



# MINNETESOL

Minnesota Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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## Editorial Policy

The *MinneTESOL Journal* seeks to publish articles of importance to the profession of English as a second language in the state of Minnesota. Articles in the following areas are considered for publication: (1) Instructional methods, techniques, and materials; (2) Research done in the context of the classroom with implications for ESL teachers; (3) Philosophical issues related to curriculum, program design, and the education of LEP students. Submit manuscripts to the Editor (Mark Landa, Program in ESL, 152 Klæber Court, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455).

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## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WAY A CHILD ACQUIRES A SECOND LANGUAGE ?

Elaine Tarone

A review of some of the central questions in the field of second-language acquisition research is presented, with special reference to what we know about the acquisition of second language by children. It is suggested that successful second-language acquisition, for the child, is a result of a combination of: 1) innate language ability, 2) experience with the first language, 3) adequate amount of exposure to the new language, and 4) communicative need for the new language.

People have been teaching foreign languages for thousands of years, and testing what they teach. But until about ten years ago, very little systematic research had been done to find out how second-language learners learn. That is, there was almost no systematic, detailed description of what learners learned first, what structures were difficult for them, what learning contexts were better than others, and so on. There were a few exceptions: most notably, Werner Leopold who kept painstaking notes on the language development of his young daughter, Hildegard, as she acquired both English and German at home. But this kind of study was very difficult until the advent of the tape recorder. Even then, it was not until about 1970 that serious, systematic research began on the process of second-language acquisition. As a result, although foreign languages have been taught for thousands of years, we still do not know very much about the way foreign languages are learned. And, in particular, even in the last ten years, there has been very little research on children acquiring a second language—and here I mean detailed, systematic recording of the child's speech in both languages, and an analysis of the patterns in that speech. We still know very little about the way children learn second languages.

This paper will review some of the central questions in the field of second-language acquisition research, with special reference to

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what we do know about the acquisition of second languages by children. I will try to be as clear as possible about what I believe we know, and what we don't know, in response to each question.

One of the most obvious questions has barely been addressed at all. This is the question of whether any of the different second-language education programs currently being used in our public schools—ESL, immersion, bilingual education programs of various sorts—is overall more successful than the others in promoting the acquisition of a new language, or the retention of the first language. The fact is that even after ten years of work, there are almost no studies which systematically, in detail, observe and compare the language development of children in different programs. There are of course a great many evaluations of programs being done, but these are in the form of tests of various kinds, and are not sufficiently detailed to tell us much about how the child acquires the new language or retains the first language. So I want to make it clear at the outset that, while I will be reviewing the results of several detailed studies describing the second-language development of children, I will not be able to cite detailed research which directly and specifically favors one type of language education program over another. Most of the detailed research which has been done to date has been done on language learning in "naturalistic" settings—that is, outside the school—or else it has been done within a single program and has not attempted any comparison between programs. One reason for this lack of comparative studies is methodological; preliminary evidence from testing programs indicates that a particular second-language education program may work well in one social and political context, and not in another. This makes the issue of comparison extremely complex.

In spite of these limitations, I believe that by reviewing the literature that does exist, we may gain some helpful insights into the nature of the task facing children in any program when they set about learning a second language. Indirectly, then, we will be able to suggest features which any successful second-language education program should contain.

The first question is, does bilingualism impair a child's cognitive functioning? The answer to this question is no.

Early studies, conducted in the twenties and thirties (see Hakuta 1980 for review), seemed to show that bilingual children performed worse on intelligence measures than monolingual children. It was argued on the basis of these studies, even up until the fifties, that bilingualism impaired children's intellectual development. However, it has since become clear that these early studies were flawed: they were often poorly designed, and used measures which favored the monolingual children. In 1962, Peal and Lambert conducted a now-famous study of 10-year-old Canadian children, which showed the opposite: bilingual children were much better than monolingual children on many verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests. They were par-

ticularly good on measures of cognitive flexibility. Since 1962, several studies have produced similar results: bilingual children seem to score systematically higher on measures of cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking, as well as on metalinguistic awareness—general awareness of language (Ben-Zeev 1977; Lambert 1977). Bilingual children do not score significantly lower than monolingual children on other intelligence measures. More studies need to be done to determine whether bilingualism actually causes cognitive flexibility (Hakuta 1980). But at least it is now clear that bilingualism does not impair the cognitive functioning of normal children—and there is strong evidence that it may in fact improve it. If it does turn out that bilingualism causes improved ability to function cognitively in certain areas, then it would seem that bilingualism would be a goal worth pursuing in our schools.

Second, what cognitive processes underlie a child's acquisition of a second language?

Does a child learn a second language by consciously memorizing the grammar rules of that language, conjugating, verbs and so on? Work by developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget would seem to indicate that young children are not cognitively ready to understand abstractions such as grammar rules until the stage of formal operations, which may occur at ages 10-12. In a very interesting study, Seliger (1979) interviewed young children who were correctly using the articles a/an in contexts like "a ball," "an elephant," "an eagle." When these children were asked to explain the rule for using a/an, they would give imaginative but inaccurate rules. For example, one child said: "Use a for things and an for live animals." When Seliger then asked why we say "an umbrella," the child responded, "Well, umbrellas move when they open and close and so we think they're alive." It would seem that children do not learn languages by consciously memorizing grammar rules.

Does a child learn a second language by habit formation: hearing a pattern over and over again, and practicing the same response over and over? Chomsky (1959) has convincingly argued that this cannot be the case for children learning their first language. For one thing, in normal conversation adults do not repeat the same pattern often enough. For another, children produce sentences they have never heard before. They seem to be born with an innate ability to learn language so that they can do a great deal with the language input they get. Theories of habit learning are simply inadequate to account for first-language acquisition. Dulay and Burt have argued (1973, 1974) that the same is true for children learning a second language. In fact, all the evidence we have thus far indicates that children bring the same innate language learning ability and the same creativity to the learning of a second language. They produce sentences they have never heard; they create their own rules and modify them over time. Their idiosyncratic rules may produce "errors" at first (just as two-

and three-year-olds produce "errors" in their first language, like "I played. I goed."), but their rules develop and change over time and these developmental errors eventually disappear. Studies of children learning a second language outside of any classroom show that these developmental errors disappear without any formal instruction or correction by those in the child's environment (see, for example, Hakuta 1974).

Spolsky (1979) sums up three factors that seem to be involved in a child's acquisition of a second language:

1. innate language ability
2. adequate amount of input
3. motivation

Children are born with the ability to learn languages. But they cannot learn without being exposed to a language; they need to hear a language over a significant period of time. And they must need to use the language communicatively; there must be some motivation to learn.

The answers to our second question lead inexorably to the third: does the child learn a second language exactly like the first? The answer at present seems to be—not exactly. There seem to be many similarities, but also some differences. One of the similarities we have already cited: that is, children do seem to use their innate ability to learn languages, create their own rules and modify them over time without formal instruction. In addition, studies by Hakuta (1974) and Wong-Fillmore (1976) show that children learning a second language, like first-language learners, seem to learn whole sentences and pieces of sentences and use them appropriately in conversations, without understanding the individual words: for example, "How do you do dis?" The difference is that second-language learners are older than first language learners, so their memory span is longer; it seems that children learning a second language are therefore able to use longer "prefabricated patterns" than children learning a first language (Hakuta 1980). Wong-Fillmore (1976) also showed that children learning a second language—like first-language learners, and indeed, like adults—tend to bluff quite a bit; in conversations with other children, they pretend they understand when they don't, and rely on memorized prefabricated patterns to maintain a social relationship with these children in the playground.

Though there are many similarities, second-language learning is different from first-language learning. For one thing, the child has already learned a language and is usually older and more cognitively developed. There is now increasing evidence that the child relies on knowledge of the first language to help in learning the new one (Keller-Cohen 1981, Selinker, Swain and Dumas 1975, Wode 1976). Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't. For example, Finnish children find it harder to learn question intonation in English than Swiss German or Japanese children, because English question intona-



tion is so different from the Finnish (Keller-Cohen 1981). Keller-Cohen (1981) suggests that children search for patterns of similarity between their first language and the new language, and so may find new and different patterns more difficult. So perhaps we need to modify Spolsky's formula and add to the child's innate language ability:

4. the child's knowledge of the native language.

In making hypotheses and forming rules for the new language, the child may at first use knowledge of the native language, and assume that the two languages are more similar than they really are. Certain errors may be due to such assumptions.

