

# **MEXTESOL JOURNAL**

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## From the Editor

This is a special issue for us. Two of our articles are based on talks given at the XIX National MEXTESOL Convention, which took place in Acapulco, Guerrero in October, 1992. The convention was a great success with over 800 participants from Mexico, the United States and Latin America. Our next annual convention will be at another Mexican beach resort, Puerto Vallarta, in October of this year. We hope these articles will help convince you to come join us. A *Call for Abstracts* form is included at the back of the Journal to make it easier for you to participate.

This issue's first article is based on Peter Hubbard's plenary address, *Distant Neighbours: The relationship of research to teaching*. This informative article discusses the relation of research to teaching and then defines and criticizes various different forms of language teaching/learning research, such as: action research, traditional research and interpretive research. Even if you are not involved in research now, this clear presentation is worth reading.

Our second article, *Automated Language Teaching: A survey of students' and teachers' views* by Elvia Leonor Díaz, of the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, first reviews the history of the language laboratory in foreign language teaching and then reports on the new generation of computerized language laboratories and their effect of both students and teachers.

Next, Christopher Hall's talk *Who's Afraid of Noam Chomsky? A tutorial review for teachers of English* has been adapted for publication. This article helps the non-expert understand the ideas of the famous linguist Noam Chomsky. It first reports on Chomsky's views as to the nature of language and then discusses first language acquisition and Chomsky's theory of syntax. Finally, these ideas are related to our principal interests as English teachers.

We also have an article on the use of video in the classroom: *Procedures for Successful Video-Viewing in the Classroom*, by María Del Carmen Contijoch E. of the Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. This article gives useful ideas on how video can be included in the classroom.

In our *Book Review Section*, Patrick Smith of the Universidad de las Américas-Puebla offers us a very interesting book review of a book that, at first glance, has nothing to do with second language teaching/learning, but in reality provides insight into the question: *What English do we teach?* Our *Teaching Tips Section* includes some hints on incorporating popular songs into the curriculum.

We are still waiting to hear from you. Write us your opinions about the MEXTESOL Journal and its articles. Letters of general interest will be published in the Journal.

The Editor

### Editorial Policy

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

**Articles:** *The Journal welcomes previously unpublished articles relevant to EFL professionals in Mexico. The Editors encourage submissions in Spanish or English.*

**Reviews:** *Unsolicited book reviews are also published in either English or Spanish.*

**Deadlines:**

<i>Spring, 1993:</i>	<i>March 15, 1993</i>
<i>Summer, 1993:</i>	<i>May 15, 1993</i>
<i>Convention Issue:</i>	<i>August 15, 1993</i>
<i>Winter, 1994</i>	<i>November 15, 199</i>

*Send three copies of each manuscript, including all appendices, tables, graphs, etc. to the following address: MEXTESOL, San Borja 726-2, Colonia del Valle, 03100 Mexico, D.F., TEL./FAX: (525) 575-5473*

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

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

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### Manuscript Guidelines:

1) Articles should be typed, double spaced and no more than twenty pages long. References should be cited in parentheses 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. The following format should be followed:

*For books:*

Jones, T. J. 1984. *How to Spell*. New York. ABC Press.

*For articles:*

Moore, Jane. 1991. "Why I like to Teach." *Teacher's Quarterly*. June, 56-64.

Perez, Beatriz, 1962. "El griego antiguo en quince días." *La revista de la universidad*, 10(2), 136-139.

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.

## **Distant Neighbours: The relationship of research to teaching**

**PETER HUBBARD, UNIVERSIDAD DE GUADALAJARA<sup>1</sup>**

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The relationship between researchers and teachers has never been a good one. The following two quotes will illustrate this:

For most of its history, language teaching has been at the mercy of pronouncements from self-styled experts. It has suffered from the misapplication and misinterpretation of theory and research from other disciplines. In recent years, these other disciplines have included theoretical linguistics and its various applied offspring, behavioural, cognitive and humanistic psychology, first- and second- language acquisition, sociology, information theory, systems theory and educational technology. It has also been at the mercy of numerous applied linguists who have foisted their frequently untested or inadequately tested theories on the profession. This has led to a number of undesirable outcomes. Instead of a cautious programme of research and development, the profession has been characterized by a series of fads and fashions. Armchair speculation has spawned competing untested (and sometimes untestable) assertions about the nature of second-language development inside and outside the classroom. (Nunan 1988: 174)

Priorities for research too often reflect the interests of academic researchers or central administrators not school people... The tacit knowledge of teachers is devalued. Many of the findings are recorded in a form and style which is accessible to the trained researcher but fails to communicate to teachers, school administrators, parents or advisory people. The primary audience for research has been the research community not the practising teacher. Not surprisingly, we the practising teachers have come to distrust and reject theoretical research and the researcher who takes but does not give. (Beasley and Riordan 1981: 88)

So, teachers regard researchers as people who speculate about teaching, while they actually get on with the job. They regard them as being out of touch with actual problems in the classroom. They see them as self-interested individuals who take, but do not give; who disregard what the teacher has to say; and who offer half-baked theories that do not either explain what goes on in class or provide solutions for everyday problems.

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<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a plenary given at the MEXTESOL Convention, Acapulco, Guerrero, October, 1992. The author's correspondence address is: Escuela Superior de Lenguas Modernas, Universidad de Guadalajara, Apartado Postal 2-416, 44280 Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. FAX: (3) 653-5166.

Researchers, on the other hand, regard teachers as less well qualified academically and incapable of recording or analysing their day-to-day work with adequate rigor; they believe that they have not read enough of the recent works and articles related to language teaching in the international forum of academic discussion to be capable of joining into that discussion with a suitably informed opinion.

It is not surprising, in this atmosphere of distrust, that communication between the two communities is poor; and that educational research and teaching remain, as the title of this article suggests, distant neighbours (a phrase I have borrowed from the book by Alan Riding about the relationship between the United States and Mexico).

**The relationship of research to teaching.** A simplistic view would have it that research is the creation of knowledge, while teaching is the transmission of knowledge. This is an unsatisfactory statement from many points of view and one that could mislead educational planners into committing serious errors.

The fallacy lies in the conception of knowledge and the nature of knowledge.

Knowledge is not, as many people might think, a coherent system of ideas, universally available and continually updated by frequent additions from researchers all over the world, working in harmony, in an eternal quest for truth. For a start, ideas or scientific theories are not very often congruent: Indeed, more often they are rivals. That is the very heart of scientific debate. Scientists challenge each other's theories or cast doubt on them or refute them altogether. In order to do this, they adduce evidence, often gathered by themselves, to prove their cases. This amassing of contradictory theories and evidence is standard scientific practice. What confronts the novice breaking into a particular field for the first time is not order, harmony and unassailable truth, but chaos, discord and considerable doubt.

Nor is knowledge universally available. It is often restricted to small groups of researchers or to isolated geographical areas, even in this era of modern communications. Scientific research is often conducted with considerable secrecy until the moment arrives when the researcher believes that it is expedient to publish. A great deal of private correspondence between colleagues takes place several years before publication. Rival groups and individuals struggle for prestige; institutions exert pressure to conform to certain



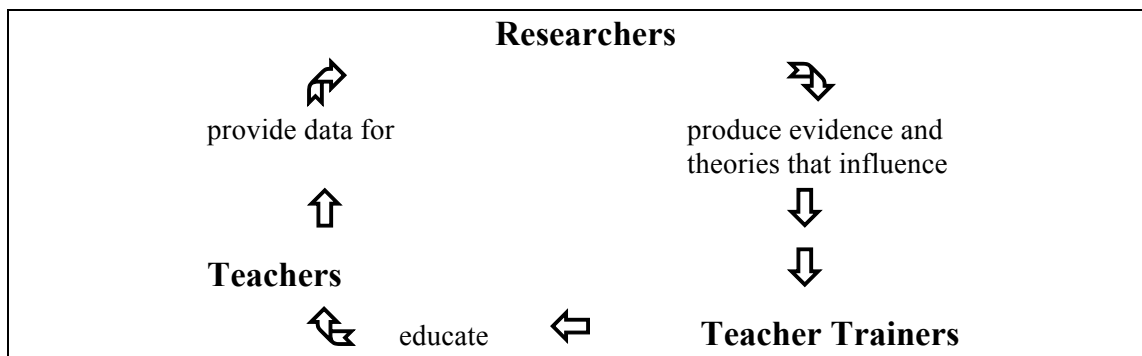
schools of thought; and governments and business interests all too frequently dictate priorities by channelling budgets into areas that interest them most.

To make the situation even more unsatisfactory, the modern age of scientific enquiry has injected a further element into the scenario: that of indecent haste. Scientists are no longer like medieval monks, closeted with their manuscripts for a lifetime, with endless time to read, reflect and philosophise. They are under constant pressure to publish in order to survive. Jobs may depend on it. Doctoral theses have to conform to time limits. Bodies that award grants or scholarships, before handing over the funds, demand in advance an established programme with deadlines and projected results. We live in a consumer society that is run by economists who think of science and education as investments and products.

At the frontiers between accepted scientific truth and the unknown, therefore, we find a mass of conflicting theories and evidence. There is seldom a solid construct that can be immediately applied with confidence to modern practice. Knowledge is not simply the total accumulation of research findings; it is far more diffuse and self-contradictory. Knowledge, at least in the field of education, is based on the experience of practitioners, unsystematically analysed and partially shared between colleagues. Superimposed on this base, and partly parasitic of it, we can detect the influence of scientific research and theory. And the picture is further obscured by commercial interests, primarily that of publishers, who force half-developed theories upon practitioners as if they were established truth. Practicing teachers can therefore intuit and believe and judge to the best of their ability, but they cannot know.

