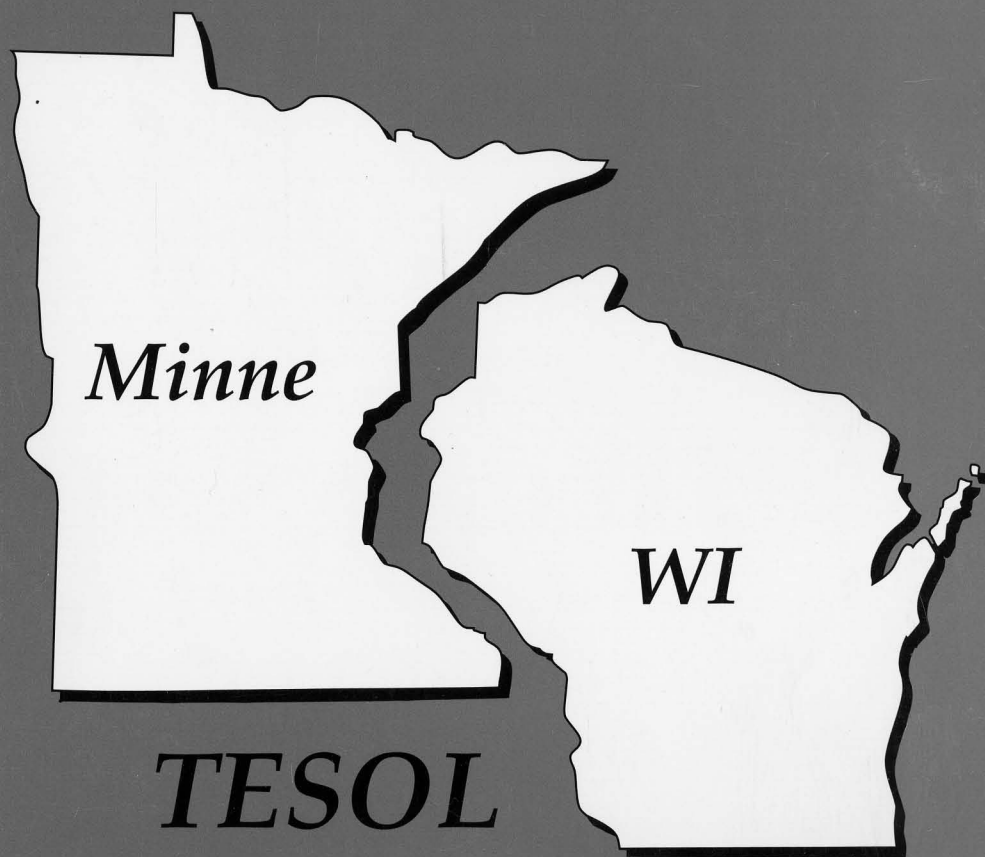


Minnesota and Wisconsin  
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

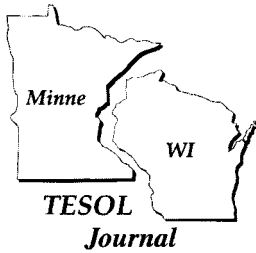


**TESOL**

*Journal*

Volume 19

2002



Volume 19, 2002

---

*A Journal for Minnesota and Wisconsin Teachers of English  
to Speakers of Other Languages*

*Co-Editors*

**Susan Gillette**, University of MN-Twin Cities

**Randall Gwin**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College

**Don Hones**, University of WI-Oshkosh

*Editorial Advisory Board*

**Mark Balhorn**

University of WI-Madison

**Scott Johnston**

Carroll College

**Tim Boals**

WI Dept. of Public Instruction

**Ava McCall**

University of WI-Oshkosh

**James Dillon**

Winnebago County Literacy Coalition University of MN-Twin Cities

**Robin Murie**

**Tina Edstam**

Mankato State University

**Tom Richards**

University of WI-Superior

**Judith Gerhardt**

New London School District

**Suellen Rundquist**

St. Cloud State University

**Kari Useldorf**

Winnebago County Literacy Coalition

Grateful thanks is given to Jennifer Daniel and Salvador Rocha for their technical support.

MINNETESOL BOARD AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS, 2002

*President*

**Leigh Schleicher**  
MN Dept. of Children, Families,  
and Learning

*First Vice-President*

**Denise Harlos**  
Shakopee Schools

*Past President*

**Dawn Reilley**  
Minneapolis Public Schools

*Second Vice-President*

**John Neumann**  
Robbinsdale Area Schools

*Treasurer*

**Patsy Vinogradov**  
Lao Family English School

*Secretary*

**Mary Warpeha**  
San Miguel Middle School

*Membership Director*

**Ann Leake**  
University of MN-Twin Cities

*Website Coordinator*

**Peter Rogan**  
*Socio-Political Concerns*

**Kathryn Heinze**  
Hamline University

*Regional Liaison*

**Woody Zieman**  
Sleepy Eye Public Schools

*Resource Center*

**Joy Brown**  
Anoka-Hennepin District 11

*Newsletter Co-editors*

**Natasha Fleischman**  
St. Paul Public Schools

**Nancy Hellerud**  
Hamline University

**Francine Parling**  
St. Paul Public Schools

*Adult Interest Section Chair*

**Carlos Garcia-Velez**  
St. Paul Public Schools

**Virginia Ferlet**  
St. Paul Public Schools

*College Interest Section Co-chairs*

**Alicia Andre**  
Minneapolis Community and  
Technical College

**Laura Jahnke**  
Minneapolis Community and  
Technical College

*Secondary Interest Section Co-Chairs*

**Marie LaPlant**  
Monticello Public Schools

**Anne Lawrence**  
North Branch Public Schools

*Elementary Interest Section Chair*

**Anne Rogan**  
St. Paul Public Schools

**Membership in MinneTESOL**

Contact the Membership Secretary, MinneTESOL, P.O. Box 141072,  
Minneapolis, MN 55414.

<http://www.users.uswest.net/~lindaleb/>

**WITESOL BOARD AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS, 2002**

*President*

**Florina Ackley**  
Wausau School District

*President-Elect*

**Sheryl Slocum**  
Wausau School District

*Past President Pro Tem & Membership*

*Secretary*

**Jami Hanreddy**  
University of WI-Milwaukee

*Treasurer*

**M. Maureen Garry**  
Milwaukee Area Technical  
College

*Secretary*

**Amy Grisk**  
University of WI-Milwaukee

*Newsletter Editor*

**Hugh Bishop**  
University of WI-Madison

*Members-At-Large*

**Elizabeth Cicero**  
Green Bay School District

**Kathy Moulton**  
University of WI-Milwaukee

**Michelle Tyvoll**  
University of WI-LaCrosse

**Kate Reynolds**  
University of WI-Eau Claire

**Kathleen Webb**  
Horace Mann Middle School

**Keith Wakeman**  
Manitowoc School District

**Membership in WITESOL**

Contact Peter Lee, Membership Secretary, at WITESOL, 3320 W. Kilbourn Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53208, or at [lee@uwm.edu](mailto:lee@uwm.edu).

<http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~hbishop/witesol.htm>

**Information for contributors to the *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal***

The *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal* is seeking contributions for volume 20 (Spring 2003). Contributions of the following type will be considered:

- Manuscripts about:
  - instructional methods, techniques, and materials
  - research with implications for ESL
  - issues in ESL curriculum and program design
  - testing, assessment, and evaluation in ESL
  - professional preparation
  - sociopolitical issues in ESL
  - learner perspectives about language learning
- Book reviews
- Samples of ESL students' work (poetry, essays, artwork)
- Work in progress\*
- Responses to Volume 19 of the *MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal* for "The Forum" section\*\*

\* "Work in Progress" is a section of the Journal for short reports or updates on work that you are doing in any area of interest to our readership.

\*\* "The Forum" section includes responses or rebuttals to any articles or remarks published in the previous year's volume.

Manuscripts should follow the same style guidelines as *TESOL Quarterly* (the style of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association).

Each manuscript must be accompanied by a short bio statement and an abstract of not more than 200 words. Submit **five** paper copies to:

Don Hones  
College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
N/E 611  
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
Oshkosh, WI 54901

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS FOR THIS VOLUME:  
OCTOBER 31, 2002**

# Contents

---

## ARTICLES

- Mental and Written Translation Strategies in ESL**  
Andrew D. Cohen ..... 1
- Evaluating the Needs of Workers and Employers in a Work-  
place ESL Program: Some Ideas for Consideration**  
Ann M. Barncard ..... 15
- Collaboration to Improve English Language Learners Access to  
a Standards-based Curriculum**  
Nicolas Foote ..... 23
- Meaning, Dimension, and Perspective as Explanation to some  
Thorny Prepositions**  
Carl Zhonggang Gau ..... 35

## INTRODUCTION

---

This volume marks seven years of collaboration between Minnesota and Wisconsin on the MinneTESOL/WITESOL Journal, and over nineteen years since the beginning of the MinneTESOL Journal. We are pleased to continue this affiliate collaboration. The articles in this volume collectively examine the multiple roles ESL teachers play in the classroom, in schools, and in workplaces.

Our first article, by Andrew Cohen, addresses the types of translation our students may use to help their acquisition of English in written and oral situations. Here the teacher is seen as needing to be sensitive to various learning styles and not assume that old ideas of “English only” in the classroom are most effective.

An interesting connection to Cohen’s article is in the second article. Ann Barncard suggests that translation and the use of the students’ first language is one of the methods that should be used in workplace ESL. She also looks at the various roles the ESL teacher plays as the mediator between the students/ employees, other employees, and the management.

In the third article, Nicholas Foote addresses how an ESL teacher collaborates in a school setting to help other teachers with assessment of English language learners. This project demonstrated the importance of local input and control on any statewide policy regarding students we serve.