In addition to the fact that children learning a second language already know more about language, they also seem to be able to attempt more complex semantic relations in the second language, from the very beginning. Lightbown (1977) has shown that children learning a second language, from the very beginning, attempt to use intensifiers, *wh*-questions, and other relatively complex semantic relations, while the first language learner does not attempt these until much later.

Research is still going on with regard to question three. We still know very little about the similarities and differences in first- and second-language acquisition for children.

Another factor which has been considered in second-language acquisition research circles, which may be important in considering bilingual education of children, is question four: Is there an optimal age for learning a second language? And is there an age after which the innate capacity to learn languages no longer functions? There are several studies which examine age of initial exposure to the second language, and investigate the effect of this on various aspects of the learning of this language. Snow and Hofnaegel (1978) have found that older children learn the vocabulary, morphology, and grammar of the second language faster than younger children do. Ervin-Tripp (1974) and Fathman (1975) have also found older children learn morphology and grammar faster than younger children. The issue is not so clear on the learning of pronunciation; most researchers have found that younger learners do better at pronunciation (e.g. Fathman 1975), but others have not (see Hakuta 1980). There are conflicting results on age and second-language acquisition because it is difficult not to confound test-taking ability with actual language ability; older students are simply better at taking tests than younger ones. If these research results are accurate, however, they do contradict the common public assumption that young children are the best learners of foreign languages. We may make this assumption because, as Ervin-Tripp points out, we expect less of younger learners, so perhaps it is easier for them to astound us.

But is there an age where language-learning ability suddenly drops off? Aren't older children better at learning new languages than

adults? And if so, what is the magic age—the sensitive period—at which one's innate language-learning ability gives out?

There is, to my knowledge, no firm evidence indicating that there is a sudden drop-off in language-learning ability. Rather, there seem to be three gradual stages: the first from the earliest ages to about 12. It is this stage we have been describing. Then there is a sensitive period from about 12 to 16 when individuals seem to begin to learn second languages differently. And finally, there is the adult period—from about 16 on, when second-language learning becomes harder. Over the decade from 10 to 20 there seems to be a change for most learners in their ability to learn a foreign language and speak it like a native.

Scovel (1969) was the first to point out that adults may be able to eventually learn the grammar of a second language—but not the pronunciation. He called this the "Joseph Conrad phenomenon," in honor of the Polish-born novelist who attained great fame for his ability to write in English, his second language. Clearly Conrad's mastery of English grammar and rhetoric was impeccable—yet he retained a Polish accent to the end of his life. Conrad retained his accent, according to Scovel, because he had learned English as a second language after the sensitive period. In fact, Scovel claims, while there may be a very small number of exceptions, the vast majority of us find it impossible to learn a second language after puberty and speak it with absolutely no foreign accent. So it seems that those individuals are rare who are able to acquire a second language and speak it natively, when their first exposure to the language occurred after puberty. Something must happen to our innate capacity to learn languages at some time more or less between the ages of 12 and 16.

The question is, what? There are several possible explanations for such a sensitive period. Some of them fall into a general category of physiological explanations. For example, a popular explanation among second-language learners themselves seems to be that when learners get older their "tongues get stiff"—that is, the muscles and nerves of the tongue and mouth have been practicing the same set of pronunciation habits for years. This theory might maintain that the nerves and muscles necessary for the pronunciation of new second-language patterns have atrophied with age so that native-like pronunciation is impossible. I am aware of no research evidence that this sort of atrophy takes place. In fact, Neufeld (1977) has provided convincing evidence that it does not take place—that adult nerves and muscles are perfectly capable of producing the sounds of a new language in a native-like manner.

Another physiological explanation—and one originally supported by Scovel (1969)—suggests that "lateralization" (the completion of cerebral dominance) affects the learning of a second language. This view holds that when the left and right hemispheres of the brain

complete their process of specialization, the brain loses its capacity for second-language learning, and that this loss affects the pronunciation more than the grammar or vocabulary. However, Krashen (1975), and more recently, Scovel himself (personal communication), have raised questions about the lateralization hypothesis. There is some evidence that lateralization actually happens much earlier than the sensitive period does; lateralization may happen before the age of five, whereas it is clear that children do not reach the sensitive period until much later than that.

Another explanation points to a psychological cause of the sensitive period. Krashen (1975) maintains that the sensitive period is related to the onset of Piaget's stage of formal operations. In this stage of cognitive development, adolescents begin to consciously construct abstract theories about the world. They tend to abstract "rules of grammar" and consciously apply them instead of activating the same unconscious processes that children use in acquiring a second language. Trying to apply grammar rules consciously, according to this explanation, is actually counterproductive, as it interferes with the innate language-learning ability. While this explanation has much to recommend it, to my mind, it still does not explain the "Joseph Conrad phenomenon"—that is, the learner who acquires the grammar and vocabulary of the second language perfectly, but not the pronunciation. Why should formal operations affect only the pronunciation and not the grammar or vocabulary in cases like these?

A third type of explanation, supported by Schumann (1975) and others, focuses upon the emotional, or affective, factors which change from childhood to adulthood. Schumann cites work by Guiora et al (1972) which supports the idea that empathy is the crucial factor. Guiora attempted to artificially increase the empathy levels of adult second-language learners by administering gradually increasing amounts of alcohol. He found that the adult learners' pronunciation of the target language improved up to a certain point, and then, after 1½ oz of alcohol, rapidly deteriorated. Guiora feels that the pronunciation of a second language is a much more sensitive indicator of empathy than either grammar or vocabulary; pronunciation is used to indicate group membership, and a feeling of identity with the group. Since children have more fluid language ego boundaries than adults, children are much more likely to identify with speakers of a new language than are adults, who have more rigid language ego boundaries. Essentially, adults have decided on their cultural identity and use their "accent" to identify themselves appropriately. They essentially have no motivation to change their accent when it communicates perfectly well who they are. Schumann believes that affective, or emotional, factors are the factors determining the sensitive period, and ultimately determining success or failure in learning a second language. He has argued that social and psychologi-

cal distance from speakers of the new language is sufficient to cause failure in learning that language.

Schumann's claim leads us to question five: if it is true that motivation is very important in a child's acquisition of a second language, what exactly do we know about the role of motivation in this process?

In a series of studies in Canada, Gardner and Lambert (1972) attempted to establish that there are two types of motivation involved in learning a new language: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is motivation to belong to the group which speaks the language, or motivation to become close friends with speakers of the language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is motivation to learn the language in order to achieve some personal goal: to get a good grade or a good job, for example. The relationship between integrative and instrumental motivation is extremely complex\*—but the majority of Gardner and Lambert's findings indicate that integrative motivation leads to greater success in learning a second language. That is, in general, learners who want to become a part of the group that speaks the new language will be more successful than learners who want to get a good grade, or get a job by using the new language. (A few studies show that instrumental motivation can lead to as much success as integrative, but the majority of studies show that integrative motivation leads to greater success.)

These findings are very important for those of us interested in bilingual education. Guiora and Schumann argue that children are more empathetic than adults. Aren't they then more likely to have integrative motivation? If we want to produce truly bilingual students, then those students may need to belong to two culture groups rather than one, or at least want to empathize with members of both groups. One's motivation to learn a language (and to keep a language one has already learned) may be closely tied to one's motivation to belong to the group that speaks that language.

But are young children really aware of these choices when they learn a new language? How aware are they of the social function of language as a marker of group membership? The evidence thus far is that they are very aware, at a very early age, of the social uses of language. Leopold (1953) in a study of his daughter's bilingual development in English and German noted that she began to use the two languages appropriately between the ages of two and three to address adults who spoke only English or German. And Spolsky (1979) notes that more sophisticated sociolinguistic variation begins sometime after the age of five. Children seem to be aware that Language A is used by some individuals and Language B is used by others, and they

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\*Swain suggests (personal correspondence) that instrumental motivation may perhaps be best viewed as one type of integrative motivation.

learn very quickly to use the two languages appropriately. But the key to the problem of the child's choice to learn more than one language, and retain more than one language, seems to have to do with the communicative pressure in the society to use the two languages. The child will not use the language for which there is no communicative need. Edelsky and Hudelson (1980), in a very interesting study, observed Anglo and Mexican-American children in a bilingual education program in the Southwest. The aim of the program was to teach Spanish to the Anglo children and English to the Mexican-American children. All the children attended class together; some classes were taught in Spanish and some in English. But all the children used English. The reason was that during their school day they never needed to use Spanish. No one ever addressed them in Spanish, so there was no communicative need for it, and therefore no motivation to learn it. By the end of the period of observation, the Anglo children had learned very little Spanish, while the Mexican-American children had made great progress in learning English and were even anglicizing their own names. Edelsky and Hudelson concluded that the key to language learning here was the communicative pressure, or communicative need, for one language more than the other. The children had no motivation to use the language for which there was no communicative need—so they did not use it or learn it.

