students sentences that contain these false cognates used incorrectly. The following is an example of this type of exercise.

Correct these sentences:
1. Tom is a student whose career is accounting.
2. Ed's dormitory in his house is always dirty.

The students are asked to find the error and then make a correction. Often students find this exercise interesting because they can see the problem that these false cognates cause and can recognize their errors. Adult learners enjoy this activity because they can analyze the problem. Another activity that can be used with these problematic words is to have the student write a sentence using these false cognates showing that they understand how they are used. If a certain tense is being studied at the time, the student can incorporate this tense with the false cognate. Students can be given sentences that require them to decide which word is correct such as the following sentence:

The teacher is reading a _____ (story, history) to the children in her class.

The use of vocabulary games can also be used to aid in the understanding of these false cognates.

While cognates are helpful in the learning of a foreign language, false cognates can be troublesome because of their different meanings to similarly spelled words. Often vocabulary is overlooked by teachers because of the vast number of lexical items, but the teaching of cognates and false friends can help the ESL learner from a beginning level to the more advanced level.

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Reaching Out and Beyond: Establishing Relationships with Pen Friends

RANDALL S. DAVIS, TOKYO FOREIGN LANGUAGE BUSINESS ACADEMY [1]

Elizabeth, I never thought writing to someone abroad is so interesting. I have learned lot about Australian culture from you. I like learning from you than from books. A Japanese student's letter to her Australian pen friend.

Introduction

At first glance, one would think that Japan and Mexico are worlds apart, yet the nature and challenges of learning a foreign language remain the same. One case in point: While traveling or studying abroad is a dream of the majority of students, this wish often goes unfulfilled. The realities of time, money, and other obligations limit many of those who want a taste of a native culture under "authentic" conditions. As a result, some students become disheartened, wondering if their time has been wasted having studied English, yet never having opportunities to broaden their horizons by interacting with speakers of the target language. In addition, language teachers often feel frustrated, not sure how to provide these experiences for their students. Yet, one method of instruction which provides students with both language and cultural exchange is establishing relationships with pen friends from abroad.

The Model

Step One: Getting Started

As stated by Paul (1994), "One of our primary roles as language teachers must be to narrow this gap between the classroom world and . . . reality" (p. 20). In other words, we must provide more real-life language practice, something that is hard to accomplish in EFL settings. Equally important, students must be allowed to engage in projects they perceive as valuable and interesting to achieving language mastery, especially since many EFL learners only see using English as a deferred need at best. After talking with my students about their own studies, I discovered they wanted to correspond with foreign pen friends as a way of sharing and disseminating ideas about culture and language.

[1] The author can be reached at 2-8-22-202 Nakamachi, Machida-shi, Tokyo 194, Japan. Home Telephone / Fax: 81-427-20-6585, Office: 81-427-28-6751, Office Fax: 81-427-28-1943.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle in the beginning is building students' confidence. Up to this point, most of my students had not had much contact with foreigners outside the classroom and doubted whether they could communicate effectively with them. Students are preoccupied with the possibility that they might not be able to read what their pen friends write in letters. Consequently, I have to bridge this gulf between classroom learning and the real world by reassuring students that (a) making mistakes is an inherent part of learning, and the classroom provides an excellent haven for testing out language skills; (b) I will be with them every step of the way, both in and out of class, to assist in unraveling anything they cannot figure out themselves; and (c) many of their pen friends are also studying English as a foreign language, and the exchange of letters becomes a mutual learning experience.

I also help students discover the joys of writing letters by putting up a special pen friend bulletin board entitled "Voices from Abroad" at the start of the year. I decorate this board with letters, pictures, travel posters, maps, and other cultural realia we have received from different foreign pen friends which serves as a catalyst for generating ideas. In fact, many students from other classes come clamoring at my door wanting to participate.

Step Two: The Writing Process

While it is not difficult to organize a pen friend program, careful consideration, planning, and teacher supervision are needed especially during the initial stages. In my case, the writing course I teach meets once a week for ninety minutes, of which twenty minutes in each class is devoted to issues relating to pen friends (e.g., reading letters together, giving suggestions regarding content, helping formulate responses, etc.). The actual course lasts approximately thirty weeks.

First of all, this pen friend project is an extension of my regular writing class, drawing on material from the main text to discuss basics in mechanics, organization, and style. Then, students are required to write six letters during the course about the following topics: (a) introducing yourself, (b) describing your city, (c) introducing a famous tourist spot in your country, (d) describing a traditional holiday, (e) relating a personal experience learning English, and (f) explaining a process (e.g., visiting a typical home, taking a taxi, attending a Shinto wedding, etc.). Actually, these are themes students must write about anyway as part of the class, but are then adapted to fit into letter form. My first lesson follows this format:

1. Discuss how to write the basic parts of a letter and how to address an envelope.

2. Point out differences in writing dates, salutations, and closings that are often pitfalls of foreign students. The same applies to the envelope style.

3. Pass out the contents of a letter that has been jumbled up and have students reconstruct the letter.

4. Have students send the unscrambled letter to a classmate. The other student should check it to see if it was written correctly and bring the letter to class the following week.

I provide a sample letter for each assignment which has been written by past students or pen pals, and explain how these letters can be adapted to fit an individual's own circumstances and experience. I emphasize that these models should only serve as the scaffolding to allow students to be able to produce their own original ones. Although there is a tendency for students to only copy what others have produced, I initially value more the instant success students feel when writing a letter that can be sent off without too much labor involved.

However, my students are sometimes unaware of the need to target their writing to an audience who probably knows very little about their country. In my case in Japan, students tend to assume that the reader is working with the same base knowledge of language and culture, and write, for example, Japanese words they believe are universally understood. In fact, the opposite is true in most cases. Subsequently, I ask students to exchange letters with each other and read them from the standpoint of a foreigner. Then, I have them give constructive feedback, not only regarding the more obvious spelling and grammatical errors, but apparent gaps in logic or ambiguities where an explanation would be unclear to the pen friend. Afterwards, each letter is turned in to me so I can check its style and content, and these letters are then set aside to be sent later.