The last article is the ESL teacher in a more familiar role—making sense of English for students. Carl Gao has us rethink prepositions. His useful figures and tables may be helpful to a teacher for tomorrow’s lesson.

For this volume, we received more articles than usual but we haven’t received any final copies of book reviews or other work, thus none are included. We encourage all of you to expand your professional contributions by sharing opinions of teacher education books or texts, by responding the articles in this volume, or by putting ideas you are working with into written form.

We wish to thank the members of the Editorial Advisory Board in both Minnesota and Wisconsin for all the effort that went into producing this volume.

*Don Hones*  
University of  
WI-Oshkosh

*Randall Gwin*  
Minneapolis Community  
and Technical College

*Susan Gillette*  
University of  
MN-Twin Cities

---

# *Mental and Written Translation Strategies in ESL*

---

ANDREW D. COHEN  
*University of Minnesota*

This paper starts by drawing two distinctions with regard to translation as performed by ESL learners – literal vs. free translation and mental vs. written translation. Then ESL learner style preferences are related to the choice of translation strategies. Third, examples of strategic use of translation are illustrated. Next, the issue of why teachers might admonish learners not to use translation is discussed, and finally empirical studies providing evidence as to the potentially positive effect of strategic translation in reading, writing, listening, and speaking are presented.

## **THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN LEARNING ESL**

There are two useful distinctions in defining “translation”: ...the process of changing speech or writing from one language (the source language) into another (the target language)...A translation which reproduces the general meaning and intention of the original but which does not closely follow the grammar, style, or organization of it is known as a free translation. A translation which approximates to a word-for-word representation of the original is known as a literal translation. (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992)

The focus in this paper is on the kind of amateur translation conducted by untrained ESL learners on a daily basis, sometimes reflecting free translation and at times very literal. We will not be referring to the kind of translation performed by a trained interpreter or skilled translator of written texts.

Another distinction that we will make aside from literal vs. free translation is that between mental and written translation. While written translation involves the actual writing down of the translation, whether it be words, phrases, sentences, or entire texts, mental translation is limited to the mental reprocessing of source material in the target language. Written translation is presumably the product of efforts by the learner to select from among the various mental translations that the learner has performed prior to writing something down. Invariably,



there is a back and forth between mental and written translation in that learners are likely to craft more than one mental translation of source language material before one version is selected to be written down, if the learner produces a written version. Then, of course, this version may be revised, depending on the learner and on the purpose for the translation.

There are times when the use of translation may be of strategic value to ESL learners in both learning English and in using the English they have learned. Having said this, let us remember that there may be differences in choice of translation strategies and in the way these strategies are used, depending on the individual's learning style preferences (see Reid, 1995, Ehrman, 1996). Table 1 provides a sampling of style preferences and possible ways in which these preferences might influence the use of translation strategies.

**TABLE 1**  
**Learning Style Preferences and Possible Relationship to Translation Strategies**

Learning Style Preference	Statement of Style Preference in Extreme Form	Possible Relationship to Translation Strategies
<b>Closure-oriented learners</b>	They plan and carry out studies carefully, do lessons on time or early, and prefer clear deadlines; they stay organized and dislike ambiguity, uncertainty, and fuzziness.	They may favor translation as one possible means to resolve uncertainties and ambiguities
<b>Visual learners</b>	They prefer to learn through the sense of sight, i.e., through books, computers, video, charts, graphs, and pictures.	They may be likely to use <b>written translation</b> so that they can see the source and target language versions in front of their eyes.
<b>Auditory learners</b>	They like to participate in frequent listening and speaking activities, such as discussions, debates, audiotape- or broadcast-listening, oral reading, role-plays, and lectures.	If they translate, they may prefer to stick to <b>mental translation</b> rather than to write it down.
<b>Global learners</b>	They attend to the gestalt -- the big picture, and the main idea, and they are oriented toward processing from the top down. They guess from context.	They may wish to translate just for the big picture and just get the gist of what is said or written.
<b>Particular learners</b>	They focus on discrete items and details and remembering specific information about a topic, with processing that moves from the bottom up.	They may translate in order to better understand specific details, and the use of written translation may work best for them in those situations.
<b>Analytic learners</b>	They tend to both notice the particular details and also to pull ideas apart, to perform logical analysis and contrast tasks, and to focus on grammatical details and grammar rules.	They may wish to use more <b>literal</b> translation in order to compare the source and target language material more precisely.

There are two other factors that may influence whether translation strategies are used and how they are used. The first is the learners' language proficiency. A study by Hawras (1996) with 27 University of Minnesota students from eight different sections of Spanish language classes, representing three different proficiency levels, found differences across proficiency levels. The beginning and intermediate students reported translating portions of the text mentally into English about as often as they got the meaning directly from Spanish. The advanced group used mental translation into English only about one quarter of the time. This finding that advanced students translated the least would be expected, in that the more proficient one becomes in a foreign language, the less there is a need to rely on the first language (L1).

It also appeared that the more advanced a learner was in the foreign language, the more likely it was that the act of translating actually facilitated comprehension. However, for the beginning group, comprehension was achieved in only about half of all the instances of reported mental translation. For this group mental translation into English either did not help them understand some linguistic unit or caused them to misunderstand it as often as it facilitated comprehension. The intermediate and advanced groups were found to be similar with respect to what they comprehended. When they did avail themselves of mental translation, these two groups had a similar success rate in terms of the proportion of accurate comprehension of all reported instances of mental translation: 62% for the intermediate group to 68% for the advanced group. This finding might suggest that as learners are more proficient in a foreign language, they acquire a sense of when mental translation into English is likely to yield better results.

The other factor that may influence whether translation strategies are used and how they are used is that of discourse context. If for example, language learners are listening to a talk in the second language (L2) or reading an L2 text in a discourse context that is familiar to them, they may find they are less likely to translate back into their L1. It may be, in fact, that the learners have studied the material for that discourse context exclusively in the L2. If the discourse context is unfamiliar to them, learners may be expected to translate more from L1 to L2 and the reverse. And certainly one might expect learners to translate less when they are in an L2 context where they are surrounded by the language than in a foreign-language context, where contact with the language is more limited.

We will first consider several of the situations in which learners may use translation strategically. Next, we will briefly consider teachers' admonitions to learners regarding the use of translation. Finally, we will look at findings from studies which included investigation of

mental and written translation strategies in language learning and language use in one or more skill areas.

### **Examples of Learners' Strategic Use of Translation**

If the languages are very similar to one another in structure and lexicon, translation may help to highlight the one or more areas of difference between them. Some language users may rely especially on mental translation as a monitoring strategy to make sure that *faux amis* ("false friends") are avoided. For example, an ESL student whose native language is Portuguese may be prone to use the Portuguese word for "recess" (at school), which is *intervalo*, since "interval" does exist in English. The strategic use of mental translation might warn the speaker that "interval" in English means "space or period of time" and does not mean "recess."

At the other end of the spectrum, learners may wish to translate certain key structures expressly because the languages are dramatically different with regard to a structure or lexical item. In such cases, translating may help them to accentuate the differences and fix these differences comfortably in their mind. So, for example, there may be cases where a verb in a foreign language has two ostensibly different meanings and the language user needs to translate them out to make sure that s/he does not mistakenly use the wrong one. So, an ESL student who is a native speaker of Hebrew uses the same verb, *levaker*, for both "to visit" and "to criticize." It should be clear to the reader how dangerous it might be to use the wrong translation equivalent in an English conversation with, say, a native English-speaking mother-in-law!

One of the potential uses of translation as a strategic tool in language learning and language use could be to monitor for literal translation in spoken or written language, especially among learners with, say, concrete-sequential and analytic style preferences. While literal translation may work in some instances, in other instances it could produce stilted and even erroneous language (e.g., \*"He won't give me to speak with her" – the literal translation of the Hebrew *hu lo noten li lidaber ita* ("he won't let me speak with her"). For this reason, it is incumbent upon the learner in his or her role as strategic translator to also monitor the spoken and written output so as to avoid erroneous literal translation.

### **Teachers' Admonitions to Learners Regarding the Use of Translation**

The following quote is from an advanced learner of Spanish at the university level (Hawras, 1996, p. 55): "Actually (thinking in Spanish) is something that I've been working on, um ...cause my Spanish

teacher in high school said 'You're not gonna get anywhere if you keep translating in your head.'" The student is simply echoing the oft-heard taboo against translation. In situations where the objective is to become fluent in a foreign language, both in the receptive and productive skills, learners such as the one cited above have often been encouraged to avoid translation from the native or dominant language as much as possible during the language learning and language use process. This admonition is supported by the assumption that it is beneficial for L2 learners to function in the language that they are learning rather than to keep translating back and forth between the target language and their L1.

This assumption had been at the core of what are now somewhat dated foreign language learning methods that have systematically avoided the use of the learner's L1, at least during the initial phase of instruction — methods such as the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and the Natural Approach. With regard to the Silent Way, Gattegno expressed his position as follows:

Throughout our oral work with the rods and the visual dictation on the charts, we have carefully avoided the use of the students' native languages. We have even succeeded in blocking them so that the students relate to the new language directly (1976, p. 99).

Krashen and Terrell stipulated the following with regard to the Natural Approach: "(a) The instructor always uses the target language, (b) the focus of the communication will be on a topic of interest for the student, and (c) the instructor will strive at all times to help the student understand." (1983, p. 20) Asher described his Total Physical Response method as follows: "Understanding should be developed through movements of the student's body." (1977, p. 4) "When you cast material in the imperative, there is no translation." (p. 20) In classrooms using Total Physical Response, learners have not only been encouraged to refrain from speaking in their L1, but they have also not had to speak in the L2 during the early stages as well. The focus has just been on aural comprehension.