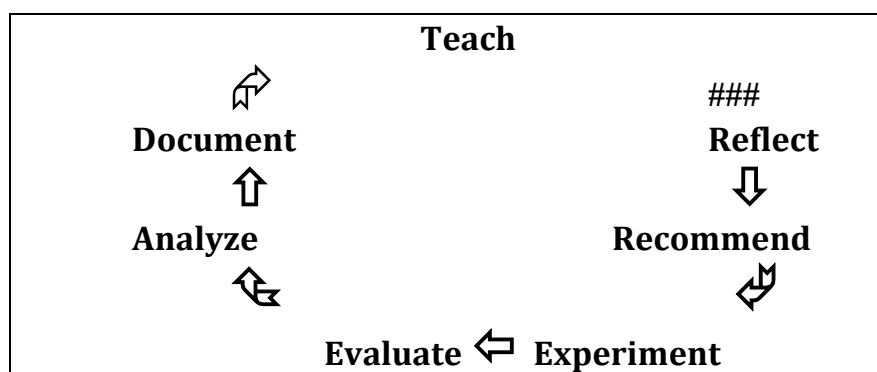
If research is then not truly the creation of knowledge, how can teaching be the transmission of it? Teachers cannot transmit facts other than the most simple and trivial ones, available at the level of common sense experience and normal human logic. Teaching is better viewed as instruction in procedures of enquiry and analysis, and as conscienceness-raising, rather than the transmission of already analysed and packaged knowledge.

Furthermore, in our field, we have a triangle of processes: research and theory; teacher education; and teaching. The following diagram illustrates this:



Teacher educators interpret the work of researchers and theorists; teachers, in turn, provide the raw material for further research. However, in the very nature of the academic establishment, there is a hierarchy involved: Successful teachers aspire to become teacher educators; and teacher educators often eventually become researchers. However, it is seldom that researchers become teachers. The process is one way. It is the unsatisfactory nature of this relationship that has led many in the field to advocate action research as the way to make suitable progress and to even out the power relationships in the system.

**Action research.** Action research is simply research performed by the teacher on his own teaching. But it is much more than this. Most teachers are informal researchers anyway: That is, they continually experiment with their own approaches to teaching and try to find more successful ways of getting their students to learn.



Action research is both a policy and a philosophy.

Philosophically, those who promote action research place a high value on the teacher's intimate knowledge of teaching and on her or his intuition and professional judgment. It is the teacher, they argue, who is the closest to the process and can speak with most authority. The teacher has the best motives to find out

about teaching, because she or he wants to do it better. And they moreover believe that the teacher, although perhaps not as erudite or as adept in engaging in academic debate, is perfectly capable of carrying out effective research and documenting this so as to make a significant contribution to the field. The philosophy of those who favour action research therefore has a tendency to demystify traditional academic processes and revalue the capabilities of the practising teacher.

As a policy, the promotion of action research sets out to organise practicing teachers into networks of collaboration. It is not enough for teachers to carry out research into their own classes; they must also share this knowledge with their colleagues and build on the collective knowledge that results. Action research properly conceived is systematic and purposeful (adjectives that cannot always be so readily applied to traditional academic research, unfortunately). As a result of this policy, action researchers will enrich themselves professionally, form closer bonds with their colleagues and make a contribution to the field that educational planners can only ignore at their own risk.

It will be clear from the above remarks that I am personally in favour of action research. It is more than a series of recommended procedures: It is essentially a political and professional movement. It breaks with the tradition of an academic hierarchy that ensures the maintenance and control of professional dogmas by the few most powerful voices in the establishment, however bitterly they may squabble among themselves in their struggle to climb higher up the pyramid. It rejects the idea that "experts" should dictate to the "non-experts"; and that teachers, classified as a mere work-force, should have no voice in the development of their own profession. Academic debate should not be so esoteric as to require interpretation by the few for the many. Teachers are the profession; and researchers can in many cases quite rightly be seen as parasites of this profession.

However, I am not so starry-eyed to believe that it would be easy to promote action research in Mexico at this moment in its history. Even in developed countries, action research movements have met with a frosty reception both from professional teachers and from educational authorities. There are at least two reasons for this: Action research denies that professional training is complete upon graduation and it challenges the authority of those above. It upsets the bureaucratic conception of educational planning to entertain the thought that what the experts ordain is not perfectly feasible and destined to succeed. It shatters the neat system of academic degrees and qualifications by asserting that teachers are also learners and that theorists, in turn, can learn from teachers. Yet, the absurd thing is that these assertions are so obviously true. Nobody but an

imbecile would suggest that one cannot learn outside of school. No plans in the world have ever proved to be perfect. Theorists about teaching cannot cut the teachers' knowledge out of their work altogether without a total loss of credibility. Be this as it may, action research movements in developed countries have in the past been effectively isolated by the authorities and their work shelved indefinitely.

However, there are other more practical reasons why action research is difficult to establish, even within a small teaching institution. It costs a lot of staff time. It would take years to produce tangible results in the form of a systematic curriculum. It requires organizers from outside that would need authorization, as well as financial and administrative support. Such organizers, being outsiders, would initially lack credibility in the eyes of the teachers. Finally, it is almost inevitable that the recommended curriculum, procedures or approaches that the action researchers would come up with would run into numerous objections on the grounds of practicality, in terms of institutional time, resources or control.

I am not saying that action research is doomed from the start: It has already had a significant impact in a number of countries--in Australia, for example. It remains an ideal and symbolises a philosophy with which I identify, but it is fraught with practical difficulties. Introducing it to Mexico will be problematic. And it may be some time before it can become accepted where it is most needed -- in public education, especially.

At the same time, in spite of my disparaging remarks about researchers above, I do not wish to dismiss traditional academic research and debate as either misguided or invalid. On the contrary, it is here that hope for professional development in the near future lies. I do, however, have some reservations about the structure of the academic establishment and the predominant research paradigms in our field.

Let me summarise my position up to this point:

- (1) The relationship between research and teaching is an uncomfortable one, poisoned by mutual mistrust.
- (2) The conception of research as the creation of knowledge and of teaching as the transmission of it is so misguided to be virtually dangerous.

(3) The academic establishment casts teachers in the role of a work-force that has to do the bidding of its research/theory managers; a relationship complicated by the presence of commercial interests.

(4) Action research offers us a possible way out of this predicament.

(5) However, action research involves many practical and other difficulties.

(6) In the short term, therefore, traditional research continues to offer the best hope for professional development, but a change of approach is needed.

We will now consider the case of traditional research.

**Traditional research.** In the social sciences, within which we can include educational science, there is a basic dichotomy between two different kinds of research tradition. This dichotomy can be illustrated by the series of different labels that writers have attached to it. The following list of adjectives will make my point clear:

<u>Dichotomy of research types</u>		
	Quantitative	Qualitative
*	Hard	Soft
	Objective	Subjective
*	Rigorous	Speculative
	Observer-oriented	Interpretative
	Experimental	Heuristic

I have placed asterisks against those words that are heavily loaded with value judgments. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, most of these adjectives contain biases that are potentially misleading. Much qualitative research, for example, contains elements of measurement. How objective is "objective" research really? Does it not contain subjective observer bias? We know, as teachers that have set "objective" tests, that, while the grading may be objective, the setting is often subjective.

Some people would like to add the pair: Deductive vs. Inductive. However, I would argue that all scientific enquiry is both inductive and deductive. We induce facts about our field of observation that lead us to form hypotheses and we then test these hypotheses by observing specific events. The process could be

considered to be a continuous dialogue between inductive and deductive reasoning.

The last two pairs are perhaps the most interesting. Observer-oriented research relies on the prior reasoning of the observer to organize the research in terms of preset concepts. Interpretive research, in contrast, is concerned with the interpretations that subjects make of their own and others' actions. These are radically different research positions. Similarly, experimental research attempts to manipulate live human interaction by controlling certain conditions while measuring others. Heuristic research, on the other hand, sets out simply to find out what is going on, without preconceptions about what might happen.

To distinguish the two different research paradigms, I will employ the terms, positivist and interpretative. Positivist, as a term, covers the column of adjectives on the left of my diagram; interpretive covers the column on the right.

The mid-nineteenth century social scientist, Auguste Comte, founded the positivist movement by proposing a science of human behaviour that investigated causal relations between events in the same way that Newtonian physics set out to explain the relations between physical phenomena. Human phenomena are to be subjected to logical and mathematical reasoning so as to arrive at an explanatory theory. The essence of this movement is isolating objectively observed events, considered to be scientifically acceptable facts, and constructing a theory that can account for the causal relations between them. The driving power behind this movement in the social sciences is the conviction that objective observation and measurement of human events can be processed by pure reason (logic and mathematics) to result in theoretical models that are scientifically rigorous (i.e., "respectable") and can be put to the test by reliable experimental means. In other words you observe your human subjects and record, over a period of time, a series of objectively verifiable events; these are then submitted to logical analysis and produce a theory of causal relations; the theory is in turn put to the test by controlled experiments. The results of experimentation lead to confirmation or modification of the theories in question.

As language teachers, we are familiar with the results of this process in the form of behaviourist theories of learning and teaching.