Step 3: Finding a Pen Friend

At the risk of singling out only one particular group at the exclusion of others, I would have to say that the International Youth Service (IYS) based in Finland has proven to be the most reliable pen friend organization I

have found so far.[2] IYS, founded in 1952, is actually the largest of its kind in the world for students, providing pen friends in over 100 countries. For a small fee, IYS will locate a pen friend for each of your students based on age (generally between 10 and 20) and interests. IYS will also try to match your students with someone from the country of their choice based on availability. When you send in the applications, IYS will send the name, address, birthday, and hobbies of your students' pen friends. From our experience, the entire process takes about a month.

We fill out and send the applications during the second week of the term. By the time we receive the addresses, my students have already completed one or two letters. If for whatever reason, someone does not receive a reply to his or her first letter within three months, the name slip can be returned to IYS, and a new address will be sent free of charge. In addition, students can receive letters from surprise pen friends from other countries on request. In most cases, we have chosen this option because it increases students' chances of finding at least one good pen friend.

Step 4: Following-up with Student Journals

I ask students to briefly record their feelings about their progress and relationship with their pen friend once every six weeks in a notebook which is then turned into me. Reading these journal entries helps me stay abreast of where each student is in his or her writing. Furthermore, it allows me to critically evaluate the program as a whole from many perspectives, providing me with clues on how to give additional support and encouragement to students as needed. Here is a sampling of past journal entries:

> "Yesterday, I got letter from Rob, my pen friend from New York. He taught me some new words and a slang from his city. He is 'cool' person."

> "I have two pen friends now, one from Sweden and one from England. Sometimes, I like writing to Swedish pen friend more, because we learn English together."

[2] International Youth Service (IYS), PB 125, FIN-20101 Turku, Finland (Fax: 358-21-517-134).

> "My pen friend told me about American high school life. For example, dances, prom, clubs, and so on. Life must be more interesting in states. More free than Japan."
>
> "Writing letters is fun, but after graduate, who helps me check my letters? I don't know if I can do it by myself."

Step 5: Evaluating Writing Assignments

From past experience, I have found that when I saddled unwilling students with the task of sending letters, many did so half-heartedly or not at all, which was not fair to their foreign pen friends. Instead, I now give everyone the option of participating, but all must write the letters whether they are sent or not. In the end, students are evaluated on the completion of assignments broken down into three categories: the six letters, the letter format as studied in class, and the monthly journal entries. Students must keep a portfolio of the letters they write and receive along with their journal entries and hand this in once a month. While no one is penalized for not sending the letters, I award bonus points worthy of their efforts if they do.

However, one reoccurring problem is the inconsistency of letters flowing back and forth between friends. Thus, in assigning their final grade, I emphasize more controllable factors including their writing in class and their journals more than the actual mailing and receiving of letters.

Helpful Hints

Writing creative and interesting letters is a crucial key to a successful and long-lasting pen-friend relationship. Here is a list of practical hints for your students on how to compose and shape letters.

1. Make sure your first letter is simple and short (about one page in length). Sticking to the basics is the best way to start up a friendship with someone else. Do not overwhelm your new friend with a six-page letter.

2. Give specific details when talking about you, your family, and your country. Try to create mental pictures through the use of descriptive adjectives, numbers, and figures. Assume your pen friend knows nothing about your country and go from there.

3. Try to respond within two weeks of receiving a letters. Otherwise, your pen friend might feel that his or her letter got lost or that you are no longer interested in corresponding.

4. Ask only one or two specific questions in each letter. Asking too many questions will make it hard for your open friend to respond to all of them quickly.

5. Write legibly. Handwriting styles sometimes differ from country to country and from person to person. There is nothing more frustrating than getting a letter you cannot read. Also, do not be afraid to ask your pen friend to print more clearly.

6. Include some kind of cultural artifact with each letter that will peak your pen friend's interest in learning more about your country. Post cards, newspaper clippings, small pieces of candy, popular music tapes, stamps, tourist brochures, popular teen magazines, or comic books are always welcomed treats. It is like sending part of your country through the mail.

7. Personalize your letters by sending pictures of your family, friends, school, house, pets, etc. The more your pen friend sees you as a real person, the more enduring your friendship will become.

Reflections

One cannot overlook the inherent challenges of finding opportunities using the target language in EFL settings as I have discovered teaching in Japan. Teachers in Mexico in many instances are confronted with these same problems. Consequently, creating a link of communication between students and other English speakers is of paramount concern to EFL educators like myself. One way to accomplish this is to write to others abroad. I have been very satisfied with the results since initiating this program three years ago. More importantly, my students feel gratified at the fact that their English studies starting in junior high school culminate in a very practical meaningful, and successful experience. For them, corresponding with others has been one way to open the door on a journey of language and cultural discovery. As for myself, I know more about Italy, Uganda, Brazil, Hong Kong, and Australia than I ever thought I would through the letters of my students.

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Interview with Dr. Kenneth "Mike" Jenson, English Language Programs Officer [1]

T. NEVIN SIDERS V., MEXTESOL [2]

MEXTESOL Journal: What does the English Programs Office offer to English teachers in Mexico?

Jenson: Mainly in my own opinion, I think one of the best things that my office has to offer--especially if funds are continually cut--is the *English Teaching Forum* magazine. It's one of the best things we have to offer English teachers, because the magazine comes out four times a year, full of practical classroom ideas for teachers. Your average teacher can read this magazine and get ideas and take them right into the classroom.

That's sort of a constant, no matter who comes and goes, because the English Language Officer, like myself, is usually in Mexico only for two years, maybe three years, so we're coming and going.

The other main thing my office offers is consultations for institutions, for universities, for the Secretary of Education offices and any kind of organization involved in English language programs. For example, in my few months here (I've only been here four months) I've already worked with two state Secretary of Education offices on curriculum evaluation, curriculum design, and curriculum development for their English language programs for the state. And I've also worked with a couple of university English departments evaluating and designing, mainly evaluating the present curriculum. It's a lot!