In using methods such as these, teachers have implicitly or explicitly discouraged students from translating, and the learners themselves have probably come to feel that L1 or other-language thinking could be detrimental to the learning process. The argument has been that by functioning as much as possible in the L2 right from the start, learners will increase their chances of becoming idiomatically accurate in that language. This maxim has usually been applied to the more external, visible forms of language—namely, speaking and writing. For example, native speakers of English will usually notice errors among nonnative speakers which they would probably ascribe to the influence

of the native language. For example, a native Hebrew-speaking ESL student may say, “The policeman didn’t give me to enter here,” instead of “The policeman didn’t let me enter here,” a direct translation from the L1. Teachers might suggest that such errors would disappear if the speakers were to think more in English while they are speaking.

Perhaps more so than with the spoken language, the written output of ESL learners has been analyzed for those errors which appear to be a result of negative transfer from the native language. Again, the assumption would be that functioning through English while writing would help to decrease the number of such errors. Teachers are probably less likely to admonish learners to think only in English when they listen to it or when they read it because these are the more invisible forms of language processing.

While it is probably beneficial for ESL learners to attempt to function as much as possible in English, some of them may need to perform one or another kind of translation at times or even extensively. It would depend in part on their learning style preferences. It might also depend on whether English is being learned in an environment where both languages are being used interchangeably (sometimes referred to as a coordinate bilingualism situation) or in an environment that is removed from contact with the native language (referred to as a compound bilingualism situation).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, regardless of teacher admonitions, it is likely that translation goes on continually as ESL learners perform different tasks in English, perhaps less so as the learner becomes an advanced user of English and less so in an ESL rather than an EFL context. However, the use of translation need not be seen just as an unfortunate crutch. Perhaps in part because learners differ in their learning style preferences, as illustrated above, as well as in their preferences as to the strategies they select for language learning and for language use, there is empirical evidence that selective translation between the source and the target languages has been found to play a positive role for some, if not many, language learners in the performing of language tasks.

## **Research on Translation Across the Language Skills**

Research on the use of mental translation in the four skill areas will be reviewed in this section. First, research on the role of translation in reading will be presented, then research on the use of mental and written translation for developing and organizing text, and finally several studies including the use of translation in listening and speaking.

### **Translating While Reading**

A study conducted with intermediate learners of French at UC

Berkeley (Kern, 1994) and a replication with beginning, intermediate, and advanced learners of Spanish at the University of Minnesota (Hawras, 1996; Cohen, 1998) helped identify at least five strategic purposes that nonnative readers reported having for using mental translation while reading:

1. *A strategy for remembering points in the text*
  - a. For chunking material into semantic clusters:  
While learners are reading a text in the target language, it may be less of a burden on memory if they chunk lexical items into semantic clusters in the native language.
  - b. For keeping the train of thought: The use of mental translation helps to keep the train of thought when chunks are long or syntactically complex. Mental translation allows learners to represent portions of the text in a familiar, memory-efficient form long enough for meaning to be integrated and assimilated.
2. *A strategy for creating a network of associations:* Since the network of associations is richer in the L1 or dominant language, the reader gives extra life to concepts by bringing them into that language.
3. *A strategy for enhancing the familiarity of the text:* Converting the input into a more familiar, user-friendly L1 version is likely to have a positive motivational effect. By engaging in mental translation, the readers are bolstering the confidence they have in their ability to comprehend the text.
4. *A strategy for clarifying grammatical roles:* Mental translation may help the learner to clarify the role played by certain grammatical structures, or to verify a verb tense. As one student put it when explaining why he reverted to mental translation for grammatical analysis:  
I know all these words in here, but the order doesn't always make the proper sentence in my mind so I kind of translate it a little bit. Since Spanish sentence structures aren't always the same as English, I sometimes put them in English structure, but still using [sic] these words. (Hawras, 1996, p. 59)
5. *A strategy for checking on comprehension:* Learners may use mental translation strategically to verify that a segment of text was accurately comprehended. So, first they strive to read and get the meaning of the text directly in the target language, and go back to perform literal translation only when necessary.

## Translating While Writing

Insights about strategies for translation while writing come from a series of studies involving mental translation from the L1 (Lay, 1988; Cumming, 1989, 1990; Chelala, 1982), from translating a given text from the L1 to the L2 (Uzawa, 1996; Qi, 1998), and from translating an L1 essay into the L2 (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Brooks, 1996; Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2001).

1. *A strategy for developing and organizing ideas:* Thinking through and possibly writing down the ideas in the L1 first, and then performing free translation into the L2 may ensure that the ideas are adequately complex and sophisticated. It may be that trying to think directly through the target language constrains thoughts into being simplistic in nature. In addition, learners may benefit from organizing what they want to say or write in their native language and then translating it into the target language. This way L2 writers may come up with not only more ideas but a better sense of how to integrate them than if they try to think through their ideas in the target language.

2. *A strategy for enhancing self-expression:* It has also been found beneficial for some L2 writers to use translation strategically to think through the key words and phrases that they would use if they were to say or write the concepts in their native language. Rather than settling for low-level vocabulary, these writers start with the L1 words and then look for equivalent words and phrases in the target language, ideally performing free, not literal translation. What makes it a strategic activity is determining the proper fit between using their own mental lexicon (see Singleton, 1999, on the mental lexicon), a judicious use of dictionaries, and if necessary, input from a native speaker of the L1. Note that a perfunctory use of the dictionary may not help here since dictionaries can misguide writers as much as they can help (see Neubach and Cohen, 1988).

## Translating While Listening

Listening is the skill where the information stream can be the most relentless—as in a live lecture or movie at the movie theater. In such cases, it is not possible for learners to run back the sound a few times until unintelligible utterances are heard sufficiently well to see if they can make any sense of them. It is also a skill for which the empirical evidence with regard to translation is limited.

With regard to the strategic use of written translation during listening tasks, a prime source of empirical data would be from students attending course lectures in an L2 and then taking notes in the L1. Koren

(1997) conducted a descriptive study of the lecture notes taken by 33 students who were attending EFL lectures at an Israeli law school. She found that almost all of the students chose the strategy of written translation into Hebrew L1 as they took notes because it was easier for them to remember the lecture that way and easier to study from the notes. She analyzed their notes carefully and found that the notes were functionally competent in terms of content.

Koren speculated that by listening in English and taking notes in the L1, the students may have lost more sentences on the way than if they had taken notes in the L2 directly because their mind was busy processing the translation in addition to all the other processes (e.g., perceiving the material, selecting relevant from non-essential material, performing semantic analysis, and reconstructing/summarizing the message in the L1). Yet it would appear that many of the same strategic principles as for reading in an L2 pertain in this instance. The use of free translation to L1 converted the incoming lectures to more learner-friendly material. Since Koren did not perform a controlled experiment to compare the taking of notes directly in EFL vs. taking them in the L1, we cannot make conclusions about the language of note taking. We must note in passing, though, that this was an EFL and not an ESL study. ESL note taking may prove easier, especially for students at more advanced proficiency levels and whose learning style preferences support this approach to benefiting the most from lectures.

There are also numerous occasions when learners would make use of mental translation while listening. A primary source of empirical data on strategic use of mental translation in listening comes from a study of English-L1 undergraduates in Spanish, French, or German immersed for all of their course work during an academic quarter at the University of Minnesota. The students reported their use and purpose of mental translation (Cohen and Allison, 2001). While learners wished to keep a partition between their languages and to think entirely in the target language while listening to it, these college immersion students reported from time to time that they sought equivalents in their native language. Some, if not many, nonnative listeners made mental translation of key words and phrases, much as with reading, in order to help store the concepts in the memory buffer.

A Spanish immersion undergraduate indicating the use of "a little" mental translation was emphatic about the benefits of this level of use as a strategy: "Yes, you learn and catch on so much faster and you lose much less in the translation." Thus, a brief use of English can help consolidate a thought, before the student converts back to the target language. As another Spanish immersion student put it, "I sort of use it — just to understand a phrase. But it's easier to just try and think in



Spanish all the time," hence expressing a desire to maintain a partition between the languages, with preference toward staying in the target language.

### **Translating While Speaking**

As with listening, the empirical data on language of thought in speaking is limited. A source of empirical data for this comes from a study by Cohen and Olshtain which involved fifteen advanced English foreign language learners, eleven native speakers of Hebrew and four near-native speakers, who were native speakers of French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic respectively (see Cohen, 1998, pp. 238-256). The students were given six speech act situations (two apologies, two complaints, and two requests) in which they were to role-play along with a native speaker. The interactions were videotaped, and after each set of two situations of the same type, the tape was played back and the respondents were asked to supply retrospective verbal reports in Hebrew by a native Hebrew-speaking investigator both fixed and probing questions regarding the factors contributing to the production of their response to that situation, including the language of thought for planning and delivering their responses. (For more on the use of verbal report as a research tool, see Cohen, 1998, pp. 34-39, 49-61.)

It was found that the use of translation in the planning and delivering of utterances turned out to be a complex matter. The most common translation pattern was to plan the utterance in Hebrew and then translate from Hebrew to English in the response. In the case of the Spanish speaker, Lily, the patterns were most complex. While her Spanish was native and dominant, and her Hebrew was excellent since she had lived in Israel for some time and was doing most of her studies in Hebrew, her English was relatively weak. In the speech act situation of apologizing to a friend for coming an hour late to a meeting, she reported planning first in Hebrew and then in Spanish, and finally translating from Spanish to English. In apologizing to a classmate for forgetting to return a book, she planned her apology in Spanish and then in Hebrew, with the response translated from Hebrew to English. In complaining to a neighbor about loud music, she planned her complaint in both Hebrew and Spanish simultaneously, with the response translated both from Hebrew and Spanish to English. What is particularly interesting about the data from this learner is that they remind us just how complex language processing can be when a learner is not simply bilingual but multilingual, with differing proficiency in the several nonnative languages.