The present disenchantment with behaviourist models of language learning lies mainly in the fact that they deal with surface phenomena rather than underlying structures. Whether you are a Chomskyan rationalist or a humanistic psychologist, you will disagree with the failure of the behaviourist approach to

get to grips with human mental processes. Probably most of us would agree that it make no sense to disregard the fact that humans have the free will to make choices. This goes against the mechanistic determinism implied by positivist science. In essence, human beings are different from machines. Secondly, motivation cannot solely be explained in terms of reward and punishment. Humans are far more complex and have been subjected to a process of integration into social groups--something that we call socialization. We therefore have to take into consideration the complex dynamics of interaction at the level of the family, the school and society at large.

Be this as it may, positivist models of research have dominated the social sciences until relatively recent times. And they are still prevalent in many schools of educational science in Mexico, the United States and Europe.

In the case of educational research, they are characterized by the division of human events in the classroom into predetermined categories. These are then subjected to observation and measurement. That is, the researcher counts them to see how often they occur. The numerical results are then subjected to statistical analysis and correlations are produced to posit causal relation between events.

To see this in action, let us look at a hypothetical example of "successful" positivist research.

**An example of "successful" positivist research.** Imagine that a researcher has, on the basis of prior observation, established a number of categories of different classroom events. In other words, he/she has made up a list of all the different things that can happen in a classroom. Perhaps the best known advocate of this approach was Flanders working in the 60's and 70's, though it was used by others before him and certainly has been used since.

Let us imagine that this researcher identifies a strong positive correlation between a certain type of classroom event, having students work in cooperative groups, for example, and end-of-semester exam results. The researcher has found that when the teacher conducts a lot of cooperative group work the students do better in the exams. He/She is therefore tempted to speculate that group work causes good exam results.

Let us further imagine that the educational authorities take up this research result and decide to apply it to teaching policy. Teachers in their schools are recommended to use more cooperative group work in class. In due course, it is found that the exam results as a whole do in fact seem to improve. It is now considered to be proved beyond doubt that the theory is correct.

**Criticism of this approach.** What can we conclude from this study?

Well, let us assume that the research was well conducted and duplicated by several people in different circumstances so that there genuinely does seem to be an irrefutable correlation between these two phenomena. The only thing that we know from this research (and I use the word *know* advisedly) is that there is a correlation. We know absolutely nothing about the causal links in the chain from one phenomenon to the other.

I heard recently on the radio that researchers have demonstrated convincingly that people of higher income groups have colds more often than those of lower income groups. At first sight, this is interesting, but on reflection, the finding is frustrating to anyone of intelligence, because we still have no knowledge of the most interesting part of all. Why does this happen? Exactly the same frustration results from positivist research of the kind I have exemplified above. What we want to know is why and how these two phenomena are related. And as to this we can only speculate.

It is perfectly true that not all positivist educational research is of this type. However, if you consider some of the psycholinguistic research being conducted currently, arguably of great significance to our field, you will recognise that it contains similar features. Elicitation techniques and measurement of mean utterance length share positivist tendencies. The emphasis is on recording and measuring observable events.

It seems to me that this type of research is misconceived. In the interests of "scientific rigour", we remain blind to the most interesting part of the whole process. The problem is that we are what we are most interested in. Unfortunately, in order to study these processes, we must abandon our strict adherence to studying what can be observed and measure. Does this mean that interpretive research methods are "unscientific"? I think not. And in the final part of this paper, I will attempt to show that this is the case.

**Interpretive research.** Th two most familiar methods used for interpretive research are participant observation and case studies.

A large number of ethnographic studies of school or classrooms have been carried out. These studies, based on methods that have been given scientific respectability by social anthropologists and sociologists, beginning perhaps with Malinowski, are carried out by a researcher as participant-observer of the educational setting. That is to say, the researcher participates in the life of the school or classroom, in some cases as a normal teacher; but at the same time observes what



is happening around him or her in considerable detail. Such a researcher keeps a journal and detailed records of everything that occurs, recording not only her/his impressions, but those of other participants. Apart from routine observation of the setting, the researcher might also conduct interviews with field participants and will certainly record by means of photocopies, photographs, video or sound recording any other aspects of the situation that are relevant to the study. What results from this type of research is an immensely rich collection of data records for subsequent or concurrent analysis. However, mere data collection is not research: The researcher also has to interpret the data and discover regularities or structures within it.

Case study research has similar goals but is conducted with an extremely limited number of individual subjects. Case study researchers have to form a good working relationship with their subjects and facilitate a very free exchange of views. It is not unlike the relationship between a psychotherapist and patient. This type of study conducted on teachers or students can reveal a great deal about the why's and how's that positivist research cannot reach.

All interpretive research is concerned with studying events from the subjects' point of view. The researcher, as an outsider is concerned with local meanings, individual or group interpretations and what events mean to the people under study. It is not appropriate to pre-categorize events, since this is in effect prejudging what is going to happen. Such a researcher has to have a very open mind about what he/she is going to find. And I would argue that the findings are very often more surprising than those of positivist research precisely because they are not guided by preconceptions.

But surely, you will argue, this is not scientific research. Vague reports and subjective journals are no substitute for rigorously collected data, scrupulously measured and subjected to sophisticated statistical analysis. How can we interpret such findings? How can we apply them to our profession?

There is no very satisfactory reply to this type of reaction. It would be best to invite such a skeptic to read some of the work of researchers of both types and see which he/she finds most convincing. Both types of research are valid. They answer different types of questions. Some academics may be more inclined towards one type than another. It would be unfortunate, however, if the choice were made for reasons of dogmatic defense or--worse--fashionable trend. It is my belief, as an interpretive researcher, that too much educational research is locked into a positivist tradition that will deny it the answers that we need.

And in our field we are looking for answers to fairly specific questions. We urgently need results. As the quote at the beginning indicated, we are slightly frustrated by half-baked and speculative theories that fail to help us do our job better.

It is my conviction that interpretive research can bring us closer to the answers that we are seeking. And I would strongly urge those who are engaged in research or are responsible for promoting it to encourage serious consideration of alternative research paradigms.

**Conclusions.** As we approach the twenty-first century, I cannot help being disquieted by the failure of traditional academic research to throw much light on the language learning process.

Some of the most impressive and up-to-date minds in the business are now more or less conceding that there is probably no single theory that can account for the various phenomena of human language or for the process of acquiring it. There is a series of partial theories that can account reasonably satisfactorily for different aspects of language. This situation is no different from that of physics, where there is no grand unified theory to account for both quantum mechanics and the physics of large bodies. (I base this assertion on Stephen Hawking's account in his book *A brief history of time*.)

In our case, however, it seems to me that much of the failure has been caused by competition between rival disciplines, each of which claims to hold the solution to our problems.

I also believe that research has been far too cold and clinical, in the tradition of Western universities. I would like to see research get close to teaching itself. One way to do that is action research. Another way is interpretive research. Both these approaches are worth pursuing if we wish to find results that can immediately be applied to our work.

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### **Recommended Reading**

- Hammersley, M. 1986. *Controversies of classroom research*. London, Open University Press.



## **Automated Language Teaching: A survey of students' and teachers' views**

**ELVIA LEONOR DÍAZ, UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE  
ZACATECAS<sup>1</sup>**

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How have computers changed language teaching today? What effect do they have on the students? Will teachers feel they are being replaced by a computer? How do students feel about being taught by a computer? Are computers really effective in ELT?

These and many other questions arose in the minds of worried teachers who are using a computer lab to assist students in learning a language at the University of Zacatecas. This article intends to summarize students' opinions and feelings as well as those of the teachers' regarding the automatization of language teaching.

Language labs have been in vogue since the fifties and sixties with the audio-lingual method. In fact, they were over sold. Students used a cassette monitored by the teacher. Students were to repeat the pronunciation and memorize the structures in a given lesson. The tapes available were based on the course book. John Higgins (1984) says in his book *Computers and language learning*, that the tapes available at that time were generally rather unimaginative and based on sentence manipulations. The underlying learning theory was behaviorism and the underlying structural theory was structuralism. Higgins also mentions that the greatest mistake seems to have been installing the machines. Why was this a mistake? Because the labs were devices for individualization, but they were used in batches of twenty or more machines for the whole class to visit once a week to do the same thing at the same time.

As time went by, language labs developed more sophisticated technology and there were two options: The teacher could monitor up to three groups on different tapes or the students could listen to individual tapes. These tape recorders used both tracks of the tape on the same side. In other words, the students were able to record the lesson on their tapes on one track and their own voice on the other in order to compare their pronunciation. The students were then able to take

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the tape home to study. This method was still teacher-controlled, but, by grouping the students, it attempted to individualize their needs.

Then the fashion changed to self-access labs which are still widely used nowadays. These labs are designed to individualize learning. Students work by themselves rather than in groups. The students should recognize their own weaknesses and work with the specific tape that will help them improve. A tutor may be available in the lab or may recommend certain tapes to the student. Tapes to reinforce the textbooks material are usually available. Language lab hours are independent of the class time. Students sign out a tape recorder and a cassette and listen to it as many times as they consider necessary. Teachers have no control over what students listen to. The only control they have is the time students spend in the lab. Hours should be kept in an individual log and be considered for class credit. Some courses require from twenty to thirty-five hours of lab time each semester. Teachers often devise worksheets to be answered with taped material from the language lab.

Unfortunately, many investments were not fully taken advantage of. In some cases, language labs have been regarded as "white elephants." Students would bring their rock 'n' roll tapes rather than use the language tapes. Usually it was because the material was monotonous and did not appeal to the students' interests. The latest trend in language labs now is computers! It has been called CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning).

