

1980 MATSOL Conference

The 1980 MATSOL Conference (the conference without a theme) took place on March 28-29 at Boston University. Many enthusiastic members listened to Jean Bodman's comments on the language we speak vs. the language we teach and Rebecca Valette's techniques in developing listening comprehension. Bill Bliss and Steve Molinsky showed how to encourage fluency through short conversational dialogues and Dr. Manuel Sedo talked about learning disabilities in Hispanic students. On Saturday, Daphne Mackey, Amy Lepon, Eric Solomon and Linda Moussouris talked about the "Sociopolitical Concerns of the Profession," and Bambi Zimmerman and Glynda Bell Smith led a workshop on "Peer Teaching for Communication," in elementary classrooms. In short it was a great conference which was highlighted by some of the following participants.

After Lunch on Saturday . . .

With a fine blend of research and anecdotal evidence, Rebecca Valette, professor of romance languages at Boston College, presented her thoughts on teaching and testing the listening skill. Saturday afternoon's plenary session sparked the audience with provocative ideas, usable techniques, and good humor.

Professor Valette believes that listening comprehension deserves a more central role in the ESL or foreign language class. Research indicated that for the advanced student extensive

listening practice leads to a general improvement in all language skills, and experiments with Asher's Total Physical Response suggest that even at the beginning level extended listening practice can be very useful.

Professor Valette presented the MATSOL audience with a banquet of suggestions for incorporating more listening activities into the class. For example, she suggested that teachers encourage students to work more extensively with recordings. She told how she experimented on herself as she was learning Spanish. She played a tape of a dialogue repeatedly, 20 or 30 times, until she could speak along with the tape in the same way that American students inadvertently learn hundreds of lyrics and sing along with popular songs. In this way she was able to get a feeling for the intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns of the language — elements more important for communication than individual words and sounds.

And she told about techniques for incorporating listening into the presentation of new material and the teaching of structures and numbers . . . and techniques for extensive listening, where students listen for a half hour a day with the idea of understanding as much as they can . . . and techniques for intensive listening where the objective, 100 percent comprehension, might be reached by playing a tape over and over again until a complete transcription of the taped material can be written.

Rebecca Valette also gave a glimpse at her storehouse of ideas for testing the listening skill — by listening for a particular structure, for the gist of a sentence, for specific facts or messages,

or by measuring sentence retention or the accuracy and completeness of tape transcriptions.

In short, Professor Valette served us the perfect dessert on Saturday: a rich taste of theory, personal experience, and practical details, all spiced with humor and insight.

Amy L. Sonka
CELOP, Boston University

The Effect of Values Clarification on Asian Students

Eileen Nam and Carla Meskill presented research done with Jim Dias on values clarifications workshops with Asian students. Their project involved three different groups of Asian students: young permanent resident university students, older permanent resident restaurant workers, and visiting scholars. Participants were initially given a questionnaire with 30 adjectives, and asked to rate different cultural groups: American people in general, themselves as they perceive themselves, and themselves as they would like to be. Next, they were involved in three values clarifications workshops including the Thematic Aperception Test, discussions of controversial statements, and discussions involving the decision of revenue allocations for a given society. Following the workshops, the same questionnaire was given again.

The results, which cannot be considered to be significant at this time, showed the greatest change with the young university students. The



change shown was generally positive; after the workshops, the students' perceptions of the American culture and their own culture were more similar. The visiting scholars showed little change. And the restaurant workers continued to see the greatest difference between their culture and the American culture, and continued to want to be more like their perception of American people. Further research is planned.

Kathy Kuy
Newton Area CETA

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MATSOL NEWSLETTER costs are included in the annual membership dues. Contributions to the Newsletter are welcome and should be sent to:

Catherine Tansey, MATSOL
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Articles should be typed on one side of a sheet and double spaced. Next deadline: July 10.

Up-Coming Events

June 6 - August 8, 1980 - TESOL SUMMER INSTITUTE, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131 (505)277-6353.

July 14 - August 8, 1980 - ESP SUMMER INSTITUTE, University of New Mexico. Contact: Karl Drobnic, ESP Clearinghouse, ELI Ads A100, OSU, Corvallis, OR 97331.