Mental and written translation may be used strategically in speaking at different phases. Before performing a speaking task, learn-

ers may jot down translations into the L2 of specific words or key sentences. The sentences may highlight certain key grammatical features. Then while speaking, the learners may choose to monitor their output by keeping in mind the translation equivalents for certain key structures. Finally, after the speaking encounter is over, strategic learners may work back through what they said mentally and back translate several items to see if they used the language correctly. Perhaps with a learner like Lily, the case could be made for encouraging target language processing without translation as a strategy in order to avoid confusion.

## DISCUSSION

This paper started by drawing two distinctions with regard to translation as performed by ESL learners – literal vs. free translation and mental vs. written translation. Second, examples of strategic use of translation were illustrated. Next, the issue of why teachers might admonish learners not to use translation was discussed, and finally empirical studies providing evidence as to the potentially positive effect of strategic translation were presented.

It would appear that efforts to identify those translation strategies that may have a positive impact on language learning and language use is still in an initial phase. More research needs to be conducted both in order to describe the strategies that are actually used and to determine how effective their use really is. While it would appear that most learners are using translation some of the time for some tasks, it is not clear how systematic they are in their use of translation. In addition, there is a need to verify the presumed links offered in this paper between learning style preferences and translation strategies used by those learners. It would also be beneficial to know the effectiveness of complex mental translation among multi-linguals at various proficiency levels and in different discourse settings, especially when turn taking happens quickly. Perhaps with multi-lingual learners, as described above, the case could be made for avoiding translation as a strategy in order to avoid confusion. But until more research is conducted, we will refrain from being prescriptive.

A caveat mentioned above will be reiterated here — that learners probably should restrict their translation to just as much of the oral or written input as they need to translate in order to maintain a sense of what the input is all about. Making sure that the bulk of the ESL processing goes on directly in English is undoubtedly a worthwhile aim. If learners put the bulk of the effort into translation – especially from the target language to the native language, it is possible that there will not be adequate psycholinguistic engagement of the language learning

mechanism in the brain. The learner may come away with a good sense of what the language input means in the native, but not necessarily with a sense of what was said or written in English. With this caveat in mind, it would seem beneficial to have learners engage in one or more training sessions in which strategic choices for both free vs. literal and mental vs. written translation are described explicitly and possible uses for each are offered. It would then be up to individual learners to apply this information to their own language learning and language use.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Revised version of a paper presented at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual TESOL Convention, St. Louis, MO, February 27-March 3, 2001. Thanks to Anne Lazaraton and three anonymous readers at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, for feedback on a previous version, and to the co-editors of the MinneWITESOL Journal for their helpful feedback on this version.

<sup>2</sup> Baetens Beardsmore (1982) would contend that there is little empirical support for the coordinate-compound distinction.

## THE AUTHOR

Andrew Cohen, Ph.D., is a professor at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in the English as a Second Language Department. Among his many contributions to the field, is his extensive work in learning styles and strategies. He is the author of numerous articles and books and a frequent presenter at conferences around the world.

## REFERENCES

- Asher, J. J. (1977). *Learning another language through actions: the complete teacher's guidebook*. Los Gatos CA: Sky Oaks Productions.
- Baetens Beardsmore, H. (1982). *Bilingualism: Basic principles*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Brooks, A. W. (1996). *An examination of native language processing in foreign language writing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville.
- Chelala, S. I. (1981). *The composing process of two Spanish speakers and the coherence of their texts: A case study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, New York.
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. Harlow, England: Longman.

- Cohen, A. D. & Allison, K. (2001). Bilingual processing strategies in the social context of an undergraduate immersion program. In R. L. Cooper, E. Shohamy, and J. Walters (Eds.), *New perspectives and issues in educational language policy: In honor of Bernard Dov Spolsky* (pp. 35-60). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Cohen, A. D. & Brooks-Carson, A. (2001). *Research on direct vs. translated writing: Students' strategies and their result*. *Modern Language Journal*, 85 (2), 169-188.
- Cumming, A. (1989). Writing Expertise and L2 proficiency. *Language Learning*, 39, 81-141.
- Cumming, A. (1990). Metalinguistic and ideational thinking in second language composing. *Written Communication*, 7, 482-511.
- Ehrman, M. E. (1996). *Understanding second language learning difficulties*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gattegno, C. (1976). *The common sense of teaching foreign languages*. NY: Educational Solutions.
- Hawras, S. (1996). *Towards describing bilingual and multilingual behavior: implications for ESL instruction*. Double Plan B Paper, English as a Second Language Department, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
- Kern, R. G. (1994). The role of mental translation in second language reading. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16 (4), 441-461.
- Kobayashi, H., and Rinnert, C. (1992). Effects of first language on second language writing: Translation versus direct composition. *Language Learning*, 42, 183-215.
- Koren, S. (1997). Listening to lectures in L2; taking notes in L1. *TESL-EJ*, 2(4).
- Krashen, S. D. and Terrell, T. D. (1983). *The natural approach*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lay, N. D. S. (1988). The comforts of the first language in learning to write. *Kaleidoscope*, 4, 15-18.
- McDonough, S. H. (1999). Learner strategies. *Language Teaching*, 32 (1), 1-18.
- Neubach, A., and Cohen, A. D. (1988). Processing strategies and problems encountered in the use of dictionaries. *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, 10, 1-19.
- Qi, D. S. (1998). An inquiry into language-switching in second language composing processes. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 54, 413-435.
- Reid, J. M. (1995). *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Uzawa, K. (1996). Second language learners' processes of L1 writing, L2 writing, and translation from L1 to L2. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 5, 271-294.

---

## *Evaluating the Needs of Workers and Employers in a Workplace ESL Program: Some Ideas for Consideration*

---

ANN M. BARNCARD

*Literacy Council of Brown County--Green Bay*

This article looks at how expectations, workplace structure, limited literacy skills of the students/employees, and bilingual efforts may affect success of workplace ESL programs. With many workplace programs in the Upper Midwest in the fledgling stage, instructors and program coordinators have an early opportunity to evaluate needs and tailor instructional programs to fit the needs of both the students and their employers. Previous research and personal observations of instructors in the Workforce Development program at the Literacy Council of Brown County, Green Bay, WI, are used to answer these three questions: 1) Does the structure of the workplace contribute to literacy problems for non-English speakers? 2) How do limited L1 literacy skills translate to problems on the job? and 3) How do bilingual efforts help or hinder job success? In answering these questions it becomes apparent that the ESL teacher is a vital link in a three-way relationship among students/workers, their employers, and the ESL program provider. Understanding the expectations of learners and employers, cooperation and communication between stakeholders, and flexibility and thoughtful evaluation of programs as they progress are all important components in a successful workplace ESL program.

*"What do you expect your employees to gain from a workplace ESL class?"*

*"What do you expect to gain as a student in a workplace ESL class?"*

These two questions elicit the same response in most cases. "I want them/ I want to learn English." Attitudes and expectations implicit in this answer vary from student to student and employer to employer. How can we best plan an ESL program to take into consideration the needs of the workers and the expectations of their employers? I propose some areas for consideration by looking at three questions: 1) Does the structure of the workplace contribute to literacy problems for

non-English speakers? 2) How do limited L1 literacy skills of these workers translate to problems on the job and in learning English? and 3) How do bilingual efforts of management help or hinder job success? Included with research are some of my own observations as well as those of other teachers in the Workforce Development Program at the Literacy Council of Brown County, Green Bay, WI.

## **The New Work Order**

With the advent of a new information-based economy, the workforce in the United States has seen a change from stable, high-paying manufacturing jobs to what has been pegged as the "new work order". In this new structure, workers are expected to become active participants in work "teams," critical thinkers, and problem solvers. While the goal of the new work environment is to increase the company's market productivity by harnessing the knowledge and skills of all the workers, this new culture creates empowerment issues for many, particularly those with limited English skills. Linguistic hierarchies are likely to spring up. These hierarchies disempower workers who were used to a traditional structure in which it was acceptable to rely heavily on physical performance skills (Moore, 1999). Different workplaces have different team concepts and team functions. In small manufacturing situations, teams are typically comprised of groups of employees working on a specific line or project. These teams can vary in size from two to a dozen workers. Members are expected to attend and participate in team meetings where production and safety information is disseminated, goals are set, and problems are identified and solved through group discussion. In order to be a good team member, a worker needs the communication skills to be an active participant. In addition, a worker is considered a good team member if he or she is working cooperatively with others on the line in order to meet company goals. In service-oriented businesses, teamwork can be the concept of working in cooperation with other employees and other departments and a willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done in order to satisfy the customer. This requires the ability to communicate with clients as well as with other workers. Most teams have a leader, and this position can be a voluntary one, rotating among team members who act as spokespersons for the team, or it can be a paid position with extra responsibilities added to the regular job duties. These extra responsibilities can include training and mentoring of new workers, dealing with discipline and performance issues, communicating quality and goal information, getting feedback from workers and management, and generally overseeing the work on the line. To reach this rank within the team requires well-developed skills

and a high level of language proficiency

Employers using this highly-interactive work-team model identify spoken and written English as necessary for job security, safety, advancement, and the ability to interact with teammates in a work environment. This may inadvertently create cultural and linguistic barriers that confine nonnative speakers to the lower ranks of a team (Moore, 1999). At one workplace ESL class, students reported that they were encouraged by management to participate in a safety contest which involved a cash prize being awarded for identifying a safety problem. The problem was to be channeled through the team leader to the supervisor. The students complained that they were unable to communicate with their team leaders, and that many times the safety problem that they had identified and tried to communicate was later claimed by a native English speaking member of the team. Management attributed lack of participation by non-English speakers to disinterest on their part and asked the instructor to make sure that the students understood the contest. The students understood well, but felt their lack of ability to communicate in English proved an insurmountable disadvantage. At another workplace, students wanted to learn the vocabulary necessary to communicate particular production line problems. When the line was stopped because of a jam-up, they were often blamed for the problem because of their inability to properly and quickly describe the problem to a team leader. They simply didn't have the English language skills required in a pressure situation. Their lack of the communication skills required in a pressure situation led to their being considered poor team players by their supervisors.