My predecessors did a great deal more in the way of actual methodology seminars for classroom teachers, so that's another service my office has offered to Mexican teachers of English. I've done some of that also, but I'm trying to aim at a higher level, a more programmatic level, because there is only one of me and there are 31 state Secretary of Education offices having schools and having English teachers. So I'm trying to aim at a level

1Dr. Kenneth Jenson can be reached at the Benjamin Franklin Library, Londres 16, 2º Piso, Colonia Juarez, 06600 Mexico, D. F. Tel. 211-0043, ext. 3566.

2 This interview was conducted on May 4, 1995.Dr. Kenneth Jenson can be reached at the Benjamin Franklin Library, Londres 16, 2º Piso, Colonia Juarez, 06600 Mexico, D. F. Tel. 211-0043, ext. 3566.

where we will have an effect, so to speak, which trickles down to the classroom teacher, eventually. In addition to offering seminars given by me, we can also bring American academic specialists, English teaching specialists, to do work on a two-week program to a four-week program for Mexican institutions--usually universities and some that are state Secretaries of Education... Very often it is an intensive classroom methodology seminar, but we are also planning to bring in someone to help several state secretaries to do an intensive two or three weeks on curriculum design, curriculum development, curriculum seminar. This is in addition to the kind of program that I don't have time to do myself.

What else do we do? The most common question I get is: "Don't you have any scholarships for me to study in America?" And the answer: "No, sorry." There are scholarships available in some select cases, but they don't come through my office, they come through the International Institute of Education (IIE) which also has its offices on the same floor, the second floor, of the Benjamin Franklin Library. I do sometimes have occasion to nominate English teachers, but more often actually trainers of English teachers, to go on short programs in the United States, anywhere from ten days to four weeks, to do a seminar, to travel around and see different U.S. institutions, but I have never had access to actual scholarships to go and study there.

The other major thing we do now in Mexico is that we have available some subsidized materials printed for the United States Information Agency at a very reasonable price. These are supplementary materials--they are not course materials, they are not class books--but they are small books to help the teacher get ideas for teaching conversation, for teaching writing, for classroom activities, learner-centered activities, some reading materials, and of course some American cultural materials. These materials are very inexpensive, ranging from one peso--not a dollar!--but one new peso, up to probably 15 pesos. Our top price item is a set of six cassettes of American songs (they are really international songs) for teaching English. And they cost 65 pesos. I think that is an actual service we can offer. We can't give these materials away, but we can make them available for very reasonable prices. Thet are available in my office or people can order them. You get the order form, you send it by fax, we can mail it to them, send them by bus, or whatever.

What else does my office offer? Mainly, when people ask me what I do, I say that I'm a consultant. I don't teach English. In fact we just changed

our names from “English Teaching Officers” to “English Language Officers,” because we never taught English, we simply consult and advise and help local teachers--the local Mexican teachers--teach English.

MJ: I have two questions about what you’ve said so far. You mentioned the State Secretaries of Education and government programs would you also be willing to, give advice to private schools, private language institutes?

Jenson: That’s actually a dilemma for our offices in general around the world. Being a government office ourselves, we think our first target, the first ones we should help, should be our host government offices. But, in general: “Yes,” we are willing to try and help and consult with anyone who’s teaching English in the country. I know my predecessors in Mexico have worked with private universities and with private schools so, yes, we are available. But if it comes down to it and we don’t have time to do both, I think our unofficial policy is official Mexican government offices are those that we try to help first. I don’t think I personally have worked with any private universities yet, but that’s certainly not out of the question, on the question of private institutes.

That brings up an interesting question on private institutes. I have been consulted by SEP, by the Federal Secretary of Education’s office, on how they go about, how they can go about, and how they should, set standards for private schools. Because of course most private schools should be or already are licensed, approved and accredited by SEP. And I think they must be working on this because I’ve just had a woman in my office recently asking about accreditations and standardization. It’s a very difficult, complicated problem because if you are going to set standards and give accreditation, you have to have not only a list of standards, you have to have people who go out and enforce them and check them, it’s quite a complicated process. But I think is a good sign that SEP is thinking about this and at least trying to register them.

That’s what I found in Poland. There were hundreds of private, just individuals, or schools teaching English. But there was *no* way to know what their standard was, if it was good or it wasn’t good. And the Ministry of Education in Poland hadn’t done anything to face that problem of how to accredit someone.

MJ: You previously mentioned you could arrange for consultants to offer seminars for Mexican institutions, do these consultants come from the United States? What are the expenses for their Mexican hosts?

Jenson: Anything we do like that, we do on the basis of cost sharing. We usually ask the host institution to indeed be the host, to provide room and board--to provide their food and a place to stay while they're here. My office, or the Washington office, pays the international air fare, their honorarium, which is actually very modest, and other incidental costs, but we do ask the host to be the host. It doesn't have to be a luxury hotel, yet we don't really want to put them in a barren dormitory room--but a place where they can prepare their lectures, rest comfortably and quietly, so they can do their work, because this is very intensive! They're usually working four hours a day in front of the group, and then four hours a day in consultation and individual discussions. So far most Mexican institutions have not found that a burden.

I do have to set up a two-week program for anyone who comes. For example one week in one institution, one week in another, to justify the international airfare and transportation. That's really no problem. And I might say that many American academics are quite eager to cooperate and work with the United States Information Agency, because they know we do quality work and it is good for their resumes and their prestige, and most are willing to work for one quarter or one eighth of the honorarium, or fee, they would normally get if the worked in the U.S. or a developed country and ask for their normal fees. For example one prominent academic asks about 800 dollars a lecture, and they will come, they work for about 100 dollars a day, plus their expenses of course. I think I mentioned that second, because after our *English Teaching Forum* and my work, then that's one of the best services we can bring. Not just top names, I think often people want *the* name in English teaching, but we can bring some of the best teacher trainers and the best people in the field, even if they're not a name like Jack Richards or Krashen, or someone like that.

MJ: Well, let's move on to: Who are you? Where have you been? What countries have you served in? What areas of English teaching do you enjoy most?