July 18-19, 1980 - TESOL SUMMER MEETING will be held during the 1980 TESOL SUMMER INSTITUTE.

July 20-25, 1980 - SIETAR'S III ANNUAL SUMMER INSTITUTE, "Foundations of Intercultural Training," contact: SIETAR, Georgetown University, Wash., D.C. 20057 (202)625-3391.

July 24 - August 8, 1980 - THE FIFTH ANNUAL STANFORD INSTITUTE FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION. Contact: Clifford Clarke, Director SIIC, P.O. Box A-D, Stanford, CA 94305 (415)497-4921.

International Jobs

An invaluable guide for anyone seeking employment abroad or with an international organization is the newly published INTERNATIONAL JOBS - WHERE THEY ARE, HOW TO GET THEM by Eric Kocher. This handbook gives the job hunter information on specific career opportunities in a number of fields. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. \$5.95 paperback, \$10.95 cloth.

Subscription Information

The ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM, a quarterly journal for teachers of English as a foreign or second language, will be available in the U.S. beginning with the July, 1980 issue. It may be ordered from the Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. Make check or money order payable to the Superintendent of Documents. The price for a yearly subscription (4 issues) is \$14.00; single issue, \$4.00. When ordering, please use the complete name: ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM. The designating code is: List ID—ETF.

LINGUISTICS RESEARCH will appear quarterly and will be distributed by the Indiana University Linguistics Club. The price for a yearly subscription is \$18.00 per volume (4 issues, about 450 pages). Volume 1, #1 appeared in March. To place your subscription write: Indiana University Linguistics Club, Lindley Hall 310, Bloomington, Indiana 47405.

Teaching Ideas

The MATSOL Newsletter has a new column that will appear in its issues. This column will consist of teaching ideas, hints, approaches or methods that you have tried in the classroom that have worked for you. It will give all of you the opportunity to exchange techniques you have used and found to be helpful and effective. We feel that this column could provide you with interesting and stimulating suggestions or alternatives that you may not have thought of before. We believe that teachers can best learn from each other.

If you have a teaching idea that you have found successful and would like to share this with others in your profession, please write it up and send to:

Vivian Zamel
English Department
U Mass/Harbor Campus
Boston, MA 02125

Teaching Ideas Across Cultures — The Power of Poetry

In the fall semester of 1979 at U Mass/Boston, I taught a reading course consisting of students who had scored between 45 and 55 on the Michigan Test. With these students, who represented 12 languages, I developed a cross-cultural poetry project that was presented as a workshop at a MATSOL mini-conference in October, 1979.

As part of a reading lesson on an ancient Chinese poet, the students were assigned to write short, five-lined poems, called cinquains (see James Hendrickson and Angela LaBarca, *THE SPICE OF LIFE*, New York: HBJ, 1979, p.17). I was so struck by the students' lyric sensibility that I gave a larger assignment, hoping to combine their poetic talents with their cultural pride.

Each student was to:

1. Choose a short poem from his/her culture;
2. Do background reading on the poem and the poet;
3. Write a short biographical sketch of the poet in English;

4. Translate or paraphrase the poem into English with the help of the teacher;
5. Present orally the biography (in English) and the poem in student's native language and in English, before the class according to schedule.

I gave the entire group two to three weeks to complete the assignment. At the end of that period I collected the students' work and returned it with corrections. Then, no later than one class period prior to his or her scheduled presentation, the student resubmitted the work to me for duplication and distribution to the class. As a rule, I scheduled two to three presentations per class meeting and used the remaining time for other work.

The results of this project were most gratifying. Not only did the students respond enthusiastically, they showed much taste and sophistication in their choice of poems. But beyond this, something else was gained. The opportunity to express national pride through poetry boosted the students' self-esteem, helped to soften the alienation they often feel in this country, and fostered an atmosphere of respect and admiration within the class; all demonstrating, perhaps the power of poetry.