The best aspect of the team concept is the creation of a culture of collaboration and problem solving. This workplace culture is successful as long as people can work together, pooling their intellectual and social resources (Hull, 1998). Without this important aspect, the team can become a burdensome and frustrating environment for the ESL worker. In ESL programming for the workplace setting, knowledge of the work culture and how it affects these learners can make a difference in how successful the classes may be for both the company and its employees.

### **All This, and in a New Language**

In 1992, the SCANS Commission (Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) issued a report identifying five workplace competencies: resource management, information management, social interaction, systems behavior and performance skills, and technology utilization, which are needed for solid workplace performance. The assumption was that all workers—whether native or non-native speakers of English, high school dropouts or PhD candidates—need to



have these skills (Guss Grognet, 1997). The self-directed work teams described in the previous section are expected to work together to set productivity and quality goals and complete significant amounts and types of paperwork. Literacy skills are used by employees in these teams to solve problems, report, evaluate, and conceptualize their work. Literacy in a factory setting can involve any combination of multiple-symbol systems, traditional text, forms, charts, diagrams, and graphs using traditional paper and pencil, computer generation, and/or e-mail. In addition to manual job tasks, these new literacy expectations can create serious challenges for many workers for whom English is a first language. Significant problems arise for those with limited English proficiency and/or limited literacy abilities.

How much do employers know of the literacy skills of their employees? In 1994, Rita Moore served as project director for one of the largest federally funded workplace literacy projects in the U.S. In an article for *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, she reported that many of the students in workplace ESL classes had limited literacy skills in their native languages, and most had no more than a third-grade education (Moore, 1999). My fellow workplace ESL instructors and I have found this to be true, and in most classes there has been at least one student without literacy skills in his or her native language. Some of these students are pre-literate, without understanding of sound/symbol relationships or even comprehension that individual words have meaning. Perhaps eastern Wisconsin's low unemployment rate and urgent need for employees has precluded literacy requirements by many employers. Employers may also have interpreted inability to fill out employment forms as lack of English rather than lack of literacy skills. Whatever the cause, many workers are deficient in the literacy skills needed to be successful in their jobs.

Do employers recognize the problems faced by these workers on a daily basis? At one workplace, two students were middle-aged Hmong women. Hmong was not a written language until about fifty years ago, and traditional Hmong culture did not highly value formal education for women. This workplace ESL class was the first "school" experience for either of these women, and they apologized repeatedly for their lack of education. The Human Resources Director reported that their team leader was frustrated because the two women would giggle and look away when she corrected their paperwork. Fortunately, the Literacy Council was able to train another employee at the company as a tutor, and the two women began coming in early to work with him on general English skills. Identifying the employees' lack of literacy abilities and explaining their cultural reactions to workplace situations brought about a workable solution for both the employer and the em-

ployees at this site. At the same company, the instructor was asked to "tell the students to put their timecards in alphabetical order" at the time clock. The management was frustrated with the employees' apparent disregard for this rule. The truth of the matter was that some of the Hmong students had no concept of the English alphabet, and only one of the Hispanic students understood English alphabetical order. A simple alphabet lesson and some practice resulted in all the students being able to alphabetize their timecards. As stated in an earlier example, lack of an ability, this time a literacy ability, had been interpreted as unwillingness to follow directions.

Improving cultural awareness on the part of supervisors and management can reduce misunderstandings and frustrations in the workplace. Many companies are offering Spanish language classes to their employees, with cultural issues being addressed there. At one workplace, participants in the Spanish class were invited to the ESL class to try out their new language skills. The surprising result was a group discussion about the difficulties that the non-English speaking workers were having in communicating their concerns and ideas at team meetings. Cultural relations can also be factors in class composition, making teaching challenging. In one workplace ESL course, Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Hispanic students segregated themselves for the first few weeks of classes. As they gained confidence in their common language, however, they began to help each other with class work and were soon asking each other questions about their backgrounds and families and taking interest in each others' lives. According to their supervisors and English speaking co-workers, these new personal connections and friendships have fostered more camaraderie and teamwork on the job.

### **Bilingual Efforts - Help or Hindrance?**

What's the most effective vehicle for instruction? Many workplace ESL programs operate on a temporary basis with classes scheduled, for example, one hour, twice a week. While employers may expect or even demand that English be the sole language of instruction, this is not always the most effective use of instructional time. Recently arrived immigrants and refugees with limited English proficiency may benefit from explanations of workplace procedures and training in their native language. Program developers thus must determine whether English, the native language(s) of learners, or some combination is the most effective vehicle for instruction (McGroarty & Scott, 1993).

One of the Literacy Council's workplace programs involved two six-week sessions. One-hour classes were held twice a week for each session at the factory site. The first session covered workplace specific vocabulary, work rules, and Good Manufacturing Processes (GMPs).

The work rules and GMPs were easily reduced to simple English vocabulary and sentence structure and lent themselves well, along with the workplace vocabulary, to using only English with this class of low level learners. The management wanted the second session to cover the company's benefits package, which contained insurance coverage, attendance and vacation policies, a 401(k) plan, and compensation issues. Time was too short and the topics simply too detailed and cumbersome to explain without using the students' native languages. The students responded enthusiastically to instruction on company benefits in their native languages, and tapped into previous knowledge on this component of instruction. In addition, students were able to expand their English literacy skills by practicing filling out forms via choosing from the benefits they learned about using native language instruction.

Workplace ESL is a balancing act. Some needs are best satisfied with translation into the worker/student's first language. Safety rules, dress codes, job procedures, and attendance policies are all examples of information which is needed by a worker "immediately" and are good candidates for bilingual instruction. Other needs can only be satisfied by developing a command of spoken English. Instructors must be able to identify the needs of their students, both from the perspective of the employer and from the worker and determine which, if any, instructional components need to be taught in L1.

## CONCLUSION

There are many issues surrounding the planning and evaluation of workplace ESL instruction. Both workers and employers may demonstrate either skepticism or unrealistically high expectations about what can be accomplished during instruction (McGroarty & Scott, 1993). It is important for stakeholders to realize that ESL workplace programs may not provide enough practice time to accomplish substantial progress in English language proficiency (Burt and Saccomano, 1995). Workers and company management may have entirely different expectations for class content and outcomes. Workers may hope to improve their conversation skills while the management wants students to learn company policy and vocabulary. Both may be accomplished through creative instructional strategies, utilizing conversational skills to practice and assess comprehension of workplace vocabulary and company policy. But, again, time constraints will affect mastery outcomes and choices need to be made.

As noted, English skills needed for using forms, diagrams, graphs, charts, etc., are not necessarily the same ones needed to com-

municate successfully with other team members. Lack of literacy skills may undercut chances for workplace advancement or even retention. Inability to speak to and understand co-workers and supervisors can lead to misunderstandings and loss of a meaningful role within a workplace team. Bilingual efforts on the part of employers are often limited to issues of safety, rules, and policy, and don't take into consideration the broader English language needs of workers trying to survive in today's workplace culture.

A major challenge for workplace programs is the creation of a successful coalition among the many parties involved (McGroarty & Scott, 1993). ESL teachers must understand how the workplace community thinks and talks (Guss Grognet, 1997). ESL instructors are often part-time employees who have limited interaction with colleagues, few opportunities for professional development, and little compensation for lesson planning time (Crandall, 1994). Yet, they are often the link between the workers and their employers and need to be informed and sensitive collaborators in the business of teaching workplace English. A good instructor can identify the needs of both employer and worker and will at times have to explain these needs. Management may need to have a better understanding of the workplace culture and everyday situations on the factory floor from the perspective of the worker. The workers may not appreciate the dangers, the economic pressures, and the business needs of their employers. Success evolves with thoughtful input from all involved, beginning with a thorough needs assessment and evaluation of targeted employees' literacy skills, and continuing through curriculum development and instructional modifications that maximize learning, ongoing feedback, flexibility, cultural education, and evaluating program outcomes.

## **THE AUTHOR**

Ann M. Barncard teaches ESL classes in the Workforce Development Program at the Literacy Council of Brown County in Green Bay, WI. She also teaches community-based ESL classes, is a volunteer tutor, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Council. She has a BA in Sociology with emphasis in Psychology from Northland College and adult ESL certification from the University of WI Green Bay. She has completed additional studies in the fields of business and library science.

## REFERENCES

- Burk, M. & Saccomano, M. (1995). *Evaluating Workplace ESL Instructional Programs*. Center for Applied Linguistics. ERIC Digest, Digest, (EDO-LE-95-07)
- Crandall, J.A. (1994). *Creating a professional workforce in adult ESL literacy*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. (EDRS No. ED 369 308)
- Hull, G. (1998). *The Changing World of Work*. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42:1.
- Hull, G. (1993). Hearing other voices: A critical assessment of popular views on literacy and work. *Harvard Educational Review*, 63(1), 20-49
- Guss Grognet, A. (1997). *Integrating Employment Skills in Adult ESL Instruction*. Project in Adult Immigrant Education (PAIE). National Center for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE). ERIC Digest, Q&A, June 1997
- McGroarty, M., & Scott, S. (1993). *Workplace ESL instruction: Varieties and constraints*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. (EDRS No. ED 367 190)
- Moore, R. (1999). Empowering the ESL worker within the new work order. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43:2

---

# *Collaboration to Improve English Language Learners Access to a Standards-based Curriculum*

---

NICHOLAS FOOTE

*University of Wisconsin—Whitewater*

In the past few years Wisconsin policy-makers have adopted standards and assessments designed to help English Language Learners (ELLs) participate in the state's standards-based curriculum. This paper discusses how I have used my position as an ESL teacher to initiate collaborative efforts with regular education teachers to implement the state's standards and assessment policies. Teachers have been very receptive to using alternative assessment for both formative and summative evaluation of ELLs because it provides more accurate assessment of student progress and can, therefore, help them ensure that ELLs are meeting the state's academic standards.