For children, the communicative need to speak, as opposed to listen, seems strongest in their interaction with other children. Payne (1976) has shown that when children move from one dialect region of the United States to another, as from New York to Philadelphia, they learn the dialect of the new area from other children, while their parents continue to speak the old dialect. (Interestingly, children more or less under the age of 12 learned the new dialect, while their brothers and sisters more or less older than 12 did not master it.) It seems that children learn from other children, perhaps because the communicative pressure is strongest from them. The strength of this communicative pressure from one's peers was stressed in a study by Peck (1980). She recorded the conversation of Angel and his Anglo friend, J., as they played together, and recorded the following exchange:

A. Only one piece (/piʃ/)

J. Only one /piʃ/ (four times) I can't stop!

A. This a old piece. Piece.

J. /piʃ/ /piʃ/ You like /piʃəz/?

(Peck 1980, p. 356)

J. is exerting very strong pressure on Angel to speak the way he does, using a kind of mockery which, while cruel, also seems to be extremely effective in urging the child to learn the new language and pronounce it the way J. does. The role of this kind of pressure from one's peers seems to be very important; but we need to know more about how it works, and what the effect is on a child's retention of the native language.

A very special kind of communicative need is operative in the Hmong community in the Twin Cities, as documented in a study by Downing and Dwyer (this volume). The Hmong community is very family-oriented and clan-oriented. In observing the activities of a Hmong family in the community, Downing and Dwyer found that the Hmong rarely went out into the English-speaking world individually, but rather went in a group. The family would go together, and generally would appoint one member—usually a child or young adolescent—to be the interpreter. As a result, these children have a great deal of communicative pressure to use both languages, while the adults do not. Not surprisingly, the children are learning English rapidly, while the adults are not. We would surmise that the children are also retaining Hmong since they need to use it, but we do not know.

The issue of motivation to use both languages would appear to be a crucial one to consider, then, in determining the degree to which the child will learn and retain both languages. The question of communicative pressure is obviously tied to the issue of input as well, since the child will not receive much input from a language for which there is no communicative need. The child must be around both languages a good deal of the time, and must have the need to communicate in both of them, before the innate capacity for learning language will operate.

To summarize, then, what do we know about the way children learn a second language? We are virtually assured that bilingualism does not impair a normal child's ability to function cognitively; there seems to be growing evidence, in fact, that bilingualism may enhance a child's cognitive flexibility. We believe, on the basis of growing research evidence, that the process of learning a second language, for the child, is a process of hypothesis-testing. This process is successful when the child's innate ability to learn languages joins with the child's knowledge of the native language, together with an adequate amount of input from the new language and motivation to use it in communication. This process is very similar to the process the child went through in acquiring the first language, though it differs in several ways. There is growing evidence that the best age to learn a second language with a native-like accent is before the sensitive period, which occurs sometime between 12 and 16. Researchers do not agree as to the cause of the sensitive period; physiological causes seem increasingly unlikely, but psychological and emotional causes remain to be explored. Finally, integrative motivation for the language, adequate opportunity for the use of the language, and communicative pressure to use it, seem to be of critical importance to children's acquisition of that language. Communicative need for both languages, together with integrative motivation for both, seem to be essential if the child is to acquire the second language and also retain the first language.

Successful second-language acquisition, for the child, is a result of a combination of:

1. innate language ability
2. experience with the first language
3. adequate amount of exposure to the new language
4. communicative need for the language to be learned

A successful bilingual education program cannot affect innate language ability, but it can provide the last three factors—and indeed, research to date indicates that it should.

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## HMONG REFUGEES IN AN AMERICAN CITY: A CASE STUDY IN LANGUAGE CONTACT

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The Hmong refugees from Laos are a largely preliterate tribal people who face major problems of adjustment to life in urban America. Most have low levels of education and speak no English on arrival. ESL teachers have tried to design appropriate curricula for the Hmong without having enough information about their communicative needs and their everyday uses of English. This study investigated the linguistic world of one representative Hmong family to learn what sorts of contact they have with English speakers and what goes on in those contacts. It was found that such contacts were very limited and that the adults actively and successfully avoided using English in many situations, often by allowing a child with good English skills to take the role of interpreter or spokesperson. Analysis of their English language interactions suggests that the communication strategies used by Hmong adults may be those that promote language learning least. In addition, a category of "communal" strategies, involving the selection of one fluent speaker to represent a group, must be recognized in analyzing second-language communication among groups such as the tightly-knit Hmong family. These findings may also suggest modification of assumptions and methods in ESL instruction for Hmong adults.

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## 1. Introduction\*

Since 1975, more than 10,000 Hmong refugees from Laos have taken up residence in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, out of more than 50,000 Hmong now in the United States.

In Laos life for the majority of these people involved slash-and-burn farming in remote mountain areas and a highly developed social system of family alliances, villages and clans, animistic religious beliefs, and an intricate artisanship in cut-work, embroidery, and silver. The Hmong population was decimated and their way of life disrupted by the wars in Laos. Most who have come to the United States have spent years in resettlement villages and the refugee camps in Thailand. When they arrived the majority of the refugees were illiterate. In addition, most had little or no familiarity with English or any other second language, and most are new to the experience of going to school.

Naturally communication between the Hmong refugees and the Americans assisting them in the resettlement process has been a serious problem. Both the resettlement agencies and the Hmong community leaders themselves have recognized that the most essential prerequisite for successful adaptation to life in America is the ability to communicate in English, even if only at an instrumental, survival level. But the task undertaken by teachers of English as a second language of providing formal instruction in English for them has been made especially difficult by several factors. One has been an inevitable mutual lack of understanding on the part of the American teachers and the Hmong students of the others' culture and mentality. A second problem is the refugees' unfamiliarity with classroom skills, and their illiteracy. Adding to this is the ESL teachers' initial lack of familiarity, training, and experience in meeting students' simultaneous needs for basic literacy and survival English. Faced with an immediate and pressing problem, it has been difficult for teachers to identify exactly what their students' immediate communicational needs are, although obviously an appropriate curriculum for "survival

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English" must be based on an understanding of the actual situations in which the learner is called upon to communicate in English and the nature and content of this communication.

In the study reported here, we have tried to address only this last problem. We have set out to find at least partial answers to the following questions: a) what are the language contact experiences<sup>1</sup> that Hmong refugees may have in the first year or two of their life in the United States, and b) what goes on in those interactions; in particular, how do they manage communication when their knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar, and usage is inadequate to the task? Section two addresses our first question, concerning the general nature of Hmong-American linguistic interactions. It is in effect a study in the ethnography of communication, although limited for the present to a single household and to cross-linguistic communications. Section Three is concerned with the second question, involving how the Hmong cope when communication demands exceed their ability to say what they want in English. We have here relied upon the categorization of "communication strategies" presented by Tarone (1978). Finally, in a concluding section, we will summarize our findings, make a few tentative observations and suggestions that may be useful to teachers working with Hmong adults on basic English skills, and note some possible directions for further research.

## 2. The Linguistic World of a Hmong Refugee Family

*2.1 Methodology:* Because we were aware of the tightly interwoven social system of the Hmong, in which value is placed upon the ability of the community to function effectively, in contrast to the Western emphasis on the individual, we felt that the question of language contact experiences had to be investigated at the level of the family or household unit rather than at that of the isolated individual. To keep this initial study to a manageable size, we decided, therefore, to focus on a single representative family in an effort to develop a fairly comprehensive understanding of this family's language abilities, experiences, and strategies of cross-cultural communication.

The first task was to try to find a family that was willing to cooperate with our study and that could be taken as representative of the recently arrived Hmong refugee population. We stipulated that the family should have come to the United States in the last two years and that all members of the family should be able to communicate to some extent in English. Through contacts with a member of a sponsoring church we were able to locate a family that satisfied

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper "language contact" will be used to mean cross-lingual interactions rather than to refer to the interaction of two languages within one speaker, as in the works of Uriel Wienreich, Dell Hymes, and others.

these requirements. Though somewhat puzzled by our interests and activities, the family members were initially receptive and later exceedingly friendly and cooperative.