Gary L. Davis
U Mass/Boston

Rhode Island School for the Deaf

Projecto Oportunidad, the bilingual/bicultural program at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, was developed to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing number of students coming from other countries. Hearing impaired children from non-English speaking homes face a far more difficult task in the acquisition of English as a second language, especially those with severe to profound hearing impairments, the kind of student most often found in the special school for the deaf. The profoundly deaf, particularly those deaf from birth, often have not developed the dominant oral language of their culture although they may have mastered the sign language of their countries' deaf community. It is important to note that not all sign languages are the same, and are as easily as different as the many oral languages

of the world. Given these conditions, the acquisition of English as a second language poses immense problems.

In addition to the profoundly, congenitally, deaf, there are a large number of students with less severe hearing impairments who also seem to have extra difficulties in learning English as a second language. These students are often misdiagnosed as retarded or learning disabled, or, when they become frustrated in learning, emotionally disturbed. Having worked with a large number of mildly or moderately hearing impaired individuals from non-English speaking homes, it is very clear that even the presence of a mild hearing impairment can adversely effect the acquisition of a second language. Students who are not functioning well in the ESL class might have hearing problems, sometimes problems stemming from chronic ear infections (otitis media). Proper otological and audiological care can often solve these problems, and the child can remain in the ESL class rather than being labeled and shuffled off to the special education class.

At the School for the Deaf, where nearly all of the students have severe or profound hearing losses, problems equal in difficulty to the language acquisition dilemma were encountered in cultural adjustment. Many of the new students, Portuguese students from the Azores and Hispanic students from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, had never been in school before, since there are very limited provisions for the handicapped in those areas. In addition, the newly arrived families were bewildered by the range of services available for their deaf child, since they had come from where there were no similar services. Very few of the students had ever seen a hearing aid or had an otological or audiological evaluation.

In the face of these problems, but convinced there was a way to provide more appropriate educational services to this population, the staff of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, with the encouragement and support of the principal, Peter M. Blackwell, developed the first bilingual/bicultural program for deaf children in the United States. We were especially fortunate to find two exceptionally qualified teachers: Portuguese teacher Zenaida Sousa, who formerly taught at the Internato Dr. Neto de Carvalho School for the Deaf in St. Michael, Azores and is the only Portuguese teacher of the deaf in

the United States; and Spanish teacher Maria Isabel Santiviago, who formerly taught at the Escuela Nacional de Sordomudos in the Dominican Republic.

Currently all Hispanic and Portuguese students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf have a bilingual/bicultural component written into their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and receive some degree of instruction in their home language and culture. Pre-school deaf students begin their language stimulation in their home language in addition to their regular pre-school activities. Students who have been in schools for the deaf for a long time, or whose preferred learning mode is sign language receive bicultural instruction through total communication, the spoken language with simultaneous signing. Students whose dominant (oral) language is Spanish or Portuguese receive both ESL as well as content instruction in their dominant language. A particularly rewarding development this year has been the mainstreaming of several severely hearing impaired students into the public schools for their ESL.

The entire New England area is facing the problem of children who not only come from non-English speaking homes, but who have special needs as well. These students often slip into gaps between bilingual and special education. Typically, these students do not learn English at the same rate as other bilingual students, and as the other students are mainstreamed into regular school classes in English, those with hearing impairments are too often "mainstreamed" into special education classes designed for the learning disabled or retarded, and not for the students whose hearing impairment has caused a difficulty, but not a disorder, in second language acquisition.

While the problems of this group of students are far from being solved, it has been our experience that these students, with proper language programs and with attention to the culture and needs of their families, can not only acquire English but can reach their full potential as learners and individuals.

Joseph E. Fischgrund
Coordinator, Bilingual Program
Rhode Island School for the Deaf

A Dream

I took my test on a sunny day in June and I wasn't too excited about it. I felt stupid trying among all those kids who had had at least five years of English each and I was there, trying for a scholarship to the United States and afraid even to say an "I don't speak English." But I had my dreams and any how I was there.

I think I used the right word above. I **HAD** my dreams and when I went home they were all gone. I thought I did terribly on the test. Two months later my mother told me that I should go to an interview because I had passed. I couldn't believe it. There were a hundred kids and I got it.

I was too proud to say anything but too proud to be sure. This was the point where I started to be insecure and trying to care the least possible about "tomorrow."