Like much of the nation, Wisconsin is experiencing an increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in its classrooms. Schools and educators have struggled to identify procedures that assess the knowledge and skills of these students and take into account English proficiency (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Many researchers have noted failing to do this is problematic (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; August & Hakuta, 1998). As O'Malley and Valdez-Pierce (1996) write, "[A]ccurate and effective assessment of language minority students is essential to ensure that ELL students gain access to instructional programs that meet their needs." (p. 3)

To address the changing needs of its teachers and student population, Wisconsin developed a two-prong alternate assessment system—a curriculum component and an assessment component—tied to the state's model academic standards. The curriculum part consists of Alternate Performance Indicators (APIs) which are linked to the content area performance standards. The APIs are observable and measurable indicators that students at English proficiency levels 1-3 can reasonably be expected to demonstrate within a classroom setting (Gottlieb, 1999).

The assessment component is made up of two rubrics, which can be found in Appendix A. The MECCA (Measuring Essential Communication in the Content Areas) rubric consists of four components:

vocabulary, language use, conceptual development, and problem-solving. It is used to document student performance in the content areas based on written or oral evidence. Additionally, Wisconsin has adopted the SOLOM (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix) to assess oral language proficiency. Combined the rubrics provide assessment strategies that address students' language proficiency as well as content area academic progress. When fully implemented these would provide a more accurate measurement of ELLs knowledge and skills.

This paper focuses solely on the assessment component of Wisconsin's ELL policy by describing my work as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher in Windy Plains, Wisconsin helping elementary teachers incorporate the MECCA and SOLOM rubrics into their assessment practices. The paper shows how a peer coaching model was used to support changes in the formative and summative assessment of ELLs. It opens with a discussion of the relevant literature, and then describes the setting in which I work. After that I outline collaborative efforts with teachers. The concluding sections of the paper address ongoing projects and discuss considerations for future study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Policy implementation has been studied extensively. One of the landmark works on federal policy implementation in school districts was the RAND Change Agent study, conducted in the mid 1970's. In 1990, McLaughlin (1990) presented a retrospective on the study, to see which of the original conclusions still held. Two of her findings are highly relevant to the issue of implementing alternative assessments for ELLs:

1. Creation of policy was the starting point for changes in practice; however, adaptations of policy at the local level were the largest determinants of policy outcomes;
2. For successful implementation, policies needed to be adapted to local conditions, teachers needed an opportunity to practice implementing new policies correctly, and a broad-based commitment to the new policy needed to be developed.

From these findings, one can infer that districts that want to successfully implement assessment for ELLs and standards-based instruction will need a vehicle for adapting the policies for local needs and providing ongoing support to teachers who are changing their practice in response to the policy. Without sufficient supports for local implementation, the policy will not necessarily be implemented in a way that achieves policy goals; that is, standards and assessment will not be used in a way that significantly improves ELLs access to high quality curricu-

lar outcomes.

One way to support teacher acquisition of new practices is through on-site, long-term effective professional development (Garet et al., 1999). In a study of the Eisenhower Math and Science program under Title II of the Elementary and Secondary School Act, Garet et al. found that effective professional development that led to change in teacher knowledge and practice had six main features:

1. form ( professional development should be school-based)
2. duration (professional development that is long-term and ongoing is more effective)
3. collective participation (it is beneficial to have teachers and grade-level teams from the same school share the experience)
4. active learning (teachers participate in their own learning)
5. content focus (activities focus on a specific content area)
6. coherence (professional development activities are aligned with standards and assessments).

Galbraith and Anstrom (1995) have identified a professional development model called peer coaching, for teachers of ELLs, that possesses many of the characteristics highlighted by Garet et al. (1999). They define peer coaching as a "process through which teachers share their expertise and provide one another with feedback, support and assistance for the purpose of refining present skills, learning new skills, and/or solving classroom-related problems....[Peer coaching] provides ongoing assessment of a specific skill or strategy that enables the teacher to continue his/her training in the classroom." (Galbraith & Anstrom, 1995, p. 2). They consider this type of ongoing professional development to be especially useful for teachers collaborating across disciplines. Additionally, peer coaching can be implemented in ways that have all of the characteristics of effective professional development identified by Garet et al. (1999).

Looking across the literature on policy implementation and professional development, it is possible to conceptualize a new definition of an ESL teacher's role in the implementation of alternate assessments for ELLs in mainstream classrooms, shown in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**

**Role of ESL Teacher in Assisting Implementation of Standards-based Assessment**

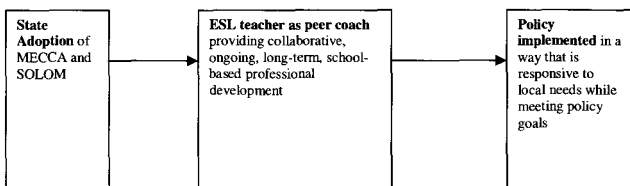




Figure 1 shows the ESL teacher's role as a mediator between state policy and local context. The ESL teacher not only implements alternate assessments in his/her classroom, but facilitates mainstream teachers' use of alternative assessments. As such, the ESL teacher becomes a 'change agent,' collaborating with regular education teachers to modify the policy to local needs and using his/her professional knowledge in English language instruction to coach teachers in new techniques. In this role, the ESL teacher helps ensure that local adaptations of policy provide the outcomes envisioned by policymakers; that is that ELLs participation in standards-based reform is appropriately assessed through alternate assessment rubrics.

In the remainder of the paper, I position myself as an ESL teacher within a Wisconsin school district. As I share the unfolding story of how the schools in which I work are using alternate assessments to more appropriately assess ELLs knowledge and skills across content areas, I show that ESL teachers have the potential to play a critical role in regular education teachers' adoption of alternate assessment practices.

## **Demographic Changes in Windy Plains**

In the last ten years the community of Windy Plains and the Windy Plains Area School District (WPASD) have experienced tremendous demographic change which has intensified during the past three years. In the 2000-2001 school year, 110 students speaking ten different languages entered eight schools in grades K-12. This represented approximately a 300% increase in the ELL population from the 1996-97 school year. Seventy five percent of these students are in grades K-5. The majority of the students are Hispanic, and the rest of the population consists of Hmong, Turkish, West African, Russian, Chinese and other Southeast Asian students.

While the ethnic makeup of the WPASD's classrooms has been changing from year to year, the teaching force has remained very stable. As of the 1999-2000 school year, district teachers, whose demographic makeup reflects the historic homogeneity of the community at large (i.e. few minorities or non-English speakers), had accumulated an average of 18.5 years of classroom service. In many ways it is a positive attribute for a district to have a highly experienced and stable staff, though there is one drawback that affects the ELL population in Windy Plains. As Constantino (1994) and Lucas (1993) note, veteran teachers in all-English classrooms, most of whom received their training under the assumption that their classes would consist of native English speakers, can be under-prepared to meet the needs of ELLs.

This is my third year at Sunnyside Elementary School which is one of five elementary schools in the district. The school serves ap-

proximately 350 students, including thirteen ELLs, in grades K-5. Sunnyside's faculty is an experienced staff, which does not include any native speakers of languages other than English, or any people of color. Half of the teachers have been at the school for at least 20 years. The ethnic and linguistic makeup of the school for a long time mirrored that of its teaching staff. As a result the recent influx of ELLs at all grade levels has posed challenges for the staff, including the fifth grade team.

As an ESL teacher in WPASD, I have built a program based on two main principles, collaboration and integrated instruction, to help teachers develop skills in working with ELLs and help their students succeed. Since I began working in the district three years ago, I have maintained ongoing discussions with teachers about the integration of language and content instruction using a peer coaching model. We have discussed strategies to help students understand, take part in and contribute to the content area instruction. In these conversations, I did not position myself as "knower" and them as "learner." Rather I presented myself as an equal part of the team with me as the leader in the language acquisition component of our work, and with their classroom curriculum driving our work.

Our instructional program for ELLs integrated ESL strategies and core content curriculum, with "the ultimate goal to enable students to acquire academic language skills while mastering the content necessary for success in the mainstream." (Spanos, 1992, p.1). By supporting ELLs success in their grade level class(es) I helped mainstream teachers see the positive relationship between ESL instruction and the core content areas, and established the ESL program at the elementary level as a key player in the success of ELLs in mainstream classes. This type of collaboration is a means to coordinate the knowledge and skills necessary to serve ELLs effectively in all academic settings.

### **Bringing alternate assessments into the district's classrooms**

Shortly after the start of the school year, the fifth grade team approached me because they were frustrated since one of their students (who was new to Sunnyside and WPASD) was struggling to demonstrate knowledge and skills within their evaluation system. Collectively, they sensed that he knew more than he was able to show, but they did not have assessment strategies that that were appropriate for him. We arranged a meeting for the following day to discuss using alternate assessment tools that could meet both the student's needs and their needs.