Having selected the family and obtained their cooperation, we undertook to observe their English language encounters and their use of English to communicate. We visited their home and their ESL classes, talked with them ourselves, and observed them interacting with other Americans in a variety of situations. We accompanied them on several outings and observed a number of tutoring sessions and conversations with church members. Finally, we interviewed the family, various members of the local business community in contact with the Hmong, and several members of the sponsoring church for their perceptions of the problems of communication between Hmong and Americans.

These interviews and observations, carried out over a period of four months, have in most cases been recorded on cassette tape. The recordings have been transcribed and some portions translated by an able bilingual assistant, Vang Vang.

It should be obvious that even a fairly extensive case study can provide only very tentative answers to our general question concerning the range of language contact experiences of Hmong refugee families in America. We should note further that even this case study is not complete, since, for one thing, we have focused most of our attention on the parents and the family unit, giving little direct attention to the children as individual language users.

**2.2 Subjects:** The Vang family, as we shall call them, consists of a father and mother in their early forties and three children: an older girl, 17, a younger girl, 9, and a boy, 15. An older son is married and lives in another city. The given names we will use in referring to the individual family members (the "names" are actually kinship terms) are as follows:

Txiv	the father	age 45 (approximate)
Niam	the mother	age 40 (approximate)
Laus	daughter	age 17
Tus Tub	son	age 15
Ntxawm	daughter	age 9

The Vang family arrived in the United States in March of 1980, after five years in a refugee camp in Thailand. They came directly to Saint Paul, sponsored by a church congregation. The family lives on refugee assistance funds supplemented by contributions from the church and their married son. The church has looked after the family's immediate needs: living space, health problems, clothing, most transportation, and schooling. They were fortunate in getting the parents into regular English classes very soon after their arrival. The church members have also helped the family in such matters as banking, insurance, welfare, and leases, and they are now trying to

arrange jobs. In addition, church members have volunteered to provide tutoring in English in the home on an almost daily basis.

The family lives in one apartment of a quadruplex. The other apartments are also occupied by Hmong, with the grandfather and his wife in one, and cousins' families in the other two apartments. Individual apartments are rarely closed off, the entire building serving as more or less communal living space. The Vangs however have no friends, either Hmong or American, living in the immediate neighborhood outside of their building.

Neither parent can read or write Hmong or Laotian, and neither speaks Laotian to any extent. Vang Txiv, the father, speaks some Thai. He was a farmer most of his life, serving only for a brief time in the military. Vang Niam, his wife, is expert in Hmong stitchery and cooking; her responsibilities and activities would seem to have continued with much less change from the past than have those of other members of the family. The son, aged 15, speaks some Thai and some Laotian, and received lessons in English in the camp. His present language ability in English is by far the most advanced; he can serve moderately well as an interpreter in most situations, and he seems to be succeeding in his schoolwork at the ninth-grade level. Both sisters are exceedingly shy and were more difficult to approach directly, making it hard to assess their levels of understanding and fluency in English.

As has been mentioned, the family lives together with three other Hmong families. Additionally, much time is passed in visiting or receiving visits from other relatives. Social contacts with the American community are limited to those with members of the sponsoring church in the tutoring sessions and in dealing with questions about their family affairs. The adults do not seek out social contacts with the American community.

**2.3 Learning and Using English:** The adult English classes attended by the two parents have included classes in survival English. The emphasis in these classes is on the mastery of simple grammar points, pronunciation, and, at the level we observed, literacy skills. There are only limited opportunities to practice real, meaningful communication or to practice the coping skills necessary for handling situations where the communicative needs exceed the learner's command of English. The homework the Vangs now receive consists of written assignments including working basic arithmetic problems, answering questions about a story, copying a passage, or practicing a reading passage.

The tutoring sessions provided by volunteers from the church were generally limited to topics such as numbers, telling time, addition or subtraction of sums of money, naming things in picture books, practicing greetings, and practicing the alphabet and the spellings of familiar words. Some meaningful communication with the sponsors took place when the Americans tried to assist with household prob-

lems, although here the focus was on accomplishing the task and not on teaching the family how to cope with problems of communication.

Apart from the ESL classroom, the tutoring sessions in the home, and the children's attendance at public schools, we found the Vang's contacts with English speakers to be quite limited and to involve very little actual communication in English. The English language interactions that we either observed firsthand or learned something about secondhand are the following:

- 1) ESL classes for adults and public school programs for the children
- 2) Contacts with tutors in the home
- 3) Riding the bus to school
- 4) Banking (assisted by a church member)
- 5) Dealings with the landlord (usually assisted by a church member)
- 6) Shopping for food
- 7) Shopping for clothing and other commodities
- 8) Major purchases, such as a car, TV, or radio
- 9) Church: occasional services and social events and one incident involving communication about the death of a relative
- 10) Doctor's and dentist's appointments (assisted by a church member)

The types of situations we actually observed included 1) ESL classes for adults, 2) tutoring sessions, 6) shopping for food, 7) shopping for clothing and for fabrics, and 9) a situation in which relatives had gathered at a church following a relative's death.

We found that communication in English outside of the ESL class is minimal and is not always handled in the same way. Four principal means of communication could be distinguished, as follows.

First, in situations such as riding on the bus or shopping for groceries, almost no verbal communication took place. We should re-emphasize that the Vangs never initiated conversations in English and, in fact, actively avoided situations that might lead others to speak to them. Other Hmong have been observed hiding their faces on the buses, and storeowners told us that Hmong people shop very carefully but without requesting assistance. Unless there is a problem with a check, voucher, or food stamp purchase, they can and usually do check out without exchanging words with the cashier. Thus in many contact situations, spoken English is not essential for this initial level of survival, and the social contact experience does not necessarily provide a language experience.

Second, there are some situations such as banking or negotiating with the landlord in which an American sponsor takes charge, acting as a spokesperson or guardian. In these interactions, the difficult part of the communication is handled by the American with minimal verbal communication directed to the family members—chiefly the seeking and receiving of consent or verification.

The third type of interaction, to be discussed further in section 3, involves the selection of a member of the family or of the broader Hmong community to act as interpreter for an individual or a group. The person chosen is the one with the best command of English, usually a boy or young man. Thus, in many of our attempts to communicate with the older Vangs or in their negotiations with tutors, or in handling phone calls, or where problems arose requiring verbal communication while shopping, the son served as interpreter or, in some cases, as spokesperson.

Finally, and seemingly only where all other approaches failed (or where demands were minimal, as in returning a greeting), the individual adult communicated directly in English. This fact, while perhaps not surprising, is important in that it shows the extent to which adults can survive as residents in an English-speaking American community without English. It also reveals that, contrary to the expectations of many ESL teachers, the adult Hmong learner may have only the most limited experience with the English language outside of the classroom.

Keeping in mind these observations concerning the general English-language experience of a Hmong refugee family in an American city, we may now turn to the second focus of our study, concerning the specific strategies used to effect communication in English on the part of individuals with limited knowledge of English. We will look both at the parents' own use of English and at the pervasive strategy of using an interpreter or spokesperson for the family, which will suggest an extension of the notion of communication strategy developed by Tarone and others.

### 3. Communication Strategies

*3.1 The Framework of Analysis:* We are concerned here with the means used by a non-native speaker to achieve communication in the second language (English) when his or her mastery of the vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and discourse usages of the language is inadequate to the task. Tarone (1980, p.2) defines communication strategies as "mutual attempts of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. Communication strategies are seen as tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning, in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to what is meant."

As has been mentioned, we have chosen to use the conceptual framework proposed by Tarone, although different frameworks have been suggested by other researchers (see, for example, Faerch and Kaspar 1979, Bialystok and Frohlich 1980, and Palmberg 1979) to shed light on differing aspects of learner communication strategies.

Tarone specifies the following three criteria as prerequisites to an interaction being termed a communication strategy:

- 1) The speaker desires to communicate a meaning X
- 2) The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning X is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener
- 3) The speaker chooses to
  - a) avoid communicating X
  - b) attempt alternate means to communicate X. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning. (Tarone 1980)

The absence of one of the three criteria would mean for Tarone that the strategy should be called by some other name—such as learning strategy or production strategy (see Tarone 1980 for discussion). In essence, from the speaker's point of view, the main purpose for the interaction must be the desire to convey information—not to practice the use of some recently acquired structure or rehearsed speech in the target language, nor to try out a hypothesized structure with the purpose of learning more about the target language by finding out whether the hypothesis works or not.