The Language Center of the University of Zacatecas has recently acquired a set of Macintosh computers especially equipped for language learning. Each computer consists of a monitor and CPU (Central Processing Unit), a keyboard, a CD ROM player, four headphones, a mouse and a compact disk drive. The compact disks available to the students are: *Pronunciation of Consonants*, *Pronunciation of Vowels*, *Entertainment*, *Sports and Leisure*, *Travel and Daily Living at Work* and *Culture and Customs*. Pronunciation is reinforced through differentiation of vowel or consonant sounds. The words are presented with illustrations. Students listen to the different sounds; then they review them. It is a behaviorist system in which the student is "rewarded" by a "That's correct" for every right answer and a "That is not correct" (not an electric shock) for every wrong answer. After each review, the computer gives the percentage (40% - Try again, 80% - Very good and 100% - Excellent!). In the pronunciation programs, the students may listen to the paired sounds at the beginning, middle or end of the word. New vocabulary is introduced using pictures. The students are also able to record their voices and compare their pronunciation immediately. They may also listen to the words in context in a dialogue form.

The more advanced programs present dialogues with animated (cartoon-like) pictures. Students are able to listen to the dialogue with or without the text. They may choose to listen to the whole dialogue or just one segment of it. They can later listen to and read a text related to the topic. This text has the key words highlighted. If the students do not know the meaning, they can click on that word and they will hear the pronunciation and see an English definition of that particular word in a hypertext. They are also able to record the text to practice pronunciation. A multiple choice quiz is given at the end of the lesson to ensure comprehension.

Students who are not familiar with computers need only learn how to use the mouse or cursor keys. However, it is recommended to teach the basics (parts of a computer, risks of improper use, how to enter and leave the program, etc.) to avoid misuse or unpleasant surprises.

A wide variety of software is available from different computer companies. These programs or applications are designed to enhance vocabulary, reading strategies, spelling, listening comprehension, etc. There are also language games available for children and for adults. Another option obtainable is the test-making programs, which help the instructor devise a test that can be answered on the computer or on a print-out. These tests can be marked and graded by the computer as well. The options for writing questions are limited to the user's creativity.

In the case of CALL the investment is an important factor to consider. Are computers really worth it? Are we going to experience the familiar problem of teachers getting more time off during class by being able to set the students on "automatic pilot" and having one more coffee break? Are teachers going to feel free to leave the students unattended because the computer is doing their work?

We must keep in mind the fact that not all language labs have been a disappointment, Higgins (1984) says:

Not all labs were so unimaginatively [designed], and they did provide teachers with experience of handling tapes well before personal tape-recorders became widespread in people's homes. Teachers experimented with songs and authentic listening tasks and so were ready for the real breakthrough in the late sixties when cassette recorders became generally available [...] The technology of the recorders no longer frightens teachers or learners, and the machines are quite properly seen as aids, not threats [...] Computers then, become aids under the control of teachers and learners; they are slaves, not masters. (p. 12)

The reason for conducting this survey was to know more about the students and teachers' anxieties concerning "dehumanized instructors." For the last twenty years we have heard of computers taking over and have worried about the possibility of their depriving human teachers of employment. In the back of their minds, teachers might feel jealousy or rejection toward a "robotization" of the classroom, in which students will be programmed rather than taught. It is not only the computer they fear, but also all the audiocassette and video programs available that claim to teach fluent English, satisfaction guaranteed! How many teachers are really able to guarantee their students' learning? Are teachers right to reject computers? "I have never heard of anyone who learned English fluently solely by using any of the courses available on the market. Desperate students buy them because they would like somebody to inject the language to them," replied one disenchanted teacher. He continued, "I agree with modernization and all of the innovations to language teaching. What I do not agree with is the misinformation students have received and how they are deceived to buy these methods as if they really could replace, not only the human teacher, but the classroom environment."

We must realize that the computer programs available are not intended to be the sole teaching element. They are used to enhance a syllabus, to make teachers' jobs easier and to strive for more effective learning.

We should not, however, disregard the fact that computers cannot be introduced as quickly as tape recorders were. Computer literacy is not a common feature of the adult Mexican student or the teacher population. Teachers and students might feel pushed into computers. Then again, the computer wizard students just might prefer, given the opportunity, to learn a language only with the aid of a computer.

This survey was conducted at the Language Center of the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas with thirty-five students. They have used the computers as supplementary material to the program for three trimesters. Anonymous questionnaires were used. Students were asked the following questions:

- Do you like to use the computers? Why?
- How have they helped you (in listening, writing, reading, speaking and thinking in English)?
- Do you think you could learn a language only by using a computer?
- Would you prefer a computer over a teacher?



The great majority of students said that they enjoyed working with the computers because it took them away from the monotony of the classroom. "I like computers because they break the monotony of the class. They are very instructive, and help you to have better spelling and also to recognize the sound of the English words." (An intermediate student). "I like them because they offer a different and fun way of learning." (A lower-intermediate student). Others felt that a computer provided them with a shelter. Although they usually work with three other classmates, they felt more at ease. "I like them because I have the chance to repeat and repeat until my pronunciation is better. If I make a mistake, I can correct myself." (An upper-intermediate student). Out of the thirty-five students, only three stated that computers were boring because they did not like to talk to a machine and that the headphones annoyed them and gave them a headache.

All students agreed, however, that they would not be able to learn a language only by using a computer. "A computer has the advantage that it will never, never be angry at you. It does not make us do homework or study for a test. But all this is necessary and only the teacher can do it." (An intermediate student). "Computers help us to learn more vocabulary and the pronunciation, but they cannot really communicate with us." (An advanced student).

Regarding the question: *How have they helped you?*, twelve out of the thirty-five students said that computers had helped them in all the skills. Five said that they were helped especially in reading and pronunciation, but not in oral expression. Eight said that computers had helped them only with pronunciation and spelling. Four others said that they had been helped in listening, spelling and reading and six said that the computers had helped them to read, understand and think in English because there was no translation.

The negative aspects that some students mentioned were:

- They would like to have the option to work by themselves (individually). "Sometimes I want to go slower, but my friends are finished and I must continue with them." (An intermediate student).
- They would like to have an option in Spanish for the really difficult words.
- They wish all the programs did not follow the same pattern because they become predictable.
- They complain that students speak loudly and this hurts the other students' ears (especially if somebody sneezes or coughs). "I get impatient when

another student cannot pronounce and says the word louder or takes too long over his turn." (An advanced student).

- Their own expression is limited because they cannot always give the exact answer the computer expects.

Teachers who are afraid of being taken over by a computer will be happy to know that not one single student preferred a computer over a teacher. Most students regarded guided learning as imperative. "A computer could never replace the warmth of my teacher's smile when I say something. (An advanced student). However, they liked the fact that the computers were a complement to the program. "Of course not! I like to have my teacher; the computer is only to practice with." (An intermediate student).

When teachers were asked if they felt that computers helped their students, the majority said that they saw improvement in their students' pronunciation and vocabulary learning. An honest teacher replied, "I do not know if they have really helped my students, but my students love to work with them."

When asked for the advantages and disadvantages of the computer program as part of the syllabus, the teachers said that time was a factor because if the computers were to be self-paced, they could not really advance as much as the teacher would like. One teacher said, "I have never liked drilling patterns or teaching pronunciation; now we have a machine that can help us teach the important, but boring topics and I get to do the fun and creative activities."

When the word jealousy came up, none of the teachers felt that computers would ever take over. "Everyone likes something different and new at some time." Some of the teachers felt that computers could not provide the authentic need of the students to communicate. "Speaking to a machine can never be the same as speaking to a human."

When asked about the students' level of interest, teachers admitted that there were some students who were not inquisitive enough and just zoomed through the program. They said that most of the time they tried to keep active and let students know that they were aware of their scores.

## Conclusions

- A language lab has never been absolutely necessary in ELT. Institutes are right to be afraid of making a large investment in a new "white elephant."

However, with proper management and with the proper use of computers to individualize learning, they can be a great source for reinforcement of all the basic skills.

- Computers are merely aids under the control of the teacher. It is up to the instructor to take as much advantage of them as possible. If an institution does not want the big investment to be turned into a "white elephant," they fear, they must be innovative and up-to-date, not only by buying new programs, but also by training and orienting the teachers that will use them. What good will an expensive, well-equipped lab be, if it is combined with unmotivated, bored and tired users?
- Computers are meant to make the teacher's job easier, not to do it for them. It is up to the teacher to make computers as effective as possible. Instructors will decide if computers have come to make their lives miserable or easier.
- Computers must help teachers individualize learning. Taking the whole group once a week to do the same thing at the same time may discourage those who have mastered what is being shown or discourage those who cannot yet master it, but are being forced to continue with the program. Remember that computers are an opportunity to help the students learn at their own pace, not to frustrate them at the pace of others.
- The programs used should be a challenge to the learner. However, at the same time, this challenge must not be a source of frustration. Under-challenging the learners can discourage them.

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# Who's Afraid of Noam Chomsky?

## A tutorial review for teachers of English

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### 1. Introduction.

No matter how hard they try, English teachers who read the professional journals or attend workshops or conferences cannot avoid a confrontation with linguistics, the scientific study of language. On opening almost any book or journal on language learning or teaching from the past couple of decades, the reader will come across the name of Noam Chomsky, the 'father' of modern linguistics. In many cases too, one is faced with terms like *UG (Universal Grammar)*, *LAD (Language Acquisition Device)*, *transformations*, *parameters*, etc., and often they will not be defined. Who is this person, what are these instruments of torture and what has it all got to do with English teaching?