Jenson: First of all, where have I served? I've been in English as a second language all of my career. I went off to the territory of New Guinea way

back when, with a B.A. degree, and inadvertently got into teaching English as a second language, not even knowing what that meant at that time, and more or less stayed in this field ever since. The largest part of my career was spent in Indonesia, where I taught English and trained English teachers. I only joined the United States Information Agency in 1988, so this is a relatively new aspect of teaching English as a foreign or second language for me. And I guess I do like the classroom, like classroom teaching, but I find this position is very stimulating, and very challenging. And I think the thing I like most about it is I have so many opportunities to meet so many different people. And so when I'm sometimes frustrated by the problems of living overseas and moving around the world, and then I go off and meet this really great group of English teachers in Monterrey or Chiapas or Veracruz, I'm reminded of why I joined this particular organization.

When I was more in the classroom and doing actual teacher training, one of my specialties, one of my favorite fields, was psycholinguistics. And I used to think that was my "specialty." Now in my kind of work, we have to be more general and willing and able to do a number of different topics. Since I've come to Mexico I've been concentrating on curriculum design and curriculum development because that's so in demand, there's such a need here.

MJ: "Psycholinguistics" means a lot of different things to different people...

Jenson: Yes, I guess in our field it would come back down to "second language acquisition"; the whole process of how a learner acquires a second language, a foreign language. In fact, I did a doctoral dissertation on university level individual students learning English as a foreign language, and traced their developments back in the days when the trend was doing morpheme counts and that kind of thing. Now I wonder why we did such tedious kinds of work--but it was interesting, especially since I followed 12 individual students, personally and carefully, for a period of over two years. I really felt I learned a lot about how they learned English as a foreign language--learned a lot about them personally--we became dear friends after two years of listening to them speak English, analyzing their English in the second language acquisition process. That's all sort of out of style now, especially morpheme counts, but I think it is still important to try to realize and know how we are as learners--as I try to learn some Spanish--and how our students actually learn. Just last Saturday I went to a presentation by Rebecca Oxford on learner strategies, learner styles. It's all about how do

we go about learning, how do we learn, what are the processes, what are the things that help us to learn.

MJ: That's what JoAnn Miller spoke about at our workshop last Saturday; we analyzed our own learning styles.

Jenson: Ah, she (Oxford) was asking us to analyze ourselves, about what kind of learner you are, what kind of worker you are. Sometimes I don't think that my styles are suited to an administrative, bureaucratic position in the office! But it's part of my job. And then I get out and work with teachers, it all sort of evens out.

My current interest--if I have any focus to this job which requires me to be all things to all people and do all kinds of things, I'm convinced we all have to became aware of and to become literate in the use of computers and especially with the Internet, or being "on line." So, I'm trying to learn as much as I can about on-line access, using a computer, using e-mail, using Internet, for both keeping in communication with other people and of course the almost mind boggling research tool that the Internet can be, get into it and make use of everything available. So I would say that's kind of my current investigation, current focus--not reading books on psycholinguistics.

MJ: What is the first thing that our members, teachers and administrators, can do so that their school acquires a modem and subscribes to e-mail systems? Where do they go?

Jenson: Internet started really with the academic research community, period. So, generally in Europe and the U.S.A., the first source and the first access to Internet was through the university, period. So in theory anyone who has access or is working in the university should have access to Internet! But, as with most things, the English department and the language department, are the last ones to know about it, the last ones to get access. Just like in the U.S., the English department got the cast off computers from physics and math, and when the computers were not good enough for them anymore, they gave them to the English department! The language department! So I think its the same way in much of the world of Internet. There hardly exists a university campus in the world that does not have Internet connection. It is simply: Does the language department, do English teachers, have access? The first thing to do is to go bug the administrators and the comput-

er people, the systems people, and say "Are you on Internet? Do you have access to Internet?" "Of course!" And then you say, "I have to get on this! How do I get on this?" And then there will be a lot of wishy-washy, non-answers and a lot of this and putting you off, but you have to be persistent!

Ten years ago in the U.S., I moved into this English department. They didn't even have word processors! They didn't know what they were, but there--just like you said--there was a terminal sitting in the corner that no English teacher knew anything about. They didn't even know what it did. It was just something they put there. So a lot of it is: the English teachers' lack of information. They are unaware; they have a fear of technology. And then I started using this word processor in the corner, and then when all the other English teachers finally saw that it might be useful, unfortunately in one year I had little access to the *one* terminal we had in the English department--because everybody was using it. So a lot of it is this idea: we don't know what's available or maybe we're a little afraid of it, but we simply we have to inquire and ask.

I think I'm not wrong in saying, probably every university campus has somebody on that campus who has access to Internet already. Maybe not in San Cristóbal de las Casas, in Chiapas, because I was there recently, but in Tuxtla Gutiérrez indeed the main campus has Internet.

Mainly, how do you get it to your building or to your office? Even UNAM-CELE (the Foreign Language Center), definitely still does not have access to Internet at this time. Meanwhile UNAM is actually *selling* accounts to the rest of Mexico on the Internet, but their own divisions, the CELE didn't have access but they are getting it, and they may have it now. I spent four months in USIS Mexico trying to get on in order to get an account. So a lot of it is just lack of knowledge, lack of concern, people maybe don't know all the benefits of the Internet and e-mail. Just the communications alone, with e-mail, it's just incredible.

I've been off-line now since I left Poland, which reminds me, in Poland I had Internet, was on Internet for years! I left Poland, and then I sort of went into this black void. Got to Mexico City: "Don't we have Internet? Don't we have e-mail?" "Oh no! We are working on it." Finally, about a month ago it was up and running. So the idea is to ask around, ask your colleges, ask your people, your colleagues in computer science, ask the people in math and science, they're probably on Internet.

MJ: How about for people not at universities?