Since I was going to initiate and assist in implementing a change effort, it was critical that I conveyed my belief in and commitment to alternate assessment. It was my hope that by providing ongoing support, feedback and analysis of their implementation efforts, over time

they would add alternate assessment tools into their regular repertoire for ELLs. At our meeting the conversation centered around how the MECCA and SOLOM rubrics are used to conduct performance assessment (defined as any form of assessment in which the student constructs a response orally or in writing). Performance assessment can be conducted separately or as part of regular instruction. As O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) note, "[T]he student response may be elicited by the teacher in formal or informal assessment contexts or may be observed during classroom instructional or non-instructional settings." (p.4) By emphasizing how the teachers could collect data from oral responses, written responses or a combination of both, I hoped the team would see they could measure an ELLs performance on an objective in a variety of ways.

The conversation then shifted from formative to summative evaluation (report cards). I relayed to the team that the principal had expressed her support for using means other than the district report card to reflect and document growth. We talked about how to compile the data they would collect and present it to offer a summative assessment based on observed behaviors, growth and development of skills while also considering the degree to which he had met the grade level expectations. We considered using a narrative grade report form as an alternative to the district report card. They were very receptive and indicated that they felt more comfortable with the alternative format than the standard A,B,C,D,F grading system because it could more accurately reflect student progress.

Finally, we discussed how important their feedback was at the local level and state level in this process. I told them that their input would play a key role in the implementation of new practices, because we could use it to improve assessment within the school and district. As a result of our initial discussions I added two headers to the form so that teachers could include as much anecdotal data as necessary to support their assessment and to assist in use for quarterly report cards. When we wrapped up the meeting, we agreed that this discussion should be ongoing, and that I would continue to meet individually with team members as well as the whole group.

While supporting the fifth grade team's ongoing implementation of these assessment practices, I have introduced these tools to other members of the faculty. The initial response across grade levels has been positive. I am using teacher input and assessment samples in my discussions with district teachers at in-services and in other buildings in the district. The initial group of fifth grade teachers is continuing to collaborate with me to gather and analyze data on ELLs performance, and is energized by the knowledge that their feedback is being used to

improve assessment in the district. For example, teachers have informed that one of the initial challenges they faced in implementing the MECCA was how to use the tool when an assignment does not address all four strands. One case of this was a fifth grade social studies lesson in which students did oral presentations based on study of early American history. The teacher used the three applicable strands (vocabulary, language use and conceptual development) in addition to anecdotal notes to create an appropriate alternate assessment for the student. On that particular day, I sat in on the student's presentation as the teacher's peer coach. I independently assessed student progress and compared notes afterward with the teacher to both increase the teacher's skills and level of comfort using the MECCA and help generate a high quality assessment of student progress.

As the end of the first quarter near, the fifth grade team came to me with another concern. Having used alternate assessment tools which they believed accurately reflected the progress made by their student, they were unsure of how to reflect the progress in a report card since the traditional report card called for a letter grade. In response I presented a narrative grade report form (see Appendix 2 for the form). On the form the teacher needs to identify the objective, work samples (oral or written or if there was a combination) and offer comments addressing the degree to which the student met the objective. The teachers asked if they could use a combination of work samples (e.g. the activities for which they had taken a numerical grade as well those assignments which had been evaluated on a rubric). I encouraged them to use what they felt presented the most appropriate measure of the student's skills, knowledge and accomplishments in the quarter.

The senior member of the team (who has been teaching at Sunnyside for twenty eight years) reiterated to me her belief that this alternate assessment system offered a way to show growth over the short term and the long term. She conveyed that she was pleased to have such a system, because for the first time she was able to consider language proficiency when evaluating a student's work, where previously the only thing she and her colleagues could do was offer "token" grades based on effort. It was very apparent that she saw a strong distinction between the two, and is more comfortable with the MECCA rubric. This response to a policy change offers support for McLaughlin's (1990) findings that belief in a policy sometimes follows practice, that is "[I]ndividuals required to change practices or take up new practices can become believers." (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 13). As the teachers became familiar with the MECCA and SOLOM, their support for alternate assessment grew.

As this year has progressed, an increasing number of teachers

in WPASD have started to use the MECCA and SOLOM rubrics to assess students' progress on standards or APIs. The use of these tool is critical to the success of standards based reform for ELLs because combined they show teachers how to align their teaching to standards and measure students' progress towards the standards separately from their progress towards English fluency. Many teachers in districts which have traditionally served very few ELLs are not familiar with strategies for ensuring that students not fluent in English have full access to the curriculum. Through a peer coaching model, I have supported teachers experimentation with and implementation of the APIs and assessment rubrics. In return, the teachers have provided me with valuable fee back to guide the implementation process as it expands throughout the school district.

### **The Work is Ongoing**

As implementation progresses, I will continue to collect data on how teachers are using the instruments and how I can support more extensive implementation of these tools in regular education classrooms. This work is very important since my students spend most of their instructional time in their regular education classes. Additionally, the collaborative process through which we are bringing standards-based assessment and curriculum to ELLs breaks down the traditional divisions between ESL and regular curriculum in pull-out programs; this separation has been shown to be detrimental to the progress of ELLs as it gives them access only to a limited portion of the full curriculum.

The work discussed in this paper addresses part of the recent policy changes made in Wisconsin. While the incorporation of different assessment practices in Windy Plains is one step towards giving ELLs full access to the curriculum, it is obviously only one part of a larger group of policies. Further research needs to be conducted on the use of alternative assessments for ELLs as well as implementation of the APIs in Wisconsin.

The literature on policy implementation and change suggests that the ongoing change in Windy Plains is informative, but certainly not generalizable. The collaboration in WPASD is beginning to produce an integrated, high quality curriculum and assessment system for ELLs in our district; other districts may be taking alternate, but equally informative approaches. Continuing dialogue about how assessment practices are implemented would benefit teachers, policymakers, and ultimately students who will benefit from new approaches to assessment.

## THE AUTHOR

Nicholas Foote has seven years of teaching experience at the elementary and middle school levels. He has been an itinerant ESL teacher for the past three years. He completed his masters' degree in the department of Curriculum & Instruction at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

## REFERENCES

- August, D. & Hakuta, K. eds. (1998). *Educating language-minority children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Constantino, R. (1994). *A study concerning instruction of ESL students comparing all-English classroom teacher knowledge and English as a second language teacher knowledge*. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 13(Spring), 1-13.
- Galbraith, P., & Anstrom, K. (1995). *Peer coaching: An effective staff development model for educators of linguistically and culturally diverse students*. *Directions in Language & Education*, 1 (Spring), 1-8.
- Garet, M., Birman, B., Porter, A., Desimone, L., & Herman, R. (1999). *Designing effective professional development: lessons from the Eisenhower program*. Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research.
- Gottlieb, M. (1999). *Standards-based alternate assessment for limited-English proficient students*. Madison: Department of Public Instruction.
- Heubert, J.P., & Hauser, R. M. (1999) *High stakes: testing for tracking, promotion and graduation*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council.
- Lucas, T. (1993). *Applying elements of effective secondary schooling for language minority students: A tool for reflection and stimulus to change*. NCBE Program Information Guide Series, 14(Fall), 1-14.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). *The Rand change agent study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities*. *Educational Researcher*, 19(9), 11-16.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Valdez Pierce, L. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Spanos, G. (1992). *ESL math and science for high school students: Two case studies*. Paper presented at the Third National Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues: Focus on Middle and High School Issues. Washington, D.C.

# APPENDIX 1

## MECCA and SOLOM Rubrics

	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Language Use</b>	<b>Conceptual Development</b>	<b>Problem Solving</b>
	<i>Understanding of specific, related words, from general to specific</i>	<i>Understanding of language patterns, from simple to complex</i>	<i>Understanding of ideas, concepts, and principles, from concrete to abstract</i>	<i>Understanding how to process information, from explicit to implicit</i>
<b>1</b>	Identifies content words in isolation, often with visual or graphic support.	Uses single words and begins to chunk words to form phrases.	At times, identifies concrete concepts when associated with visual or graphic support.	At times, identifies problem but struggles with how to use language to process information.
<b>2</b>	Uses mostly nonspecific words with few high frequency content words.	Uses basic repetitive patterns confined to present tense.	Relates concrete concepts to everyday familiar experiences.	Uses some explicit information but often reaches illogical solution.
<b>3</b>	Uses some topic and content specific words.	Uses simple sentences in various tenses with some expanded patterns.	Applies concrete concepts to new unfamiliar material.	Generally applies explicit information to reach partial to complete solution.
<b>4</b>	Uses technical and academic language inconsistently.	Uses expanded and compound sentences with some complex patterns to convey ideas.	Identifies features and provides examples for some abstract concepts.	Analyzes explicit and some implicit information to reach a reasonable solution.
<b>5</b>	Uses technical and academic language of the content area appropriate for age.	Uses a variety of sentence patterns appropriate for content area.	Connects interrelated concepts and explains relationship among the ideas.	Synthesizes information to create original, defensible solutions.
Scoring				
Novice 4      Apprentice 5-8      Intern 9-12      Tutor 13-16      Mentor 17-20				
MECCA Score <i>From 4-20</i>				

**LANGUAGE MATRIX**

	<b>A. Comprehension</b>	<b>B. Fluency</b>	<b>C. Vocabulary</b>	<b>D. Pronunciation</b>	<b>E. Grammar</b>
<b>1</b>	Cannot be said to understand even simple conversation.	Speech is so halting and fragmentary as to make conversation virtually impossible.	Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible.	Pronunciation problems so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.	Errors in grammar and word order so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
<b>2</b>	Has great difficulty following what is said. Can comprehend only <i>social conversation</i> spoken slowly and with frequent repetitions.	Usually hesitant—often forced into silence by language limitations.	Misuses words and very limited vocabulary; comprehension quite difficult.	Very hard to understand because of pronunciation problems. Must frequently repeat in order to make himself/herself understood.	Grammar and word order errors make comprehension difficult. Must often rephrase and/or restrict himself/herself to basic patterns.
<b>3</b>	Understands most of what is said at slower-than-normal speed with repetitions.	Speech in everyday conversation and classroom discussion frequently disrupted by the student's search for the correct manner of expression.	Student frequently uses the wrong words; conversation somewhat limited because of inadequate vocabulary.	Pronunciation problems necessitate concentration on the part of the listener and occasionally lead to misunderstanding.	Makes frequent errors of grammar and word order which occasionally obscure meaning.
<b>4</b>	Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasional repetition may be necessary.	Speech in everyday conversation and classroom discussions generally fluent, with occasional lapses while the student searches for the correct manner of expression.	Student occasionally uses inappropriate terms and/or must rephrase ideas because of lexical inadequacies.	Always intelligible, though one is conscious of a definite accent and occasional inappropriate intonation patterns.	Occasionally makes grammatical and/or word order errors which do not obscure meaning.