This paper is an attempt to summarise the state of the art in Chomskyan linguistics, with a view to making the complex concepts involved more accessible to English teachers. As the title suggests, my intention is also to reassure English teachers that Chomsky represents no cause for alarm. Although Chomskyan (or 'generative') linguistics certainly is highly complex, I shall suggest that the English teacher need not concern herself or himself with the technical details of the theory. My goal here is to highlight the general philosophy of language and mind underlying the theory, which I believe will help teachers to have a better 'feel' for what it is that they are trying to accomplish in the classroom.

We must start with the recognition that Chomsky's own writings in linguistics are anything but accessible: Not only are they intrinsically difficult because of their content, but they are also written in a style which does not always lend full transparency to the issues. Consider, for example, the following passage:

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...the rules of the LF-component...associate S-structures with representations in "logical form" (LF), where it is understood that the properties of LF are to be determined empirically and not by some extrinsic concern such as the task of determining ontological commitment or formalizing inference.

(Chomsky 1981:17)

Two features of Chomsky's linguistic prose are illustrated in this passage: First, his predilection for acronyms (e.g., LF, meaning *logical form*), some of which do not stand for anything (e.g., S-structure, which was called *surface structure* in earlier versions of the theory, but now, we are told, should be read as *S structure*, being more abstract than 'surface' structure); Secondly, the density of assumptions and presuppositions ("...it is understood that..." ) which cause many trying to follow him for the first time to call out, "Now wait a minute. When did he establish that?" Suffice it to say that reading Chomsky in the original is definitely not for the faint-hearted.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I concentrate on 'unpacking' three major issues in Chomsky's research programme. In the next section, I discuss Chomsky's views on the nature of language, asking three fundamental questions: (i) What precisely is the English Language that we teach? (ii) Why is it different from the 'language' of chimpanzees? and (iii) Why is it different from Spanish or Nahuatl (or any other human language.)? In the third section, I address Chomsky's solution to what he has called the *central problem* for a science of language, namely, the problem of first language acquisition: How do children master the mysteries of English grammar before they have even started primary school, whereas some of our students fail English even after years of study? Finally, in the fourth section, I focus the discussion on Chomsky's theory of syntax, asking (i) why it is so important to him, (ii) why it seems so difficult for the non-specialist, even to many competent L2 grammar teachers, and (iii) what, as teachers, we need to know. In the final section, I offer a brief assessment of the importance of Chomsky for teachers of English and conclude that no one need be afraid.

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<sup>2</sup>One of his recent publications (Chomsky 1988) is more accessible than most and has also been translated into Spanish; the first two chapters of Chomsky (1986) are also more 'reader-friendly'. For those who wish to follow up the issues here in more detail, I recommend the following recent textbooks: Cook (1988) on Chomsky's general approach to language and Radford (1988), who concentrates on English syntax. Recent applications in second language research are summarised in Flynn (1988); c.f. also Phinney (1988), an article published in this journal, and Herrera (1992), which is written in Spanish.

## 2. Chomsky's views on the nature of language

### 2.1 Language as mental knowledge

What is the nature of the subject called *English* that is being taught, day-in, day-out, in second or foreign language classrooms around the world? For a mathematics teacher or a geography teacher, the answer is relatively straightforward and the knowledge they teach is distilled from what university scholars have discovered about maths or geography through their research. We may feel, however, that a language teacher is perhaps closer to the position of an art teacher, who needs no knowledge of chemists' theories of the molecular structure of paint or cognitive psychologists' theories of the human visual system. In the arena of language, however, even this analogy breaks down, for the creative, artistic use of the raw materials of language is the domain of teachers of creative writing and literature, not of language *per se*. The problem is that, unlike artistic or practical skills, language for native speakers is automatic, effortless, natural and untaught; second language learners come to the task with the untaught knowledge of their own native language already in place. Understanding the nature of that knowledge of L1 is Chomsky's primary goal, and I believe that it can help us to better understand our role as teachers in the classroom, and also to solve the apparent paradox of teaching a subject that we do not really fully understand.

For most people, including many teachers, language is essentially a social skill: a set of learned rules used for communication. It is a skill that, in L1, is taken largely for granted, since we all communicate with great fluency and little conscious effort (although some people know more words than others, and some seem more fluent in certain social situations). For Chomsky, however, language is essentially *mental*, rather than *social* and is used for internal *representation* of information as much as for communication with other people. In order to understand its use in social contexts, Chomsky argues that we must first of all understand the nature of what it is we are using, i.e., what knowledge we need to have stored in our minds in order to produce and comprehend meaningful utterances.

For many people, also, the word *language* means Spanish, English, Nahuatl, Bantu or German: i.e., different languages which are characterised by their differences (hence keeping us in jobs). For Chomsky, however, *language* means just that: *language* not *languages*, i.e., the general concept of language expressed better by the Spanish distinction between *lenguaje* and *lengua*. *Lenguaje* is universal, it is the faculty that all human beings share, whereas particular social groups of human beings (often corresponding to different

nations, but not always) have different *lenguas*, and these need learning or translating to be understood by groups speaking other *lenguas*.

These distinctions between *social* and *mental* on the one hand and *lengua* and *lenguaje* on the other hand, actually go hand in hand; if language is mental, then it is located in the brain, like other mental phenomena such as emotions, logic, imagery, catchy tunes, etc. The brain, just like all the other organs of the human body, is identical for every normal human being (except for minor variations in size, rate of metabolism, etc.) and it does not matter what language they speak, what culture they live in, what socio-economic class or race they belong to. The brain is a biological fact, a *human* fact. We can therefore appreciate how Chomsky can view language as basically *lenguaje*, a universal human phenomenon, located first in human minds and only derivatively in human society.

Given this perspective, it does not matter if we study Bantu or Spanish, Hindi or German; we are finding out something about all humanity. Chomsky says:

There are a number of questions which might lead one to undertake a study of language. Personally, I am primarily intrigued by the possibility of learning something from the study of language that will bring to light inherent properties of the human mind. (1972:103)

Of course, Chomsky cannot study the mind directly: If one opens up a brain one will not be able to see the mind there, with one section marked syntax, another phonology, etc. Chomsky realised that he was limited to the external manifestation of language, i.e., *lenguas*, like Japanese or French, but he realised that individual languages reflected aspects of the mental *software* that lay behind them. Using this computer analogy, we can say that Chomsky studies the actual printouts of different computers (say, an IBM and a Printaform) in order to find out the nature of the common operating system (e.g., MS-DOS) that they use. In this analogy, the printouts represent data from different languages (say, Spanish and Japanese) and the operating system represents the mental language faculty that is common to all members of our species.

Chomsky therefore set about studying English syntax in great depth, using as his evidence speakers' judgments about which sentences were grammatical and which were not. But what did he mean by grammatical? Grammatical sentences are defined as those which form part of some individual's language. *Emphatically*, Chomsky, like all linguists, does not talk about *correct* and *incorrect*, as do traditional school grammars or guides to correct usage. For Chomsky, questions like whether it is correct or not to put a preposition at the end of a sentence ("Who did you talk to?" instead of "To whom did you talk?") or whether



one can split an infinitive ("to boldly go" instead of "to go boldly") are questions of style and social norms, rather than questions of linguistics. We have established that for Chomsky language is mental and therefore what is grammatical is what is in people's minds; *all* people's minds, not just those who speak the 'standard' dialect. The distinction here is one between *prescriptive* grammar and *descriptive* grammar. Chomsky did not invent this distinction, but he emphasised it and added a further dimension: For him grammar is not just descriptive, but also has to be *explanatory*. Grammar cannot be just a list of rules in a book unconnected with anything else; grammar for him is an account of *what we know (subconsciously) about our language*, i.e., part of a theory of mind.

This idea of a mental grammar has caused problems for many non-linguists: What does Chomsky mean that we have a grammar in our heads? I certainly cannot feel mine; I know that when I am working on a problem in syntax I often get a headache, but his meaning is surely a little more subtle. Once one thinks about it, grammar cannot really be anywhere else. "Once one thinks about it" is the key to the problem: People only very rarely think about the essential nature of language--even as language *teachers!* "Once one thinks about it," the only place one can find the real rules of the language is in each speaker's head. Institutions like the *Real Academia* or the *Academie Française* (or books like *Fowler's English Usage* for English) only codify small parts of the grammar and they do it in a very haphazard manner, governed by *social*, rather than *linguistic* criteria; such institutions are prescriptive, rather than descriptive, and do not help us in our quest for the reality of language.

Chomsky starts from the premise that very normal human being has represented in his/her mind a mental grammar and a list of words, the *mental lexicon*. Using these knowledge stores, we can *speak* to ourselves and other people and we can *listen* to ourselves and to other people (in many languages we can also read and write too.) So language for Chomsky is basically knowing the rules and principles which govern our ability to speak and listen. It is this capacity that we are teaching when we teach English (plus a whole host of other non-grammatical factors like vocabulary, appropriate conditions for use, etc.).

As we have seen, Chomsky tries to work out these rules and principles using native speaker intuitions. He could not study actual speech, in the form of surreptitious tape recordings or transcripts of lectures, for examples, since what we actually produce is not the most accurate reflection of what we *know*. Generally, in normal conversation, we do not fully plan what we are going to say beforehand, and even if we do, we are only human and sometimes lose our drift or make errors because we are tired, drunk, excited, etc. This is Chomsky's

distinction between *competence* and *performance*: Competence is what we *know*, internal to the mind, static and permanent; whereas performance is what we *do*, externally, moving in time and impermanent.