Jenson: It gets more problematic. Like I said, even USIS (U.S. Information Service) has had trouble getting to Internet, so I can imagine how much more difficult is for a private high school or even just a regular elementary school. That's when they may have to go to a commercial provider like Compuserve, or in Mexico there's something called S.P.I.N., (I'm not sure what the letters stand for,) and that you do have to pay for. It's so much for hook up, (I don't remember how much it is,) and then so much for a month, for a certain number of hours. And of course for that, you have to have not only your personal computer, you'll have to have a modem, which is the device which lets your computer talk, via phone line, to all the others computers in the world. So it is an investment. If you have the computer then you have to invest, say, a hundred U.S. dollars in a modem, and then maybe thirty to forty dollars to subscribe, and then ten dollars a month to have access to the Internet. But for a school or for a institution it is probably not an overwhelming cost--for an individual it might be.

One of the things that is provided on Internet and e-mail are discussion groups, and there is a discussion group called TESL-L. And I just finally got hooked up with it, and this is where seven thousand people around the world subscribe, and you send one message and all seven thousand people get the message in just a few seconds. TESL-L is a list serve so there are (I'm guessing) seven thousand people on this list serve. I put just one message that the list serve distributes to everybody around the world, I mean literally around the world, China, Thailand, Russia. And the discussions recently have been on using this international e-mail as not simply a pen-pal device, which of course is very good because a student of English in Mexico City could be writing letters in English or little notes on the e-mail back and forth to a learner anywhere in the world! In Prague, in Moscow, even in China, certainly in all of the so-called western world. So, there's been a discussion going on, back and forth, everybody giving their ideas, about how to use the Internet, e-mail, and how to use e-mail and the pen-pal concept for teaching English in the classroom, and of course, as an extraordinary motivator. Because you think, "I can correspond with a student in Australia, a native English speaker, in English!" And so this is great motivator for the Mexico student, to learn English and to use English, and it's real communication.

That's just one way that we know Internet can be very useful. My own real interest in it, although I love to correspond and keep up with people, is as literally a reference library at your fingertips. You can find any information on any topic anywhere in the world, practically. When somebody wants some information about a specific topic, maybe the Benjamin Franklin Library here (which is right down the hall from my office) doesn't have it, but what they do is they get on their interconnections and they can have the information here, depending upon the nature of it, maybe within hours, certainly within a day. They can have the full text of president Clinton's most recent speech within hours, right here in Mexico City. Of course for the English student that's not the interesting thing, but I'm thinking for teachers, they can have access to just unlimited information. For example, last night, just to waste time, I was reading the weather report from Chung Mai University *gopher* systems (for people who don't know, "go for" is a term they use for "searching," "going for something," and to be funny people say it so that it sounds like the little animal); it just happened to be on the menu so there's the weather from May 3, 1995, in Chung Mai! It's sort of a trivial, silly thing, but that's how instantaneous it can be. And this was coming from Chung Mai, Thailand, not from Mexico City or from Washington D.C. If I had had time to dig around more I may have found about the state of their English teaching program in Chung Mai University, Thailand.

MJ: Is *English Teaching Forum* magazine available electronically?

Jenson: Yes, it is available on-line. Our office has actually set up an EFL *gopher* which has, among other things, the text of *English Teaching Forum* on it. It's a very new *gopher*, so I'm not sure what all's in it yet. They're just building it. And frankly, I haven't accessed it myself, yet.

MJ: How does the classroom teacher look for aids in everyday teaching of, say, modals, for example? When I have to teach it tomorrow?

Jenson: I'm not sure that it's on that particular *gopher* right now, on EFL, but there would be a particular *gopher* for a particular topic. And that's what we hope to fill this EFL *gopher* with, information like that. Right now, you probably have to go into some of the magazine or periodical *gopher*s, and then search for your topic, on modals and different kinds of modals.

But then again, that's for the teacher. This TESL-L list serve bulletin board is very good, because another recent discussion they've been having on there is all about the different uses of "shall" and "will," which of course, for most Americans is a moot point, but in many parts of the world it's still a big issue. So everybody from all over the world has been putting in their opinion, their assessment or their judgment on the uses of "shall" and "will." I'm sure that if a teacher has his link he can get it; he can go into the TESL-L message and say, "Can somebody please help me to teach the different concepts of the modal?" And people will respond with actual magazine articles or books, or often they like to, of course, respond with their own opinion: "This is how I see it;" or "This is how I teach it." Of course that would take a number of days to get the *chat* back and forth. And if you need something instantly, you're probably going to have to go to a major university like University of California Berkeley, which makes its complete library catalogue available, and then certain items you can go into and call up and actually get the text on your screen, it's similar with periodicals.

There are a number of services, and the problem that I'm trying to study now is: "What are these specific *gopher*s? What are these specific things that we as English teachers can call on, and say ´Here I can get an answer.'" It is a bit intimidating to go into the University of Berkeley library catalogue and start looking.

MJ: You should make a list of these *gopher*s.

Jenson: Right, then make them available--in the MEXTESOL Newsletter! Like last night, I have an account from the Tec de Monterrey, and they had a screen, a little menu item, where you can ask them to give you all the *gopher*s in the world! Press the button and--it was page one of one hundred and twenty-five pages! And each page probably had twenty lists on it, twenty times 125 and--needless to say I didn't have time to go through the lists!

There will be more and more specific services like this. And I hope our USIS-sponsored EFL *gopher* will eventually have a lot of practical information on things like this. Nearly any periodical, certainly any newspaper, in the world is now available on Internet. Whether you realize it or not, you can now sit down and read certainly all of your major Mexican newspapers on your computer screen if you prefer. You don't have to buy them, you don't have to subscribe, you can have access to the on-line on your

computer screen. Although I think you might almost go blind reading these little screens! For example, the Washington *Post, New York* Times, all of them are immediately on-line. In fact, in Poland, we were getting the Washington *Post* on-line, on screen, before it was being delivered to people's offices and doors in Washington D.C. We were six hours or so ahead of them because of the time difference, so we were getting the Washington *Post* before the people in Washington. It's instantly fed into a certain system, and of course, the Internet, whether you like it or not, is nearly all in English, for the whole world. However, the Chung Mai did have a half-screen in Thai script and half a screen in English, bilingual.