Tarone (1980) divides communication strategies into five major types which are then further divided into sub-categories. These include:

Approximation	Appeal for Assistance
Word Coinage	Mime
Circumlocution	Avoidance
Transfer	

**3.2 Findings: Individual Strategies:** Figure 1 contains examples of our findings. For each example, the situation is described and the speakers involved. Zero ( $\emptyset$ ) means that there was no verbal response, and square brackets enclose descriptions of nonverbal gestures or our interpretations of the intent of a speaker's remarks. Each of the examples comes from one of the following situations:

Shopping in a fabric store. In the course of one of our visits with the Vangs, the son Tus Tub asked us to take his mother and two other women to buy material. The communication which took place involved our attempts to find out where they wanted to go and how to get there and, at the store, the efforts of the sales clerk to find out how much material each woman wanted and to convey how much that amount would cost.

Social visit in the Vang's home. Over the four months of the study, we visited the Vang home about once a week. At first we attended tutoring sessions, but later we came around just to talk and observe what happened. Several of the instances included in Figure 1 come from such informal conversations.



Figure 1

Conscious Communication Strategies (cf. Tarone 1978)

- (1) Avoidance
  - (a) Topic Avoidance
 

(Social: Sharon: Txiv, what were you doing just now?  
Txiv: [laughter] I don't know say.)

(Social: Txiv: Chia Thao and Cynthia coming . . .  
Bruce: Why did they come?  
Txiv: Chia Thao . . . I don't know say.)
  - (b) Message Abandonment: None
- (2) Paraphrase
  - (a) Approximation
 

(Social: Niam: Have many, many rain [i.e., there is a lot of rain there].)

(Social: Niam: I many, many chicken and rice [i.e., I eat chicken and rice a lot].)
  - (b) Word coinage: None
- (3) Conscious Transfer
  - (a) Literal Translation: None
  - (b) Language Switch
 

(Shopping: Salesperson: So, how much do you want of this [one kind of material]?)  
Cousin: [Stream of Hmong in which she says she wants the same amount as of the first type of material.] [Laughter])
- (4) Appeal for Assistance
 

(Shopping: Salesperson: How long have you been here?  
Niam: ∅ [Takes on preoccupied expression and acts slightly discomfited, finally looks at us to see if we will answer for her.]
- (5) Mime
 

(Social: Sharon: Niam, how do you do this? [make geometric patterns in cloth]  
Niam: ∅ [Fetches a piece of paper and demonstrates how the pattern is made.]

(Shopping: Sharon: So, what's good thread?  
Niam: ∅ [Demonstrates how a strong piece of thread can be unravelled.]

We found that the adults used only six types of communication strategies: topic avoidance, message abandonment, approximation, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime. In our data there were many examples of topic avoidance and mime, but only two examples of approximation and one each of language switch and appeal for assistance. The greatest reliance was on nonverbal means.

Although we have not analyzed all of our data on the son's inter-

actions, it seems that his communication strategies fall mostly into the verbal categories of approximation and literal translation, with only a few examples of mime and a few detectable examples of avoidance. He did not seem to employ any other types. This difference in communication strategies raises some interesting questions: Are certain strategies favored by certain age groups, or as we suspect, do the choices reflect the language proficiency of the learner? On the other hand, can the son use verbal communication strategies because he is more proficient in English, or is he more proficient because (among other things) he is more aggressive in using strategies which may promote his language learning?

**3.3 Communal Strategies:** Thus far, we have approached communication strategies only from the perspective of the individual speaker attempting to transfer a meaning. But we have already noted the frequent use of intermediaries as translators or spokespersons by the older Hmong adults in preference to direct communication in English on their own. By this means adults do get messages across, but rather than handling the linguistic formulation into English themselves or using some communication strategy as a substitute, they primarily rely on the individual with the best command of English to convey the message for the group. For example, storeowners and clerks have commented that the Hmong appear in large groups to do their shopping, with one person acting as a go-between for the entire group. When a family is shopping together, the parents select the items to be bought and the children take over at the check-out. While this last case may seem to violate normal role structures in the family, by elevating a young boy or girl to a position of responsibility, these two coping strategies are very much in tune with the general corporate kinship structure of the Hmong, which emphasizes the family and community unit over the individual.

To accommodate this observed community approach to communication, we have gone outside Tarone's framework to oppose to her individual strategies a category of communal communication strategies.

In Figure 2 we exemplify such strategies, mostly from situations in which the Vang's younger son, Tus Tub, served as interpreter for his parents or took upon himself the role of spokesman for his family.

Figure 2

### Communal Communication Strategies

#### (I) Use of an Interpreter

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| (Social: | Tus Tub acts as interpreter for individuals who were trying to relate some of their experiences in the war and information about their life in Laos.) |
| (Church: | Tus Tub acts as interpreter to relay information about the death of a relative.)  |

## (2) Use of a Spokesperson

## (a) For an individual

(Social: Tus Tub acts as a spokesman, relating the story of his father's life, in response to a question addressed to his father.)

(Shopping: [reported] An individual with experience takes charge of making a major purchase.)

(Social: The other adults in the same quadruplex with the Vangs have no English classes. Tus Tub requests that we find classes for them.)

The examples given above were drawn from three situations:

**Social:** In this instance, we were just getting to know the family. Our appearance one Sunday afternoon had led to the eventual gathering of a number of male relatives in the Vang living room. (It is still a mystery where they all came from and how they assembled so quickly.) We began asking them questions about their lives in Laos, the war, and their subsequent flights to Thailand. Most of our conversation was conducted via Tus Tub as interpreter. The tales began with Tus Tub relating his father's life story, although to our surprise he did not consult his father, who was sitting silently close by; Txiv himself did not participate. Our questions to others, however, and their subsequent replies were quite fully translated by Tus Tub. Only the questions directed to his father were answered directly by Tus Tub without consultation.

**Church:** On this occasion, we had arrived for our usual Sunday visit with the family only to find them seemingly a little less happy to see us. It turned out that one of their recently arrived relatives had died suddenly during the night. (It was the son who explained this.) We took Tus Tub and his father to the church where the widow and other relatives had assembled and offered our help. In this instance, Tus Tub acted as interpreter for his extended family.

**Shopping:** We did not directly observe a group represented by an individual engaged in a shopping transaction, but an interview with two assistant store managers provided considerable information, including the example cited above, of the problems and shopping practices of Hmong customers in a discount supermarket in the Vang's neighborhood.

From the viewpoint of the individual adult learner, the strategy of using an interpreter or spokesperson is a kind of avoidance, a strategy that cannot aid the individual's own linguistic development. But from the communal point of view, of course, it not only provides the best means of conveying and receiving messages but it also, we may note, maximizes the language experience of the community's best speakers, presumably helping them to develop their own knowledge and communication skills even further. It is difficult to say whether this benefit is a conscious consideration in the community's selection of this means of communication.

The use of translators or spokespersons in intercultural communication is certainly nothing new and may not be uniquely associated with the Hmong community among America's linguistic minorities. But there are three points to consider which make it a phenomenon worth noting and worth further examination. Translators or spokespersons are usually used by people who have no need or no time to learn a language, for whom the communication situation is temporary and single-purposed, as, for example, the completion of a business deal or agreement on a treaty, or a week's visit to Hungary on vacation. But it seems probable that the Hmong who have immigrated here will be staying, which leads to the expectation that most of them should be interested in learning enough English eventually to function independently. Of course, it is possible that the community as a whole might survive without making this assumption—communal strategies of survival communication might provide a way for the community as a whole to succeed in its new life even though some individuals might never learn to communicate in English well enough to survive alone. It has in fact been suggested to us by William Smalley (personal communication) that the communal strategies we have described may be simply a continuation of practices successfully employed for cross-linguistic communication by the Hmong communities in Laos and Thailand. In both countries, the Hmong were never really considered natives, having migrated south from China over the preceding hundred years or so and having settled in the remote highlands, largely isolated from the majority language and culture. The question now is whether practices which may have served well under those circumstances are appropriate for a Hmong community existing in the midst of an essentially monolingual Western technological society.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have examined some aspects of the interaction of one Hmong family with the English-speaking community to determine what sorts of language contact situations they encounter and what means they use to achieve communication in those situations. In the case reported here we find that English language use outside of the classroom is quite limited: the family we observed does not seek out, and sometimes actively avoids, situations requiring the use of English. Where communication with English speakers cannot be avoided, spokespersons or interpreters are usually employed, even though this role may elevate a younger member of the family to a position of prestige and authority. Only when this communal strategy of communication is not available do the parents attempt to communicate directly, and then the strategies they employ most are those which seem to promote language learning least. Thus the common assumption in second-language teaching that what is taught in the classroom

will be reinforced through outside language contacts, particularly the assumption that adult learners will necessarily make use of their "survival English," is called into question.