## 2.2 The uniqueness of human language

We now come to the second question: Why is English much more like Bantu (or any other language) than it is like the 'language' of apes or the 'languages' of dolphins or bees? In fact, we have already seen the answer. For Chomsky language is mental, therefore biological: it is a property of the species, a part of our genes. Recall that we are not talking about individual languages like Spanish or English, but rather *lenguaje*, the underlying, shared faculty of language.

Although Chomsky is reluctant to discuss the biological evolution of this genetic capacity, it is instructive to address the issue, especially in order to understand the differences between human and non-human communicative systems. The human species developed the ability to speak around 3.5 to 5 million years ago and yet we diverged from our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, around 5 to 7 million years ago. It is true, of course, that we cannot expect chimpanzees to talk, since they do not have the same vocal apparatus, but they *have* been taught some language-like behaviour (using various types of signs or symbols). Crucially, however, as Chomsky and others have pointed out:

- (a) they have to be taught (as we shall see in a moment, children do not);
- (b) they lack the function words (like articles, pronouns, question words, etc.) that give us complex grammar;
- (c) they lack subordinate clauses -- again implying a lack of complex grammar;
- (d) they use 'language' as a *stimulus-response*: They cannot 'talk' about things they have had no experience of or cannot immediately perceive with the senses.

The most we can say is that some highly evolved animals can be taught to manipulate signs in order to obtain food, warmth, etc. Generally, animals are born with a fixed set, a finite list, of expressions like "Watch out, there's a predator about!" or "There's a good spot for a picnic just down the track" or "I'm in the mood for love!" -- they are born with no capacity to communicate messages which are not already encoded in their genes.

Humans, on the other hand, have an infinite capacity--what Chomsky has called the *creativity* of human language. On the basis of a finite grammar (the rules of our language) and a finite vocabulary, we can construct an infinite number of sentences. I am quite confident that almost no reader of this article has read any of the sentences in it before, except maybe the quotes from Chomsky and the sentence "I'm in the mood for love." Most of them were certainly new to me, too, when I began to write.

### 2.3 The difference between languages

We have now established that English is much closer to Japanese than it is to chimpanzee, but how so? For Chomsky, the basic difference is one of *vocabulary* rather than grammar. Different human communities developing in different parts of the planet are obviously going to label the world around them in different ways. The actual words we choose to give things are arbitrary sequences of sounds and cannot be part of the genetic code.

The grammars of different languages, on the other hand, are for Chomsky basically the same, derived from a genetic blueprint he calls *Universal Grammar (UG)*, which constitutes a small set of principles which we are all born with, along with some *parameters* of variation. These parameters of variation are, according to Chomsky, very few. Humans are born knowing UG: All they have to do is work out which parts of it apply to the language they are exposed to, and which patterns of sounds they use to refer to the world around them. How this is done leads us to the second major area of Chomsky's interests: language acquisition.

### 3. Chomsky's views on language acquisition

It is impossible to talk about Chomsky's view of language without mentioning language acquisition. It has been very difficult to avoid the issue so far in this discussion, especially as it is an aspect of his work which has been of great interest to English teachers and L2 researchers. The reason why it is difficult to ignore is that it provides the single most important justification for the Chomskyan paradigm, especially the view of the language faculty as innate Universal Grammar. Chomsky (1986) claims that his theory must be "rich, detailed and specific enough to account for the fact of language acquisition." And it is this feature which distinguishes the theory as explanatory, rather than merely descriptive.

Chomsky has argued that the essential difference between particular languages is basically one of vocabulary. For him syntax varies minimally across languages. The implication for language acquisition is that *there is not much to be learnt*. Only words and some slight grammatical fine-tuning. This assumption, unlikely as it seems, does help us to explain the facts of language acquisition, which seems something of a miracle. As teachers, we invest hours, days, weeks and years teaching intelligent adults to speak English, and yet very few of them emerge from the process with anything like a native command of the language. Children, on the other hand, have by the age of 4 achieved all but adult grammatical competence, without any classes, Berlitz tapes or suggestopedia.

In fact, and this is a fact that is central to Chomsky's argument, children do not even get all the help they need from the language they hear around them daily, from parents, baby sitters, siblings and kindergarten colleagues. This is the problem that Chomsky has called the "deficiencies in the input" or the "poverty of the stimulus." Children, first of all, are not corrected by their mothers, guardians, older siblings, etc. in any consistent manner. Even if they *are* corrected, such corrections usually refer to the truth conditions of the utterance, and the few grammatical corrections are in any case inconsistent and generally ignored. This point is an empirical one, that has been established not by theoretical syntacticians like Chomsky, but by psycholinguists, many of whom do not even agree with Chomsky's ideas, who have observed the acquisition process first-hand.

Another problem is that children do not hear all the structures that they end up being able to produce: So not only is there a lack of explicit instruction, but also they do not get all the information they need in order to fix the rules of the grammar. Finally, what they *do* get is not pristine input reflecting *competence* (which they are acquiring), but, as we have seen, an imperfect reflection of competence through *performance*, which is full of ungrammatical and incomplete sentences.

How, then, does the child always succeed when the typical student generally fails? The answer is *UG* (coupled with a set of learning procedures known as the Language Acquisition Device [LAD]). Children must *already know* an awful lot about language, using the input only to fix the variable parts of the grammar which are specific to the particular language to which they are exposed. These variations in UG are called parameters. UG constitutes a set of general principles which govern the structure of all languages; for example, the rules of phrase structure, which determine the hierarchical organisation of phrases and sentences (usually diagrammed in the form of syntactic *trees*). Word order, however, is

something that varies across languages, but it turns out that much of the basic structure is the same, and that particular languages vary systematically in this regard. The fundamental structure of any phrase consists of an obligatory *major category* (noun, verb, adjective or adposition) and then optional modifiers or complements (such as relative clauses or adjectives for nouns, direct objects or clausal complements for verbs, etc.) and languages are more or less consistent about which side of the head they place their complements and modifiers. In Chomsky's model, this left or right positioning of heads of phrases is determined by the *value* of the *head direction parameter* associated with the principle of phrase structure. The child only has to hear some relevant input which allows the LAD to *set* the parameter: for the head direction parameter, only prepositions or postpositions perhaps, or relative clauses before or after the noun.

Let us consider, as an example, the difference between Spanish and Japanese in this regard. Spanish (unlike English) is consistently head-initial in its phrase structure, as the following example shows:

(1) Spanish: Head-Initial

*El estudiante descontento con la vida entregó la tarea a la profesora.*

(The student unhappy with (the) life handed in the homework to the professor.)

Noun Phrase: [el [**estudiante** descontento con la vida]]

Adjective Phrase: [**descontento** con la vida]

Verb Phrase: [**entregó** la tarea a la profesora]

Prepositional Phrase: [**a** la profesora]

Japanese is an example of a consistently head-final language, as we see with the following example (a translation of the sentence in 1):

(2) Japanese: Head-Final

*Jinsei ni fushiawasena gakusei-wa sensei ni shukudai-o teishutshita.*

(*Jinsei ni fushiawasena gakusei-wa sensei ni.*

(Life with unhappy student (subject) professor (indirect object)

*shukudai -o teishutshita)*

homework (direct object) handed in.)

Noun Phrase: [Jinsei ni fushiawasena **gakusei-wa**]

Adjective Phrase: [Jinsei ni **fushiawasena**]

Verb Phrase: [sensei ni shukudai-o **teishutshita**]

Postpositional Phrase: [sensei **ni**]

In order to learn this aspect of the grammar, the child exposed to Spanish need only hear, say, a certain number of prepositions or object noun phrases after the verb, in order to be able to set the head-direction parameter to head-initial, and the child exposed to Japanese need only hear postpositions, or objects after the verb, to know that it is acquiring a head-final language.

#### 4. Chomsky's theory of syntax

We now turn to Chomsky's concentration on syntax and begin by trying to appreciate why he has spent so much energy on this, maybe the most esoteric aspect of language. Syntax is important to Chomsky because, of all the levels of structure in language (traditionally: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics), it is the only one to be *uniquely* linguistic. Phonetic and phonology are intimately tied to the production and reception of linguistic sounds, as is morphology in part (e.g., why the past tense -ed has three different pronunciations in *thanked*, *pleased* *waited*), but we can also produce and comprehend *non-linguistic* sounds using some of the same mental resources. Semantics is the study of linguistic meaning, but there are also meanings that are *non-linguistic* (for example, the meaning of hate, the meaning of road signs, the meaning of a painting by Monet, etc.). In its turn, pragmatics is by definition the *interface* between the linguistic code and its *non-linguistic* context. Only syntax can be discussed purely in its own terms, without recourse to knowledge from other fields; it is therefore, for Chomsky, the key to the nature of the human language faculty.

For theoretical syntacticians like Chomsky, the notion of syntax comes easily, but for many others (including many linguists working on other aspects of language) the notion of syntax is rather more impenetrable. One reason is its very isolation from non-linguistic phenomena, its *autonomy*, in Chomsky's terms. For

Chomsky, syntax is almost entirely separate from function and meaning. Terms used in traditional approaches to grammar, such as subject, object, etc. suggest the *function* of nouns in a sentence and therefore are only derivative notions in Chomsky's syntactic theory. Stripped of any relation with meaning, it is the very abstractness of his grammar, its intangible, inaccessible nature, which makes it so difficult for the non-generativist to grasp: It is precisely terms like subject and object which *anchor* traditional syntax to the real world of events; without such concrete notions, and with, instead, notions like *empty categories* and *abstract case* (which in English at least is rarely overtly marked), syntax seems for many people an unreal world, requiring an act of faith.