MJ: I'd like to ask you a hard question: There's word going around, on the grapevine of classroom teachers, that the "whole language" approach is going out of fashion in Europe, whereas it's just becoming big here. A related issue is that English is a *foreign* language here, not a first language, so the language produced by the students themselves is often less rich, more teacher-controlled, teacher-modeled.

Jenson: That's always been a basic concern, that whole language was developed in a native language context, a native language setting. So efforts or attempts to transfer the whole language approach to a foreign language setting have been problematical and have been controversial because of some of the things you mentioned. But I think nearly everything you read about whole language in English as a second or foreign language still confirms that idea, that really whole language is for a second language setting, like people living in America, people moving to Australia, learning English in an English environment. And if you want to adopt whole language ideas and methodologies in a foreign setting like in Mexico, we certainly have to adapt and adopt within the methodology. And my personal opinion about the whole language concept is that indeed, it's very sound in its theory, and in its foundations, that language is not just grammar exercises, not just repetition and drills, but it is something to be *used,* and used for communication. So I think that's what we should be emphasizing in Mexico, not English as a whole language per se, but very specifically English for communication in Mexico. In fact I've been surprised at how much structural approach and audio-lingual approach still *survives* in various pockets of the world and in Mexico. So if we can emphasize the idea of using authentic texts, using realia, using real materials, that's at least a move away from the very formal, stilted, stylized what we call a structural approach, and even grammar-translation approach.

I'm not really aware too much of what Europe is doing *beyond* the whole language approach. But even in a setting like Europe, where English is not a *native* language for most people, English is so pervasive and so very very much *the* language of international communication, the lengua franca of Europe, that their whole setting of teaching English in France, or teaching English in Poland, is already very different than teaching English in Mexico. Because I think Mexico is just sort of coming to the point to realize and admit that English is *the* international language. And they have to learn English. Whereas, Europe realized decades ago that English is the international language, and they have realistic uses for English in their setting; the French are talking to the Dutch, the Dutch are talking to the Poles, it's just automatic to use English. And that may be coming here, because Mexicans probably realize Americans are such poor foreign language learners, or so (what's a good word?) stubborn, they just don't learn foreign languages, that they should learn English not just to communicate with the *gringos* but to communicate with the rest of the world. I'm not real sure of what Europe is going to beyond the whole language, but it's also like a TESOL matter, talking about "The communicative method is out," "We've gone beyond the communicative method," but nobody's really going back to grammar-translation, nobody's going back to structural drills, so I'm not quite sure what they're going beyond and going to. That would be my reaction.

But I do think and I do hope I can keep working with Mexican teachers of English, and emphasizing the fact that *any* language is about communication, and we as teachers have to make sure that our students communicate with this language rather than just do exercises, structural drills, and sort of the "standard" classroom activities.

Book Reviews

Focus on Grammar. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994-1995. (Student's Books, Teacher's Manuals and Cassettes) [1]

Reviewed by JoAnn Miller, Universidad del Valle de México [2]

As the subtitle for each title in this series states (*A...Course for Reference and Practice)*, Focus on Grammar, was written both as a course textbook and as a reference book. This four-level series (Basic, Intermediate, High Intermediate and Advanced) concentrates on grammar, but also includes four-skills and communicative practices. They are supplemented by workbooks, cassettes and teacher's manuals. Software is also available, but was not examined for this review.

The major grammar structures which are presented and practiced at each level are as follows:

Basic	Intermediate	High Intermediate	Advanced
Be	Verb Tense Review	Verb Review	Verb Review
Imperative	Present Perfect	Passive	Passive
Present and Past Progressive	Adjectives and Adverbs	Gerunds and Infinitives	Adverb, Adjective, and Noun Clauses
Simple Present and Simple Past	Gerunds and Infinitives	Indirect Speech	Unreal Conditional
Future	Articles	Conditionals	Modals
Comparatives and Superlatives	Modals	Adjective Clauses	Adverbials and Discourse Connectors
Modals		Modals	

In general, each unit includes a presentation of the relevant structure (usually a dialogue, which is also recorded on the accompanying cassette, or at higher levels, a reading) often followed by comprehension questions and a list of pertinent vocabulary. Then the target grammar structures are explained and practice is provided. Each grammar section begins with a

1 See *References* at the end of the article for complete bibliographic references for the Student's Books.

2 The reviewer would love to hear from readers. You can also contribute reviews through the following means or by sending them to the MEXTESOL office. Fax: (525) 550-9622. e-mail: mextslj@servidor.unam.mx.

brief note which explains the grammar through the use of frames and supplemented by various examples. This is followed by focused practice which leads the student through various types of exercises, from simple recognition practices (often using the cassette) in which the student listens to or looks for the structure being taught in some relevant context, to practices in which the student begins distinguishing when to use the structure and when not to and finally relating the structure to similar grammar points which were studied previously (For example, in the section teaching the past tense of BE in the Basic book, students first listen to and read a dialogue and then write the six sentences from the dialogue which include *was, were* and *weren't;* then they do two *fill-in-the*-blank exercises in which they have to choose between the different forms of BE in the present and past tense, Basic: 241-242). After students have practiced with focused exercises they are ready for communicative exercises, which are usually set up for pair or group work. Many of these exercises are open-ended, allowing the students to give their own opinions using the recently learned structure. (For example, *Ask your partner: When you were a child, were you ____? Use the words in the box.*) There are also often writing practices related to the grammar point being practiced. The Advanced level text also includes TOEFL-like exercises, such as error-identification.

Each text also includes several interesting and useful appendices which are related to the cultural items, vocabulary and grammatical structures presented in the book, i. e., maps, numbers, lists of vocabulary such as body parts, US and Canadian Holidays, spelling, pronunciation and punctuation rules, summaries relating to the formation and use of the verb tenses presented in the text along with a lists of common irregular verbs.

The workbooks include many completion-type exercises, as well as more productive types of sentence-creation practices. Many of the exercises are communicative since they are based on realistic materials, such as job application forms, lists of facts, calendars, etc. There is an answer key at the end of each workbook, but the pages are scored for easy removal. A set of tests is also included using TOEFL-like formats. The answers to these tests are also provided so students can use them for self-evaluation.