We can only speculate as to whether this situation differs from the general experience of refugees and immigrants of other language backgrounds with very limited knowledge of English. We feel that the Hmong practice may reflect not only a lack of appropriate language learning skills on the part of individuals but also a tradition of community isolation and self-sufficiency carried over from the Hmong experience as a geographically isolated minority in Laos and, before that, in China.

The fact that the Hmong can achieve a degree of accommodation to American life without universal mastery of basic English language skills raises some interesting questions regarding the process of assimilation. Does the use of communal communication strategies provide a valuable buffer against some of the shock of relocation within a radically different cultural setting? Assuming that the use of interpreters as an alternative to developing individual proficiency in English provides some relief from culture shock, what are the consequences with respect to achieving economic self-sufficiency? Can jobs be found in which Hmong workers can communicate with their employers (or their customers) through the services of a bilingual foreman or interpreter? Or must each Hmong adult be expected to strive for linguistic independence through mastery of English as a prerequisite for employment?

These broad questions of resettlement policy are obviously very difficult to answer, and yet they are crucial to the English language teachers' decisions about what approach to take in the first stages of language instruction for refugee adults. Since we do not know the answers (and because our own investigation is too limited to support any broad generalizations), we hesitate to offer any suggestions for teachers. Teachers may, however, want to reconsider "survival English" as a matter involving the family or a group in some cases rather than just the individual. The teacher can choose to recognize, support, and even practice in class the process of communication through an interpreter. On the other hand, the teacher may wish to find ways to encourage and develop individual self-reliance in communication and practice in using English for genuine communication outside the classroom. In any case, the teacher will want to investigate in some way the nature of the language contact experiences of her own students.

Before we can be confident about the validity of generalizations from this case study to the broader Hmong community, much additional research is needed. We have not studied relations of children with their English-speaking peers, and we need to know more about how both amateur and professional interpreters manage the process of translation. Of course, a much larger population needs to be

studied, including older adults, adults without children old enough to translate, and less isolated families. The process of communication among employees and between employees and employers has also not been studied.

With additional data, a number of interesting questions can be addressed. To what extent does avoidance of direct communication or the choice of communication strategies reflect learners' confidence in their own linguistic abilities and attitudes toward the majority culture? To what extent does the use of individual or communal communication strategies reflect the educational level and cultural traditions of particular refugee groups? And, from a practical viewpoint, how do attitudes toward communication and strategies of communication in the majority language affect the psychological, economic and cultural adjustment of refugees to the realities of life in this new land?

#### ADDENDUM

Naturally, in the year since this study was completed, things have changed some for the Vang family. They are no longer in the same apartment, although they are still surrounded by Hmong neighbors in their new place. Txiv now has full-time employment as an unskilled laborer. The church continues to help him in his communication with the management. Niam works part-time for a member of the church. They now have a couple of locations where they can raise vegetables in the summer. All three of the children seem to be succeeding in school. Tus Tub continues to integrate more thoroughly with the English-speaking community than either his sisters or his parents. The adult Vangs spend most of their free time with Hmong relatives and neighbors. The language skills of the parents have improved, although this improvement has been slow and their production is marked by fossilized errors. Tus Tub's speaking skill in English is now near-native. The two daughters are still much more shy about speaking than their brother, but seem generally to have improved.

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**DESIGNING AN ESL PROGRAM  
FOR THE PRELITERATE INDOCHINESE ADULT:  
AN ACCOUNT OF ONE PROGRAM'S DEVELOPMENT**

Ellen Vaut

This article describes the development of an adult ESL program for preliterate Indochinese refugees. Although the teachers in the program had training and experience in ESL, a great deal of creativity and flexibility was required of them. In view of the students' needs, special testing and record-keeping procedures were adopted for placing them into appropriate groups and tracking their progress. A curriculum that drew upon the students' real language experiences and needs was gradually established. A component for developing literacy skills at four levels became an integral part of the program. The presence of a bilingual Hmong teacher made it possible to include special presentations, guest speakers, literacy classes in the native language and math classes.

In the mid-seventies ESL classes in the Twin Cities began to include Indochinese refugees who had been resettled in the area. Most of these early refugee arrivals were quite well-educated and had at least some rudimentary English proficiency picked up from their association with American personnel during the war. Therefore, they could be integrated with relative ease into existing ESL programs. By 1978, however, a change was seen in the type of refugees needing English classes. Many of the newcomers were less educated and generally less sophisticated in the ways of the West. They had little or no previous experience with English and were often illiterate in their first language.

Earlier refugee groups had included Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao and Hmong. In the late seventies more and more Hmong refugees were represented in the arriving groups. These were the family members of that first group of Hmong. Many of them had been soldiers in General Vang Pao's Hmong army. Otherwise, their backgrounds were

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Ellen Vaut has been the coordinator of the special program for preliterate Indochinese adults since September, 1979. The program is under the auspices of the International Institute of Minnesota.



rural, with farming the main occupation. There were some smiths, tailors and carpenters among them, but basically the skills that they had were not easily transferable to their new communities. Yet they needed language to survive and, with their arrival, English as a second language became a vital step in the resettlement process.

The years 1978-81 were really a boom time for ESL teachers. In fact, many people were attracted to the field through working with refugees as sponsors, as tutors, or in the public schools. The arrival of the preliterate refugees opened a whole new area to those of us used to teaching university students. Suddenly we were faced with a classroom of people who had a lot of other needs besides learning English, and the kind of English they required was not the kind we were used to teaching. Terms such as "survival English" and "coping skills" became a part of our vocabulary.

### 1. Preliminary Considerations

In September of 1979 a group of teachers that I was coordinating was asked to start a program under the International Institute of Minnesota at First Christian Church in St. Paul. Our two main goals were to develop a curriculum based on the immediate oral language needs of our students, and to teach literacy skills. Students who completed our program successfully would then go into text-based classes at the International Institute of Minnesota, which had a broader curriculum and a more diverse student body. Our courses lasted seven weeks, so we estimated that most students would make the transfer in approximately four to six months. As time passed and we got to know our students better, we realized that it was impossible to set a time limit on a student's advancement to book readiness. The simple reason was that about a quarter of the students never did make it to this level. Because we did not want to make reading ability the one measure of success or failure of the students in the program, we found ourselves creating more specialized classes in oral development. We also found it necessary to limit the time that students could remain in the program, in part because of the long waiting list.

We soon found that learning abilities, rates, and styles among our students varied widely. In particular, we learned a lot about the effects of war and displacement, and how resettlement brought a whole new set of problems to offset the comforts of survival and peace. Some of our students took a full session to become fully aware of their environment. A few seemed permanently dazed. Yet all showed remarkable staying power: with few exceptions, attendance was excellent. Even women who had given birth the week before turned up in class. Our program served so many needs besides teaching English: the church offered the students a place to go, away from the cares of home; it was possible to get to know some Americans (who quickly became Hmong advocates) in a non-threatening atmo-

sphere; the halls of the church could serve as a place of social and commercial gatherings as students met to discuss the latest news or material from Thailand. It was important for us to recognize these other areas of the students' lives in order to develop as humanistic a program as possible.

Developing a curriculum that would address the particular language needs of this group of refugees was a real challenge for us. Although we all had training and/or considerable experience in teaching ESL, we had never been faced with this particular kind of student. We quickly discovered that the key to designing a successful curriculum was cooperation and flexibility. We had a common need for good teaching ideas and materials, and we had common problems. We had a common stake in the eventual success or failure of the program too. Perhaps for this reason, the teachers were willing to put in extra hours developing materials and attending evening curriculum meetings. By the time the First Christian Church program closed, the staff had produced a student workbook with an instructor's guide, a "pre-book" curriculum and an impressive array of teacher-made materials.