For example, Chomsky has proposed an abstract level of structure called D-structure (originally *deep structure*), to which movement rules apply to give different *surface* structures. From the D-structure

(3) John made dinner for David.

we can apply rules to get more complex sentences like

- (4) (a) Who did John make dinner for?  
 (b) What did John make for David?  
 (c) Dinner was made for David by John.  
 (d) It was dinner that David made for John.

Within the theory, rules which change basic (*deep*) sentences into often more complicated (*surface*) ones are called *transformations*. But they are not really mental *movements*, as psycholinguists have been able to prove. Using such metaphors as *movements* and *derivations* has, I think, made it harder for people to grasp the reality that Chomsky is trying to describe, namely that represented in every human mind there are permanent, static principles which govern the perception and production of language. These principles are very abstract and complicated, making them difficult for us to grasp at a conscious level, but Chomsky has demonstrated very convincingly that all speakers *know* them at a level below consciousness.

The major question for English teachers is whether, as teachers, we need to know these rules and principles *above* the level of consciousness, and whether they can provide tools for us in the classroom, in the same way that biology teachers need to know theories of biology. A number of years ago Chomsky himself answered this question, when he stated:

I am, frankly, rather skeptical about the significance, for the teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics [...] It is difficult to believe that [...] linguistics [...] has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a 'technology' of language teaching. (1966: 37)

Although the theory has developed a lot since 1966, I am sure that Chomsky has not changed his mind on this point. As we have seen, his theory is a theory of a static, abstract knowledge, a knowledge that is acquired by children with no explicit teaching. It is not a dynamic theory, which would be likely to help in the dynamic, *conscious* process of explicit second or foreign language teaching.

What language teachers should learn from Chomsky's work is not the details of his theory of syntax, but rather the general framework he has provided for understanding the nature of *lenguaje*: The fact that language is possessed by all of us, that all of us have a remarkable creative capacity, richer and more complex than any man-made computer's, and that we have acquired it unconsciously, without teachers.

The question of whether students can use this genetic capacity for language (i.e., the LAD and UG) in their attempts to learn a second language, is still unresolved. It is the linchpin of approaches such as that advocated by Krashen (e.g., 1981), who argues that if we can provide a learning environment which 'mimics' that of a child acquiring its native language, then conscious *learning* will give way to unconscious *acquisition*, and the result will be near-native competence. Unfortunately, creating the right environment is not the only, or even then most important, element of the puzzle: We also need to know whether the LAD and UG are still accessible to the adult learner, and this is not at all clear. Some L2 researchers fervently believe that it is (cf. Flynn, 1988) whereas others strongly disagree (cf. Bley-Vroman, 1989); the debate is healthy and continues to grow.

## 5. Conclusion

Although familiarity with Chomsky's syntactic theory will help English teachers to follow this exciting debate, it will not greatly enhance our effectiveness as teachers. A sensitivity to the nature of language should, however, help us to reflect on what it is that we are teaching, and thus, with reflection, help us to understand our role in the classroom and to have greater respect for the cognitive tasks which our students face. Chomsky has provided the most integrated, comprehensive and scientifically rigorous framework for this reflection and can thus help us understand that a large part of our students' task is effectively out of our



hands: Unlike teachers of geography, mathematics or biology, we can only hope to *facilitate*, rather than direct, the learning of large parts of the subject matter entrusted to us.

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## Procedures for Successful Video-Viewing in the Classroom

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Video is an extremely useful resource in modern language teaching. Therefore, it is essential for the student to take an active role in viewing video materials. However, many students do not consider video a valuable teaching aid. This is due to the strong connotation of entertainment that domestic TV has. It is necessary then, that learners be introduced gradually to video in the classroom so that they understand how valuable and profitable for their learning video can be. The use of video entails not only the activities to be developed during the class period, but also good management of the available technical resources such as video cassette recorders, monitors, video cassettes (of good quality) and sometimes a video camera. This is a general worry of teachers who do not know how to use the equipment or who have had previous frustrating experiences with video.

Active viewing can focus the student's attention on a wide variety of language aspects which can be exploited through video activities. It is up to the teacher to decide which of these to exploit according to the type of video sequence chosen. A video sequence can be used to focus students' attention on linguistic or paralinguistic features of interaction. It can serve as a stimulus for classroom activities involving different types of tasks such as: discussion of the characters' roles and their relationships, problem-solving, prediction of what is going to happen in the video (or what has just happened), comparison of cultures, development of follow-up activities based on the topic of the sequence, etc. The use of video in class exposes students to contextualized genuine communication (verbal and non-verbal). The combination of sound and vision is dynamic and immediate and besides being highly motivating, video represents a challenge to students of all levels. Therefore, it is necessary to grade the tasks according to the students' level. One of the keys for the successful development of viewing skills is that in addition to having a clear purpose, the sequence should serve as a stimulus for the development of activities which the viewing guide should include, such as preview, viewing and follow-up activities. It is necessary to

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consider the fact that the design of all these activities is time consuming, and the teacher must have a very clear idea of what objective or objectives he/she is pursuing.

In order to explain some procedures for active viewing, it will be necessary to mention some of the techniques that can be employed:

1. Technique: *Sound and Vision*. This technique involves listening and viewing comprehension.

Procedure:

- a) Do a warm-up to prepare students for the sequence. This can be done with oral questions, a short discussion, a vocabulary list, etc.
- b) Depending of the sequence and on the activity already designed, decide if students will watch it straight through or in small sections. here, exercise formats may vary (true/false, multiple choice, matching, completion, etc.) and the procedure itself may vary too. Students may answer the exercise first and then watch the sequence and compare answers or the teacher may provide students with a paraphrased script or an incomplete one and ask students to write the actual one. Here is where creativity and initiative come in. It is important to remember while designing the exercise that students should not write too much as they are watching and listening at the same time.
- c) Depending on the students' level, decide how many times it will be necessary to repeat the sequence (2 or 3 should be enough), but in the case of commercials, for example, they are so short that they might need to be shown more times).
- d) Have a follow-up activity ready to round up the session. It can be an activity based on language, functions or related to reading, listening or even a writing activity.

2. Technique: *Silent Viewing*. This technique can be used to stimulate oral production (discussion about what is seen, predictions about what is said). The key for this technique to be successful is to choose scenes with short dialogues where the action, emotions, setting and situation provide clues as to what is being said.

Procedure:

- a) Do a preview activity (introduce the topic or language function).
- b) Show the whole sequence two or three times.

- c) Have students predict the topic; lead them, if necessary, to the language function you want them to practise.
  - d) Use the pause/freeze frame control at the initial point of exchange for students to predict language. Allow enough time if you are asking students to write the exchanges.
  - e) Repeat the sequence with the sound on so that students can compare their exchanges with the actual conversation.
  - f) Have students perform their exchanges and the actual conversation in a role-play activity.
3. Technique: *Sound on/Sound off*. This technique stimulates hypothesis formation and discussion. It also highlights the differences between verbal and visual communication as it starts with sound only.

Procedure:

- a) Start with a warm-up asking some pre-listening questions.
  - b) Have students guess from the sound track as many things as you may think of: the setting, the number of different voices, the physical appearance of the characters, their relationship, the action, etc.
  - c) It might be convenient to have students listen to the complete sequence first and then divide it into chunks (line by line or by exchange).
  - d) Have the students discuss their guesses in small groups.
  - e) Show students the sequence with both sound and vision.
  - f) Have them discuss their guesses with the real image, giving their reasons for why they imagined this or that in a particular way. This could be part of the follow-up activity.
4. Technique: *Jigsaw viewing*. This technique can be used to stimulate oral discussion in different ways. Preferably sequences that show a logical story should be selected. (For example, a restaurant sequence.)

Procedure:

- a) Do a warm-up activity with the whole group.
- b) Divide the class into three groups of 5 or 6 students each.
- c) Have each group watch a different sequence.
- d) Have each group make their guesses of what happened before or what will happen after their particular sequence.

- e) Put the group together again.
- f) Make new groups of three (one student from each of the three original groups) and have them orally exchange the information in their sequence and ask them to decide which sequence is first, second and third. Do not provide the students with the answers.
- g) Show the complete sequence so that students can check their predictions.
- h) Discuss how accurate the previous information exchanges were.

5. Technique: *Split viewing*. This technique creates an information gap as some students will just hear the sequence and others will just watch it.

Procedure:

- a) After doing a warm-up, divide the class into two groups.
- b) Have one group listen to the sequence.
- c) Have the other half watch it.
- d) Organize pair work with one student from each group.
- e) Tell students to exchange the information about what they heard or saw.
- f) Tell students to go back to their original group.
- g) Ask them to discuss the exchanges in the sequence (place, action, characters).
- h) Ask one person from each group to give an account of the events.
- i) Show the complete sequence with both sound and vision on.
- j) Have students discuss the differences between their versions and the sequence.

As it is easily possible to realize, these are only a few ideas of how video can be exploited in the language class. There is a wide range of possible activities that can be developed with video. It is a pity that only a few schools in Mexico have complete video equipment and materials, but hopefully in the near future, if budgets allow it, more and more language teachers will be able to profit from this valuable aid.