The teacher's manuals do not include copies of pages from the Student's Books, so they are of a reasonable size to carry around. They include teaching suggestions and cultural notes, tapescripts and a series of diagnostic and final tests with answers. The tests are quite clear, but not very communicative.

These texts would be very useful for grammar-based, language courses or remedial courses. The clear presentation of the structures and the possibility for oral and written communicative practice would permit it to be used quite easily as a class text. However, perhaps, one of the strong points of these books is their utility to the teacher as resources for those times when the course book being used doesn't include all of the exercises the students need. There are a large number of *Fill-in-the-blank* type practices which are either directed at one structure (*present progressive*) or at contrasting related structures (*present progressive vs. simple present*) that can be assigned to individual students needing remedial practice. For this reason, it would be quite useful to have class sets of these books available for supplementary practice in and out of class. They also would be a welcome addition to any school library.

References

Student's Books:

Focus on Grammar: A Basic Course for Reference and Practice. by Irene Schoenberg.

Focus on Grammar: An Intermediate Course for Reference and Practice. by Marjorie Fuchs, Miriam Westheimer and Margaret Bonner.

Focus on Grammar: A High-Intermediate Course for Reference and Practice. Volumes A and B. by Marjorie Fuchs and Margaret Bonner.

Focus on Grammar: An Advanced Course for Reference and Practice. Volumes A and B. by Jay Maurer.

SHORT CUTS [3]

Joy M. Reid, ed. Learning Styles in the ESL / EFL Classroom. Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1995. 264 pp.

Reviewed by JoAnn Miller, Universidad del Valle de México

This is apparently the first book which is dedicated entirely to learning styles. As defined in the book, a learning style

> refers to an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills. (p. x)

In general, learning styles are divided into, among others, cognitive learning styles (such as field-independent vs. field-dependent, analytic vs. global learning, reflective vs. impulsive) and sensory learning styles based on the sense that the student prefers to use in class and when practicing alone (i.e., auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic styles). Some of the main points made by the book are that every person (student or teacher) has a learning styles and that even though styles are often described as opposites, they really exist on a continuum, few people are ever completely field-independent or entirely auditory. It is also important to remember that no one style is better than others and that students (and teachers) should be encouraged to recognize their learning styles and how to use them efficiently.

The book is designed not only to provide teachers with insights into learning styles, but also to give them instruments that can be used with their students to help them identify their learning styles and learn how to best take advantage of them in class and at studying home.

The book is a compilation of relevant articles which were written by various experts in the field. These chapters are separated into four sections.. The first section of the book (*Learning Styles: Issues and Answers)* includes chapters by Gayle L. Nelson, Patricia A. Eliason and Rebecca L. Oxford related to cultural and gender differences and their possible effect on learning styles. Section Two (*Learning Styles, Curriculum Development, and Classroom Activities*) has seven chapters relating to less theoretical problems;

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3 **cut** (kut)....*n*....7. a short passage. (*The Pocket Webster School & Office Dictionary*, 1990.)

learning styles are examined in the classroom. For example, Chapter 5 by Sharron Bassano and Mary Ann Christison presents a technique for using student-created visuals to promote adult ESL language development and Chapter 8 by the same authors promotes the use of poetry to expand students learning styles. The third section (*Learning Styles Research and Classroom Implications*) is made up of four chapters which examine the relationship of learning styles to elementary school ESL, ITA (international teaching assistant) training, composition and field dependence / field independence in the L2 classroom. The final section (*Overview of Learning Styles in the ESL / EFL Classroom*) consists of only one chapter written by Kate Kinsella ("Understanding and Empowering Diverse Learners in the ESL classroom).

There are also three wonderful Appendices which include some instruments that can be used to determine learning styles. Appendix A includes five different surveys devised to determine normed learning styles (including the editor's Perceptual learning Style Preference survey (PLSP) and Rebecca L. Oxford's Style Analysis Survey (SAS). Appendix B has two informal surveys / materials and Appendix C includes seven of Kate Kinsella's learning style materials. After the Appendices there is a amazingly complete 17-page bibliography related to learning styles.

This book, although the first in the field, is quite complete and is a good beginning for teachers, student-teachers or researchers who are interested in becoming involved in the field. It is also interesting to take the tests in the Appendices to discover what your learning and teaching styles are.

Boone Brinson and Richard Romo. Visual Delights: How to Make and Use Visual Delights in the English Class. Mexico, Delti, 1993.

Reviewed by Nanette DePaoli, Universidad La Salle.

This book first appeared in print in 1980. It was the brain child of two fellow English teachers (Richard Romo and Boone Brinson) who decided to put down in book form what they had successfully demonstrated in numerous seminars in Mexico and the U.S. In 1993 it was given a new format and put back on the market. The question, of course, is how well does the book hold up 15 years later. The answer is... pretty well!

The new edition is a little more polished than the original, but most of the artist's original sketches have been copied, so that the flavor remains the same. 15 years ago visual aids were not so widely used nor readily available and the purpose of the book was to fill that void. Today many more teachers are aware of and have access to more professional visuals than when the book was originally printed. However, for the beginning teacher and especially the public school teacher who is struggling to find an inexpensive, but interesting way to supplement the curriculum, this book can still offer a no-frills, basic approach to making and using visual aids in the classroom.

The book includes twenty different visual aids. Each unit begins with a drawing of the visual followed by simple, step-by-step directions on how to make the visual. The next part of the unit deals with suggestions on how to use the visual. The authors provide vocabulary, grammar structures and situations, as well as different types of activities which would be suitable for the visual. Many of the visuals are aimed at basic level classes, but some of the more open-ended visuals, such as The Dragon and the Princess, Faces, Story and Road Ran could be used for any level and any age group, from children to adults.

In the preface to the book, the authors assure the reader that "anyone can" follow their instructions and make workable visuals. So, if you are just starting out in your teaching career or if putting variety in your classes has become too costly, then getting back to basics might be just what you need.