The remainder of this article describes in more detail certain elements of the program, in particular evaluation and placement procedures, curriculum content, the literacy factor and cultural orientation. Before going on, it is important to point out one of the major difficulties of the development of a program like those that exist for the refugees. The people who fund the program, the students the program serves, and the community in which they live all will have expectations of the outcome of the program. These expectations may differ and they may not always reflect reality in terms of what the ESL teacher can accomplish. It is best to confront these expectations from the outset by communicating with everyone concerned about the program and its goals and limitations.

## 2. Evaluation and Placement

Testing and placing the preliterate student was not a skill that I started out with at First Christian Church. I soon discovered that much of what I needed to know about the student's ability and potential could be gleaned from the registration process. Very often, English-speaking relatives would accompany the applicant to help out. A certain amount of testing needed to be done in the first language for me to accurately judge the ease with which students would be able to transfer their experience into English. For example, if students could not tell time according to a clock, it was clear that they would have a great deal of difficulty when presented with this skill in English. Not only would the language be new, but also the skill. On the other hand, reading a clock in Hmong is quite similar to reading a clock in English, so students who already had this ability

probably would not have too many problems translating their skills into English.

At the time, there were no commercial tests that were suitable for testing the pre-book levels, so we developed our own informal testing procedure. While filling out the registration card, we would ask common questions (What is your name? Are you married?) to which the students were likely to know the answers. During this time, we could tell quite a bit about the students' potential learning styles, which would affect our decision on how to group them. An applicant who was passive and withdrawn in the interview was likely to be a passive, withdrawn student in the beginning. However, appearances can be deceiving, and sometimes an unresponsive applicant turned into a lively and talented student once in the classroom situation. This is one reason why it was so important for the teaching staff to be flexible, especially during the first week or two of the session when it was sometimes necessary to regroup the classes.

Registering and testing a student took anywhere from ten to thirty minutes, depending on the level of the applicant. After filling out the registration card, we asked accompanying relatives not to translate any more so that we could test the applicant's knowledge of English. We began by having the student identify common objects (pen, book, chair). Even if the student could not respond, we asked several more questions to be sure that the student demonstrated no skill in English. Quite often, I found that the people accompanying the student were quick to say that the student knew nothing. For our purposes, however, any skill at all had meaning.

The sequence of the test questions, including the registration interview, is found in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Registration Interview Questions

- 1) What's your name?
- 2) What's your address?
- 3) What is it? (indicating pen, book, chair)
- 4) What color is it?
- 5) Where is the \_\_\_\_\_?
- 6) What is it? (indicating two-dimensional representation of common objects, food, clothing)
- 7) How many \_\_\_\_\_ do you see?
- 8) What is it? (indicating the letter A and proceeding in order, then randomly, both upper and lower case)
- 9) (Same as above using numbers.)
- 10) What time is it? (indicating clock on the hour, then half hour, then random time.)
- 11) Write your name.
- 12) Write your address.
- 13) What is it? (indicating a handprinted word such as name, pen, book)
- 14) (The student is asked to read a short sentence, handprinted.)
- 15) (Same as above using printed material.)

Students who could complete this entire test were transferred to the ESL program at the International Institute to join a text-based class. Students who remained in the First Christian Church program demonstrated ability anywhere between no response to twelve or thirteen responses. The program consisted of four pre-book levels with fast, moderate, and slow classes to accommodate different rates of learning.

Once the students were in a class, it was necessary to assess their progress at the end of every session. Because formal testing in class was difficult under the circumstances, the teachers devised a system of keeping track of the individual student's progress as it was demonstrated during regular classroom activities. The checklist (Figure 2 is a sample) was one efficient way of measuring the student's mastery of material.

Figure 2

<u>Sample Checklist</u>  (ac) aural comprehension (op) oral production (rc) reading comprehension (wp) written production	Her, Mai	Xiong, Xoua	Yang, Lia	Vang, Ying	Vang, Yer	Lee, Chou
(ac) Directions						
(ac/op) Name						
(ac/op) Address						
(rc/wp) Name/Address						
(ac/op) Common Objects						
(ac/op) Numbers -25 & Plural						
(rc/wp) Numbers -25						
(ac/op) Time on hour						
(ac/op) Verbs (get up, go, eat, drink)						
(ac/op) Verbs & Time						
(ac/op) Family: husband, wife, child(ren)						
(ac/op) S/he & verbs						
(ac/op) Money - 25¢						
(rc/wp) Food items						
(ac/op) Verbs (like, buy, cook)						
(ac/op) "How much is it?"						
(ac/op) Numbers - 100						

Some teachers maintained a checklist mounted on the classroom wall and therefore visible to the class. The students could then gauge their progress by the checks beside their names. In so doing, they were made aware that progress was expected and that the simple act of coming to class every day was not enough.

In addition to rating the students in comparison with the rest of the class, we had to compare class groups in order to know where to move students next. This was done by my observing every class during the latter part of every session. I was interested in several things: where the class was in the curriculum for the level, what sort of learners the students were in general and individually, and how they had been taught during the session. After my observation, the teacher and I would confer about regrouping the students as they continued to the next level or repeated. Neither the teacher's judgment nor mine alone would have been sufficient in the assessment process.

### 3. Curriculum Development

I have previously described teacher and student backgrounds in order to put the task of developing a suitable curriculum in its proper perspective. For one thing, it was not possible to depend on what we had learned in school or previous experiences to guide us. Our present group of students was unique. So, to discover their language needs, we tried to look at the resettlement process through their eyes. Sponsors, friends, welfare workers, even bus drivers were helpful in this endeavor.

First, we compiled a list of priority vocabulary words. We then inserted them in simple grammatical patterns which were of immediate use to the students. To do this, we had to learn as much as we could about the students' living situations and daily routines. We also had to take into account what their potential lifestyles in the community would be: would they work outside of the home or be homemakers? Few of the students in our program would be eligible for further training at the vocational level. We therefore had to imagine what sort of jobs the workers would get.

The vocabulary that we compiled was categorized in the following themes: personal information, classroom objects (including colors and numbers), daily activities, home and family, food and shopping (including money), and health (including body parts, clothing and common ailments). At the lowest level, we asked students to concentrate on mastering a core vocabulary. Grammar points were presented in context but mastery was not expected. In the subsequent levels, we could use a familiar vocabulary to teach more grammatical language use as well as literacy skills.

Over the months that we worked with our students, there was a great deal of experimenting with the curriculum. This is another

advantage of having a flexible staff. The teachers were always willing to try, and in fact actively sought, new ideas. They learned to capitalize on any occasion that brought real language into the classroom: a visit from a meter reader, a lost bus card, a mugging. Even the lowest level student would retain a word that was important to his or her particular situation. With higher level students, experience stories worked very well. Because these situations were of such interest to the students, we developed a series of dialogues that would enable the students to get out in the community and practice their English.

Methodology was one area where the teachers were left on their own. Although everyone used variations on the audio-lingual approach, we all had our own styles. Some teachers used many more visual aids than others. Some incorporated more formal drilling into their lessons than others. All shared their experiences and were willing to hear about others' and learn from them. For example, some teachers put a great deal of emphasis on developing active listening skills from the very beginning. Over the course of time, all of the teachers agreed on using certain listening exercises. Another time, we experimented with the Silent Way. It was not an effective method for us because it demanded active participation and our students were essentially passive learners. For this reason, we could not use other creative methods that we knew.

#### 4. Teaching Reading

Teaching literacy skills in a second language is quite different from teaching a native speaker to read. Our students were missing the oral ability that the native speaker has. Although they were eager to learn to read and write, our students needed aural/oral skills first. We would present the written word only after it was learned orally. However, even Level 1 students required some immediate literacy skills, and in this we did not hold back. The sequence of literacy skill development in our program generally followed this pattern:

- Level 1: The ability to read and write the name and address, the letters of the alphabet and numbers 1-30, and some key words such as name, address, city, state, which were useful in filling out welfare forms.
- Level 2: The ability to read and copy sight words which were learned orally. At this level, we began to work on initial consonant sound recognition.
- Level 3: The ability to recognize initial and final consonants, digraphs and blends, and a familiarization with vowels. The extent of phonics work depended on the students.

Level 4: More phonics work and a transition from handwritten words to print in preparation for using a book.