I did well in the interview too and so I did my autobiography. I got approved in my country and then New York accepted me. I saw the family's picture

(the family I would live with for a year). I received so many congratulations, I saw my name in the papers, I saw my parents so proud. I saw everything and I wasn't feeling anything about it.

I realized the changes — all that was done when this was really done and I felt a big shock. Being alone, responsible for my self has been a great experience now. It wasn't and isn't easy but I've been learning a lot about how strong I can be. Now and always.

Cassia Campaj
AFS Student from Brazil

Book Review

If you would like to write a book review or suggest a book for review, contact the Book Review Editor, Ann Hilferty, English Language Center, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115 or Judy de Fillippo, 38 Whitcomb Avenue, Hingham, MA 02043.

Anecdotes for Cross-Cultural Insights

Item: Janet Hafner of Palomar College tells of an incident in her beginning ESL class for Vietnamese students. One night she wore a favorite piece of jewelry, a large pendant in the shape of an owl. The students, normally warm and relaxed, froze. Finally, one of them was able to tell her that, in Asian culture, the owl is the portent of death. An owl perched in a tree outside a house means that someone there will die soon.

Comment: What an interesting insight Janet's "mistake" reveals. Consider the number of educational materials with the "wise old owl" theme, and the commonness of the owl motif in American gifts and accessories. Janet's anecdote could be the beginning of an interesting and relevant discussion for intermediate and advanced classes with Asian students, and help us avoid an upsetting symbol for shell-shocked Indo-chinese refugees.

WANTED: Dynamic Materials to Teach Language Skills and Strategies for Getting a Job.

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Longman 

American English 19 West 44th Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10036

Item: Pat Anesi of Alemany CCC and Jerrilou Johnson of Oxford U. Press tell of Arab and Latin students who have hissed for a waiter's attention and have nearly been thrown out of the restaurant for doing so.

Comment: These students' "mistakes" give us another insight into a bit of American cultural behavior which should be discussed perhaps practiced, in ESL classes which have students of these backgrounds. How many of us would think to talk with our students about polite ways of getting others' attention in this country — unless we knew about this mistake?

Item: Elena Garate of USC tells of, and has shown on videotape, the Latin American who was insulted by a well-meaning North American who, when asking about the height of one of the Latin's children, used a gesture that is reserved for animals in many parts of Latin America (arm outstretched, palm down).

Comment: Another "mistake" reveals another aspect of culture that we might wish to cover in class. How would we know unless someone had made that mistake? Would someone from that culture think to tell us about gestural differences? Only if they had been made overtly aware of those differences — probably through someone's mistakes.

The anecdotes above may make you think of others — mistakes made because what was appropriate in one culture was not in another. We may discover them inadvertently in class as Janet did, or from a student's anecdote about his own experience here, as Pat did, or from our own experience with someone of another culture, as in Elena's example.

A collection of these anecdotes would make a useful body of knowledge for us teachers to have; 1) for our own interest and heightened sensitivity; and 2) for indications of direct point of intercultural conflict — a very practical place to begin in "teaching culture" in the classroom.

Won't you help with this collection? You have probably shared stories like Janet's, Pat's and Elena's around the teachers' room coffee table. Perhaps your students have anecdotes to tell. You could make a real contribution to other teachers by sharing these anecdotes. Bob Lindberg in the Adult Education Field Services Section of the California State Department of

Education has offered to distribute the collection to all contributors.

Please send your anecdotes to me (don't forget to include your name, affiliation, and mailing address). Put down on paper now while the inspiration is fresh, and send to:

Judy E.W.-B. Olsen
c/o Alemany Community College
Center
750 Eddy Street
San Francisco, CA 94109

Or, if you prefer, send a cassette tape of your anecdote and I'll type it out myself. Maybe it's time to revive an oral tradition.

Judy E. Winn-Bell Olsen
(reprint from TESL Reporter
Winter, 1980)

Review of Language Tests at School

by John Oller, Jr.,
Longman 1979, 419 pp.

If you have been testing more and enjoying diminishing confidence in the results, then LANGUAGE TESTS AT SCHOOL by University of New Mexico linguist John Oller, Jr., may be for you. Published as part of an applied linguistic series by Longman, Oller's new book is a lengthy critique of common "discrete point" testing procedures and an argument for "pragmatic" — that is, communicative or language-in-context — testing and teaching. Cloze tests, dictation exercises, modified FSI-type interviews and essay writing all gain Oller's approval; the usual garden-variety multiple-choice tests do not.