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## ***Book Review Section:***

### **Outside our own Backyard: Can Black English studies inform the teaching of English as a Foreign Language?**

**Keith Gilyard. *Voices of the self: A study of language competence*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1991.**

*Reviewed by Patrick Smith, Universidad de las Américas-Puebla*

*Voices of the self*, Keith Gilyard's look at schooling of African-American children in the United States through the lens of sociolinguistic theory and his own educational experiences, is intended for educators and parents involved with the education of African-American students. But, as the title of this review suggests, Gilyard's work is also of interest to educators whose students' first language is neither "Black English" nor "Standard English." It offers those of us who teach English as a Second Language insight into the question "What English do we teach?"

In the introduction, Gilyard reveals that later in life as a father-to-be he began rethinking his own education in New York City schools . The decision to add subsequent chapters on theory came as a result of his graduate studies in sociolinguistics and experiences as a college professor . The autobiographical chapters deal mainly with Gilyard's life in family and community (Harlem and Queens) and his experiences as one of the few African-American students in advanced placement programs throughout his education. The chapters on theory bring together the ideas of educators, historians and linguists in support of the "pluralist" position on the role of "Black English" in schooling; that this dialect, as the native speech of many African-Americans, ought to be used as a language of instruction together with Standard English.

What do Black English studies have to do with English language teaching in Mexico? After all, Black English is a variety of English although not the variety honored as "standard". As such, it's far more similar to standard English

than it is different from it and closer to it in all ways than a separate language like Spanish. Having read Gilyard's book, I think there are three ways that Black English studies can be useful to the EFL teacher: They help us answer the questions "What English do we teach?" and "What do we, as English teachers, do when our students bring non-standard forms into the classroom?" Finally, Black English studies remind us that education and language teaching in particular are broad areas which require practitioners to take ideas from a diversity of disciplines.

Most language programs teaching English to speakers of other languages aim to teach Standard English. Despite the fact that people learn English for different reasons (employment training, school requirements, etc.) and in a variety of contexts (public and private schools, intensive language programs, ESP classes, etc.), Standard English remains the largely unquestioned target (Goldstein 1987). Certainly, where English is taught as a foreign language, this is a less politically-charged issue than it is in the U.S. and other ESL contexts. It can be reasonably argued, I think, that standard English is most appropriate given the future needs of our EFL students. Mastery of the standard dialect(s) of English, not Black English, is what our students need to pass standardized tests like the TOEFL, Michigan Test, and Cambridge Series. But, as those of us who use authentic audio and video materials can attest, not all native and proficient speakers of English use standard English all the time. As language teachers, we need to be honest with our students about the diversity of English.

As Goldstein (1987) discovered, second language learners are often aware of several varieties of English, and display a range of attitudes toward these varieties. Again, while this may be less of an issue for teachers here in Mexico where only a minority of students have regular contact with native or proficient speakers outside the language classroom. we might well argue that it is even more important where non-standard forms (via popular media such as movies, television programs and music) constitute a relatively large portion of English input. Can we afford to ignore these sources of "English input" our students do receive, simply because they are not Standard English? In discussing this question, Gilyard reminds us that it has too often been assumed in the U.S. that African-American children have weak English skills because they start school speaking a non-standard dialect. How should language teachers handle situations in which students know and use non-standard forms? Should we admire and encourage students for their resourcefulness and awareness as language learners? Should we respond by correcting or asking for rephrasing in Standard English? What attitudes and strategies should we adopt toward non-standard varieties and forms of English within the EFL classroom?



Because *Voices of the self* is not aimed at ESL/EFL students, Gilyard does not address the above questions directly. Nevertheless, the advice he offers teachers of African-American students also has merit here:

The proposal is not to ignore Standard English. One would certainly teach all children to read it. But beyond that, the feeling is that in a more equitable societal arrangement or in a sub-environment pursuing that goal,...students will be not only more inclined to see the value of expanding their productive communicative repertoires, but prove rather skillful at accomplishing the task. (p. 73)

In other words, teachers should respect and make use of the types of language students discover outside the language classroom, while teaching them specific skills in Standard English.

Although Black English studies may not appear to have much in common with the teaching of English as a foreign language, *Voices of the self* makes clear some interesting connections between the two. As relatively new fields, both are characterized by a willingness to look to other disciplines. Indeed, Gilyard uses research from Second Language Acquisition studies and TESOL in his conception of language competence suggesting that we may gain from exploring work done on Black English and its speakers. One of the strongest points about the field of TESOL has been its ability to look outside itself. *Voices of the self* offers a well-written and persuasive argument for utilizing non-standard dialects of English in our classrooms, and demonstrates the potential of a multidisciplinary approach to research in educational settings. English language teachers would do well to read this book.

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## Teaching Tips: Using Songs in the Classroom

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We teachers have been using popular songs in class for years, but we often save songs for those few extra minutes on a slow Friday afternoon. However, songs can become an integral and exciting part of our classes. Here are a few suggestions of when and how to incorporate songs into daily class experiences.

(1) **Teaching Grammar.** Many songs can be used in class to present, practice or reinforce grammar lessons. You could use *Blowing in the Wind* written and performed by Bob Dylan ("How many seas must a white dove sail before she can sleep in the sand?") to present time clauses, or Barry Manilow's *Copacabana* or one of many country-western songs that tells a story to practice the past tense (just copy the words, leaving out the verbs; students listen and fill them in). Other songs that come to mind for grammar structures could be: Eric Clapton's recent hit *Tears from Heaven* ("Would you remember my name, if I saw you in heaven?") for *if-clauses*, the multi-celebrity rendition of *We are the World* for the present tense of BE, *I just called to say I loved you* by Stevie Wonder for *say/tell*, and the traditional songs *Frere Jacques* (*Are you sleeping?*) for present progressive and *There's a Hole in the Bottom of the Sea* for *there is*.

(2) **Teaching Pronunciation.** Many songs have the same sound segments repeated various times, either in the same or different words. Try using the Beatles' *Let it Be* for [ɛ, ɪ, iɪ] and *Yesterday* for [y] or, as above, a country western song for the pronunciation of the regular past tense "ed" forms.

(3) **Language Functions.** The language needed for various linguistic functions, such as inviting, excusing, etc., can be reinforced with songs such as the traditional *Happy Birthday* for how to wish someone a *feliz cumpleaños* or David Bacharach's famous *I'll Never Fall in Love Again* sung by Dionne Warwick to practice promising.

(4) **Listening Comprehension.** Many kinds of listening practices can be developed by using any clearly-sung song as a cloze dictation (you omit every fifth, sixth or seventh word or every verb, adjective, etc.) Play the tape as many

times as necessary for the students to fill in all the blanks. It's a good idea to let students try to guess what goes into each blank before they hear the song so that they learn to pay attention to the part of speech each word represents.

Besides being good for practicing vowels or consonants, songs can also help students with word stress and rhythm. Rap music is very rhythmical and can be used to help students internalize the English rhythm system.

(5) **Vocabulary Building.** Vocabulary can also be practiced even at very beginning levels with children's songs such as *Ten Little Children* (a culturally-correct version of the traditional *Ten Little Indians*: "One little, two little, three little children...") for the numbers from 1 to 10 or the *Alphabet Song*. Obviously, popular songs are good sources for the up-to-date slang expressions your students are always looking for.

(6) **Culture.** Songs can also be used as mini-history or culture lessons. The traditional spiritual *Go Tell it on the Mountain* could illustrate a lesson on Afro-American history, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was sung during the American War of Independence and the U.S. national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner* was written based on a battle that took place during the War of 1812. Any of the later Beatles songs, such as *Give Peace a Chance*, are representative of the spirit of the late 60's. I'm also sure most of us use Christmas songs during the Holiday Season. These songs can also be used to illustrate cultural differences since they illustrate how Christmas is traditionally celebrated in English-speaking countries.

So, as you can see, you don't have to wait until you have a slow Friday afternoon to sing in class. Sing more often; your students will appreciate it.

By the way, the songs mentioned here are either common popular songs or children's songs. I have tried to indicate the name of the composer or most popular singer whenever possible. Many of the very popular or traditional songs can be found in special collections for ELT classes. Also, some original songs have been developed for ELT; check recent texts for ideas. To find these materials, visit your local bookstore and see what is available. However, if you have never heard the songs I mention or can't find them, start listening to popular music. You can form your own collection of teachable songs in no time.



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#### **Topic Area:**

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**Area of Interest**

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-primary <input type="checkbox"/> Primary <input type="checkbox"/> Secundaria	<input type="checkbox"/> Preparatoria <input type="checkbox"/> Bilingual Education <input type="checkbox"/> University	<input type="checkbox"/> Adult <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
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**Preferred Audience Size**

<input type="checkbox"/> 50	<input type="checkbox"/> 75	<input type="checkbox"/> 100	<input type="checkbox"/> 150	<input type="checkbox"/> 200
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**Audiovisual Equipment**

Any of the audiovisual equipment listed below requested before May 15, 1993 will be provided free of charge. Any equipment requested after this date or not on the list, will be provided at the expense of the presenter(s).

<input type="checkbox"/> Overhead Projector (OHP) <input type="checkbox"/> Cassette Tape Recorder <input type="checkbox"/> Microcomputer: <input type="checkbox"/> IBM/IBM Compatible <input type="checkbox"/> Apple	<input type="checkbox"/> Videotape Player: <input type="checkbox"/> NTSC (US) <input type="checkbox"/> PAL/SECAM <input type="checkbox"/> VHS <input type="checkbox"/> BETA <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4" <input type="checkbox"/> Slide Projector <input type="checkbox"/> Other
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Mail this form and 3 copies of the single-page abstract to the following address before the **May 15, 1993** deadline:

**MEXTESOL  
San Borja 726-2  
Colonia del Valle  
03100 Mexico, D.F.**