Again, we had to be flexible in our presentation of literacy skills. Not every Level 2 class was ready for consonant sound recognition, and not every teacher taught it the same way.

As with oral language, we found the key to retention was repetition and actual manipulation of words by the students. To this end, we relied on pocket charts a great deal. A pocket chart is a surface area with pockets or slots in which word cards or sentence strips can be displayed and manipulated. By organizing corresponding sight word cards and pictures into thematic kits, we created a small library of teaching materials that could be shared or duplicated for all the teachers. We also made specialized pocket charts for furniture in a house, family members, and a supermarket. The pocket chart and sight word cards enable the student to view the entire word without waiting for it to be written on the chalkboard. This is not only time-saving, but it helps students to learn the word as they would a picture, with an association with the meaning. (You can make a pocket chart using tag board, poster board strips and mystic tape.)

Teaching literacy skills was one of the goals of our program, and most of our students expressed a strong desire to learn to read and write. However, it soon became clear to us that not all of our students would achieve a degree of literacy that would permit them to follow a text-based class. In estimating their probable literacy needs, we decided to concentrate on reading prices, time, survival words such as stop, exit, and danger, and some key personal information words. So, in developing the literacy portion of our curriculum, we needed to know not only how to teach reading but to what extent to teach it.

## 5. Cultural Orientation

Most ESL classes incorporate cultural aspects of the language to help students better understand the society in which the language is used. In our case, our students were desperate for cultural information, yet they had minimal language ability with which to understand it. While everything we did related in one way or another to their eventual acculturation to American society, we felt a strong need for bilingual help which we did not have for the first nine months of the program. In the summer of 1980, we were able to hire a Hmong teacher to assist us. His presence enabled us to add a new dimension to our program. Some of the additions were not as successful or practical as others, yet all served to enrich our students' experience.

*5.1 Weekly Cultural Presentations:* For our students to really understand the vocabulary and information included in our curriculum, we organized weekly presentations of cultural information to be given in



the students' first language. These sessions preceded language lessons which would deal with the same themes. For example, before presenting the unit on the family, we explained the American conception of the word family and compared it to the Indochinese family as our students explained it. A discussion of clothing included information on where to find free or inexpensive clothing and what was appropriate dress in specific situations. Money was a favorite topic, as was food. Each session gave us the chance to clear up misconceptions on the part of our students, and we learned a great deal more about their cultures and therefore their adjustment difficulties to ours.

*5.2 Extracurricular Presentations and Guest Speakers:* In addition to the cultural information sessions, we chose different topics, which were not necessarily covered in the curriculum, to be presented once a week after classes were over. These talks were given by members of the staff or by guest speakers representing various sectors of the community with which the students might be required to deal. The large student turnout proved the interest they had in better understanding their new society, yet not all of the sessions were as successful as we had hoped. For example, a representative of the Metropolitan Transit Commission came in to speak about taking the bus. She concentrated on how to read a bus schedule. The students wanted to know how to protect themselves on the more dangerous lines. However, they dutifully accepted the schedules she passed out and used them as fans. In another instance, a police officer emphasized the importance of a victim's being able to describe the perpetrator of a crime. He asked the students to practice by describing him. The students replied that all Americans looked the same to them. The officer went away a little less sure of himself than when he had arrived.

Three very successful sessions were a talk on immigration to this country by one of our teachers, a visit by a lawyer, and a series of presentations by the Ramsey County Nursing Service. These sessions were perhaps better presented to the students because the speakers were more familiar with the Indochinese and could appreciate the concerns and questions that they would raise. Even so, the less successful speakers learned quite a bit about the Indochinese community from their encounter with the students, and in this respect also, the sessions were useful.

## 6. Additional Components

*6.1 Hmong Literacy Classes:* Our Hmong assistant had been trained as a teacher in Laos and had a good knowledge of his own language, so we decided to experiment with some Hmong literacy classes. Obviously, it is desirable to become literate in one's own language before attempting to read and write a second language. We felt that learning more about Hmong would help motivate our slower students to learn

English. Although the classes were well attended and interesting to the students, we never had a chance to formally test the outcome. In order to be most effective, Hmong lessons should have preceded English lessons, yet time and funding were prohibitive factors. Also, our Hmong teacher was only able to work with us during the summer session. Subsequent Hmong assistants were not able to carry on the Hmong language lessons, so they were dropped from the program.

*6.2 Math Classes:* As with the Hmong classes, our math classes depended on the ability of the teacher and his command of the subject. We offered these classes in addition to the math in the curriculum because of the strong interest on the part of certain students. However, there were many problems involved with running successful math classes. In every class, a wide variety of abilities was represented so the teacher had to be prepared to present several levels of problems. This entailed a good bit of materials development and lesson planning. In one group the teacher might spend time explaining the concept of subtraction by using beans, then proceed to another group to explain the concepts of carrying or borrowing. A third group worked on multiplication problems. One excellent feature of these classes was the way in which advanced students became tutors to slower students, learning the importance of showing others how to do something themselves rather than always having things done for them.

This paper has described the development of one ESL program for preliterate Indochinese refugees for the purpose of sharing what was learned from the experience with others in the field of ESL and with future ESL teachers. I hope that this account of our experience will encourage future program developers faced with similar challenges.

## A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORK IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Jeanette K. Gundel

Language teachers are becoming increasingly interested in having their students achieve communicative competence. Assumptions about what constitutes communicative competence are based on research in discourse analysis. This five-part bibliography is divided into a general overview section, a section on linguistics pragmatics, a section on the structure of conversation, one on second-language acquisition, and a concluding section on applications in the classroom.

The goals of most language teachers today go beyond the teaching of grammatical competence—the knowledge underlying a speaker's ability to produce and understand grammatical sentences in a language—to communicative competence—the ability to use such sentences appropriately in a given linguistic and social context. A good language teacher thus needs to be aware not only of the grammatical rules of the target language but also of the rules for using the language appropriately in different discourse contexts. Such rules, like the rules of syntax and phonology, differ from one language to another.

Just as assumptions about what students must learn to achieve grammatical competence are based on research in the syntax and phonology of a given language, assumptions about what must be learned to achieve communicative competence are based on research in discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a somewhat loose label for any investigation of language whose domain goes beyond the single sentence. (It is not, as some might think, the latest linguistic theory, replacing transformational grammar or one of its competitors.) The bibliography below is intended to give ESL teachers an overview of the kinds of questions that discourse analysts are asking and possible applications that answers to these questions might have for the ESL classroom. The bibliography is far from exhaustive; it includes only those works which directly address implications of various aspects of discourse analysis for ESL and EFL teaching and learning.

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The bibliography is divided into five parts. Part I includes general overview papers on discourse analysis and its relation to language teaching. It also includes one introductory text, Coulthard's An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. This is not the only (or the most recent) book-length introduction to discourse analysis. It is, however, the one which is probably most useful for ESL teachers because of its focus on applications to foreign language teaching.

Part II is titled Linguistic Pragmatics. Pragmatics may be defined as that field of linguistic inquiry which is concerned with the relation between sentences and the context in which they are used (context here being broadly defined to include speaker, addressee, preceding and following sentences, etc.). Unlike the term discourse analysis, which refers to any investigation of discourse regardless of whether the goal is to understand language or some other form of human behavior such as social structure or psychology, the term linguistic pragmatics generally refers only to studies which have the primary goal of contributing to our understanding of human language. The works in this section fall into two basic groups—those which investigate the relation between discourse context and different grammatical structures (e.g. active vs. passive) and those which are concerned with the kinds of speech acts (e.g. apologizing, asserting, requesting, etc.) that can be appropriately performed with different sentence structures across languages.

Part III, The Structure of Conversation, includes investigations of the structure of units larger than the single sentence. Most of the articles in this part are concerned with the way in which conversations between native and non-native speakers are structured and the effect that aspects of that structure have on communication between members of the two groups.

The papers in Part IV, Second-Language Acquisition, are all concerned with contributions that discourse analysis can make to our understanding of the language learning process. Some of these, like the paper by Michael Long, discuss possible effects of native speaker discourse input on second language learning. Others, like the paper by Thom Huebner, attempt to explain learners' errors in the second language on the basis of discourse-related grammatical features of their first language.

Part V, Classroom Applications, contains work whose primary objective is to make specific recommendations for application of discourse analysis to language teaching and learning.

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# Reference and Resource

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by Jean D'Arcy Maculaitis  
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