Oller has put these points forward before, most notably in the valuable series on testing published by the Center for Applied Linguistics.* LANGUAGE TESTS AT SCHOOL is a deeper, more fully documented examination of language issues in language testing and education: bilingual education, foreign language instruction, even the relationship of IQ and language tests. Because of this broad scope, and also because the analysis is sometimes rather technical, the book should have an appeal outside the TSL community. Educators concerned with language arts, psychologists, measurement researchers and linguists, all will find something of value in the book.

However, readers will probably find plenty to argue about as well. This reviewer is in complete sympathy with

Oller's contention that testing must be a language processing act. Oller holds that for a language test to be valid, it must activate the testee's internalized "expectancy grammar," or competency. But I found his polemics against what he calls "discrete point" testing and teaching somewhat contrived. Pure behaviorism has indeed given way before the current Chomsky-inspired paradigm, but I think it is going too far to term the impact of Bloomfieldian linguistics on language teaching "debilitating" and unfortunate. This overlooks the greatest contribution of structuralism to language teaching, which was to put the profession on a scientific basis. It is, after all, teachers not methods per se, that fail in the classroom. Incidentally, despite all this, Oller still has a use for pattern practice — indeed, he favors it, but in a communicative context. Here, of course, no one can disagree.

These criticisms aside, LANGUAGE TESTS AT SCHOOL is an impressive roundup of language research. Oller's chapter on cloze tests is extremely interesting and revealing; research shows the procedure to be a robust measure of language competence. The bibliography is extensive (20 pages) and will be of great value to those who would want to pursue the issues at hand.

The book is far more than a "how-to" handbook. To be sure, the book does contain a detailed teacher-oriented section of "practical recommendations" for constructing and scoring pragmatic tests. Teachers and students of language methodology will welcome the neat summary of main points and provocative discussion questions that follow each chapter. But I think the book will be of most interest to language program administrators and researchers as a handy and stimulating guide to current work and issues in testing.

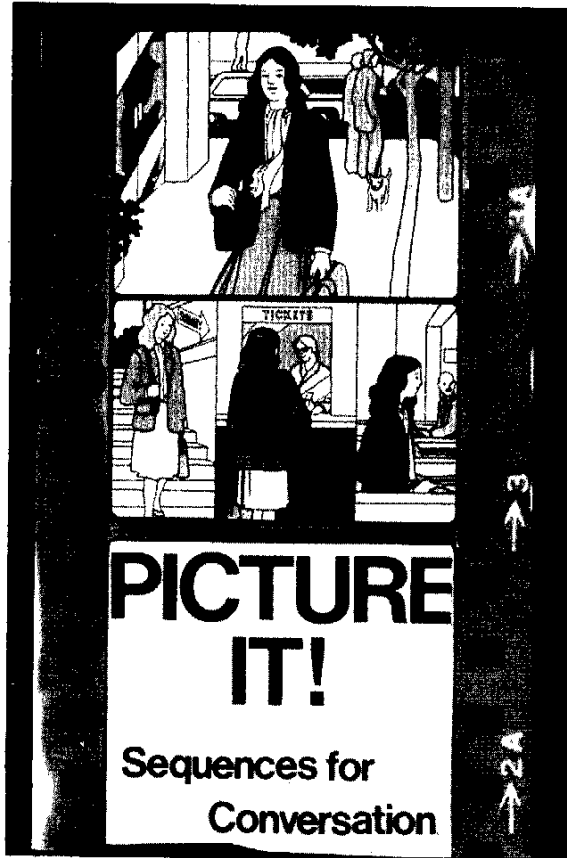
John Frankenstein
Northeastern University/
Grad Student at MIT

*See "Pragmatics and Language Testing" in Bernard Spolsky, ed., APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TESTING, Papers in Applied Linguistics, Advances in Language Testing Series: 2, C.A.L., 1978

Special Thanks

To Steve Molinsky for his wonderful piano playing which added so much to the congenial atmosphere of the MATSOL Winter Social.

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