Teaching Tips: Phrasal Verbs: For Beginners Only

T. NEVIN SIDERS V.

There is a popular myth among English teachers here in Mexico that phrasal verbs are very complicated and, therefore, are only for advanced students of the language. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, they are our simplest verb forms--at least from our point of view! Moreover, children rarely use any other verb form until they reach the second or third year of elementary school.

Phrasal verbs are an intimate, solid foundation of all Germanic languages, but perhaps even more so in English than in the others. One cannot understand English without them, and moreover, will find much of the rest of the language confusing until these constructions are assimilated.

We, as teachers, therefore do a great academic disservice to any student we deprive of this knowledge--and doubly so because there are easy and excellent ways to present phrasal verbs beginning the very first week of classes!

After the students have two or three hours of classes and are beginning to grasp the verb be well, simply lift a pen, pencil or book and ask "What am I doing?" (no, they may well not understand the word doing now, but they will in just a moment because you are going to repeat it so often). Count on the few who do know the word doing to answer in their fashion.

Then say "I am picking up the book." Model again with two or three other objects - perform the action very, very slowly while the students repeat each time "You are / The teacher is picking up the book." Then, naturally, the students perform it too. So far, this has taken only a minute or two.

Next, the students tell each other what things to lift: "Laura, pick up the book." The student performs the action and states what he/she is doing, and others restate (Insist they move slowly while others are restating the action). Again, this is a practice activity that takes only two to five minutes.

Constantly interrupt to ask third students "What is he saying?" The answer is with the same form, "He is saying she is taking the pen off the brown chair." Then a fourth student states what the third said, "He is saying he is saying she is taking..."; and even a chain with fifth and sixth students is possible.

Then, the students tell the teacher or other students (with their backs turned, behind a curtain or outside the door) what is happening: "Laura is picking up the piece of paper." "She is putting the eraser on the table." "What is she picking up?" "Where is she putting the chair?"

This third phase, where the students cannot see each other, would also be ideal as a communicative "test" for the first two weeks. They can have a lot of fun placing chairs on tables and hiding cassettes under handbags.

And then, repeat and extend the concept over the course of two or three classes by presenting several other phrasal verbs. Use dynamic words that can be immediately performed: pick up, put down, stand up, sit down, put on, take off, put into, take out of, go into, come out of, turn around.

What Have They Learned?

Now, let us analyze what has been taught. The students have practiced several crucial structures in a very fun lesson. Grammatically, they have learned to name things and actions, they have practiced the present progressive and they have learned an imperative, half of the "wh- question words" and one form of reported speech. Affectively, and in relation to learning styles, they have learned kinesthetically. Conveniently, this list has mostly opposites, so they can do and undo things repeatedly.

Your students have strongly reinforced the phrasal verbs, laying a basis for understanding and communicating in English in a way and length of time that is absolutely impossible in any textbook I have seen to date. (They all spend many chapters simply naming objects and abstractly describing the things they like.)

Later on when you get to a presentation on prepositions, whether in later chapters of this first course or to Proficiency-level students, the students will now have a very strong background upon which to judge for themselves the basic meanings of several prepositions, and can also grasp the concept of the way English (and Germanic languages in general) uses

propositions to distinguish motion and location (for example, on / in, onto / into), and therefore be much better equipped to understand an explicit comparison-and-contrast with the preposition system of Romance languages, which tends to emphasize the contrast between origin and means or method (*por / para, de / por*).

The way to present this latter point with your students is not to open an esoteric lecture on linguistics (as in my last paragraph), but to simply ask them, children or adults, "How many verbs do you know with up?" They will hopefully answer with pick up, stand up, etc. List them on the chalkboard. The teacher can then follow up with any other preposition necessary, and the students will quite naturally begin to notice contrasts with their mother tongue.

There is one aspect to this exercise that is quite different from the presentations in textbooks that I know of: textbooks present phrasal verbs by asking the students to make lists based on the verbs they know, not the prepositions. The task becomes simply listing unrelated vocabulary items. There is little obvious relationship between drive up and drive through, because they can both mean to arrive at and also by means of. Yet if the student's list includes drive up, get up, come up, go up, continue up, push up, then this double meaning becomes obvious (or at least more obvious), and the exercise has some cohesion, it is linked through meaning.

There are certain activities that advanced students can do to help understand these constructions, also. First, I feel that they should perform some of them, just like the beginners do, but more briefly, of course. Then the teacher should ask, "who," "what" and "where" those actions happen. The students should make lists based on the preposition, as explained above, and then think of their synonyms. Finally, they can legitimately create their own new phrasal verbs because this is one of the principal ways that new words are invented in English, a preposition is attached to a verb.

Phrasal Verbs Are Not Idioms

The final point to make about phrasal verbs before signing off is that they are very, very different from idioms. Most of the exercise books that I have observed do not distinguish between these two items, in fact they are placed side-by-side as if they were the same species.

An idiom is a group of words that has one, unique, special meaning, a meaning which is quite distinct from the literal meaning of the individual words, and which was created at some point in the history of that culture and society (and usually they are humorous). A phrasal verb can have many meanings (we have seen some examples), but all of these meanings will be derived from the actual meanings of the constituent words.

Grammatically speaking, an idiom is a set phrase similar to a noun, in so far as it is almost impossible to break, modify or conjugate. (An idiom may well contain a verb, but it is a fixed phrase.) A phrasal verb can perform all of these grammatical functions and more. In particular, most can be transformed into nouns without changing their form. It is possible to distinguish authentic phrasal verbs from other two- three- and four-word verbs by two special characteristics: the intonation or stress falls on the preposition, and they typically have a synonym that is just one word (*pick up / lift; go out of / leave*).

By way of credits, the ideas presented here are my eclectic conclusions based on teacher training at Ohio State University, orientation courses at Mexico City language institutes, and MEXTESOL workshops given by John Shea. Although my own pedagogical principles are founded on cognitive and developmental psychologies, the techniques themselves are not very modern. More than anything else, these are creative applications of the "direct" and audio-lingual methodologies. Yes, that's right: audio-lingual! What is overlooked these days is that "listen and repeat" is a perfectly logical and appropriate strategy for beginners. It works.

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