## APPENDIX 2

### Sample Narrative Report Card

Sunnyside Elementary  
210 W. Elm Grove Lane  
Windy Plains, WI 12345

Student Name Jose Garcia  
Teacher Mr. Smith

Academic Year 2001-2002  
Subject Area Science

Topic/Assignment	Evidence/Work Samples	Observations/Assessment
Create an animal and transfer his knowledge of animals to his creation	Jose partially completed the project of creating his own animal. He showed a basic understanding of animals and their body systems.	Jose showed the ability to identify vertebrates and their characteristics. He also demonstrated knowledge of an animal's development, but was not able to identify stages or types of development.
To demonstrate ability to classify objects by their physical characteristics	Jose classified his classmates. He chose multiple physical characteristics to separate the students.	Jose showed the ability to classify things by characteristics. He demonstrated an ability to apply concrete concepts to new objects. He could also use some topic and content specific vocabulary.
Jose and I worked together to complete a worksheet on metamorphosis. The purpose was to demonstrate an understanding of the two types of metamorphosis and the life cycle of animals.	Jose and I completed the assignment together. I read the questions and he told me his answers. He was able to give me some examples of content specific words, but he struggled with most vocabulary words.	Jose used some topic and content specific vocabulary. He used single words and is chunking words to form phrases dealing with metamorphosis. He also showed an ability to apply the concept to real life examples.

---

# Meaning, Dimension, and Perspective as Explanation to Some Thorny Prepositions

---

CARL ZHONGGANG GAO

*University of Wisconsin--River Falls*

Non-native English speakers often have a difficult time dealing with the use of the particle-like prepositions. In this paper, I examine three aspects associated with the use of these words: meaning, dimensions, and perspectives. By looking into these aspects holistically, we are able to understand and explain the interchangeable uses of these prepositions.

## THE PROBLEM

In second language learning, ESL students have a difficult time dealing with some short, particle-like prepositions such as *at*, *on*, and *in* because the trio can be used interchangeably to express the same meaning. These prepositions are also often used as adverbs to collocate with verbs as particles to form phrasal verbs, hence particle-like prepositions. The difficulty may have come from several sources. In some languages, prepositions are not equivalent in form and use to those in English. In others, one preposition may be used to indicate the meanings of three or even four prepositions in English. For example, in Spanish the preposition *en* can encompass the meanings expressed by *at*, *on*, *in*, and *to* in English. Compare the following Spanish examples with their English translations (Hill and Bradford, 1991:173-4):

1. La fiesta fue *en* mi casa. (The party was *at* my house.)
2. Trabajo *en* la universidad. (I work *at* the university.)
3. Vivo *en* esta calle. (I live *on* this street.)
4. No hay nada *en* la mesa. (Nothing is *on* the table.)
5. La pluma esta *en* las caja. (The feather is *in* the box.)
6. El lector esta *en* las biblioteca. (The reader is *in* the library.)
7. Nunca he estado *en* España. (I have never been *to* Spain.)
8. He estado *en* tu casa repetidas veces. (I've been *to* your house repeatedly.)

The pseudo-equivalency of Spanish *en* with the four prepositions in English can easily cause problems for native Spanish-speaking stu-

dents, especially those at the beginning or intermediate level. Interference from the first language (L1) can potentially occur among these students. Because of language differences, ESL students speaking a variety of languages will likely encounter similar types of problems in their acquisition of these particle-like prepositions.

ESL teachers, on the other hand, will have to differentiate and explain the use of these prepositions in different contexts and answer the question of why interchanging these prepositions does not always cause changes in meaning. For example, in English we can say, "in the train" or "on the train," "in the road" or "on the road," "in the islands" or "on the islands," "at night" or "in the night" without much difference in meaning. When factors of L1 interference and interchangeability of use are combined, it is only natural that students face a dilemma in their choice of an appropriate preposition.

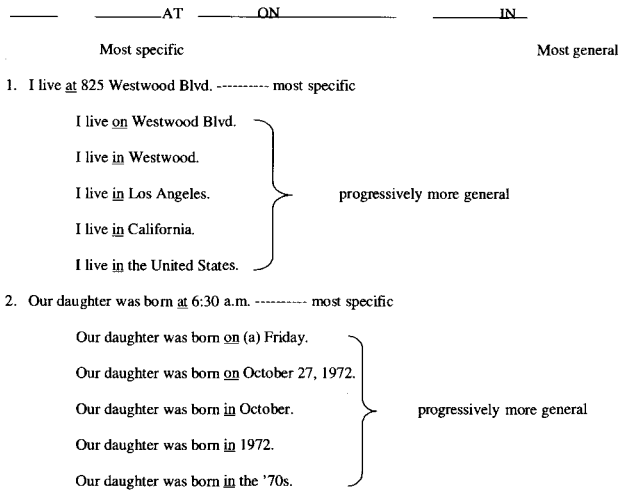
The three frequently used terms of meaning, dimension, and perspective need to be defined. "Meaning" used in this paper refers to the lexical definition of the word, in this case, a dictionary-like definition of a preposition. "Dimension" refers to a conceptualized representation of a spatial relationship, such as "at the door," a point as a static one dimension versus "in a room," an encircled building with three dimensions. Finally, "perspective" is defined as the speaker or writer's unique way of perceiving the reality and using a certain preposition to represent that reality at the time of speaking or writing, for example, "University of Wisconsin *at* Madison," a point on a map versus "a university *in* Madison," a higher education institution within the confines of a city.

Preposition use is probably one of the most difficult focal points in learning English. Many of the prepositions are used to indicate temporal and spatial relationships in a sentence structure. Even though overlapping in meaning is frequent in preposition use, we can, most of the time, distinguish the subtlety in meaning by looking into a variety of factors to identify the underlying meaning. The lexical meaning of prepositions is often the key to understanding the preposition usage in a context. Occasionally, we will have to go beyond the basic lexical meaning to examine the dimensions or perspectives to truly understand the preposition's use in a specific context. By looking at temporal meaning, spatial meaning, dimensions, and perspectives, we can have a panoramic picture of an individual preposition in mind to figure out the meaning of the structure.

## Time and Space

Among all the prepositions, *at*, *on*, and *in* are probably the most frequently used to indicate time and space. Celce-Murcia & Larsen Free

## FIGURE 1 Celce-Muria & Larsen Freeman's Illustration of the Particle-like Prepositions



**TABLE 1  
Master's Illustration of Particle-like Prepositions**



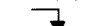





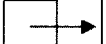

CALENDAR TIME	PLACE OF ADDRESS
Time: The party <u>is</u> at 8 o'clock.	House: John lives <u>at</u> 210 Bay St.
Day: The class begins <u>on</u> Monday.	Street: He lives <u>on</u> Bay Street.
Date: They met <u>on</u> June 2, 1964.	
Month: It rains here <u>in</u> May.	City: He lives <u>in</u> Berkeley.
Season: It's hot <u>in</u> the summer.	County: He lives <u>in</u> Alameda County.
Year: Kennedy was shot <u>in</u> 1963.	State: He lives <u>in</u> California.
Decade: Music changed <u>in</u> the '60s.	Country: He lives <u>in</u> the USA.
Century: The story began <u>in</u> the 9 <sup>th</sup> century.	Continent: He lives <u>in</u> North America.

man (1983, p. 262) proposed that the trio be viewed on a scale with most specific on one end and most general on the other when indicating time and locations.

In Figure I, (a) we see the use of *at*, *on*, and *in* range from a more specific to a more general order in terms of the size of the area (a point in place, a street, an area, a city, a state, and a country). In (b), we see the trio used in time expressions illustrating the quantity of time from a point in time, a day in a week, a date, a month, and a year to a decade. Master (1996, p. 289) developed a similar schema to illustrate these three prepositions indicating time and place (See Table 1).

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's and Master's illustrations are similar in that they all point to the idea from a point in time and space to a larger quantity of time and area in space. They didn't mention dimensions in their respective schemes as it might be difficult to discuss prepositions associated with time expressions in terms of dimensions. Quirk et al. (1985, p. 674) separated the discussion of time from space and only discussed the spatial use of these prepositions. They viewed *at*, *on*, and *in* and other related prepositions in terms of their spatial relations, setting up three dimensions with relevant factors such as positive versus negative, destination versus position.

**TABLE 2**  
**Quirk et al's Illustration of Spatial Prepositions**

destination	position	destination	position	
to 	at • X	(away) from X 	away from X •	DIMENSION -TYPE 0 (point)
on(to) 	on 	off 	off 	DIMENSION -TYPE 1 OR 2 (line or surface)
in(to) 	in 	out of 	out of 	DIMENSION-TYPE 2-3 (area or volume)
POSITIVE		NEGATIVE		

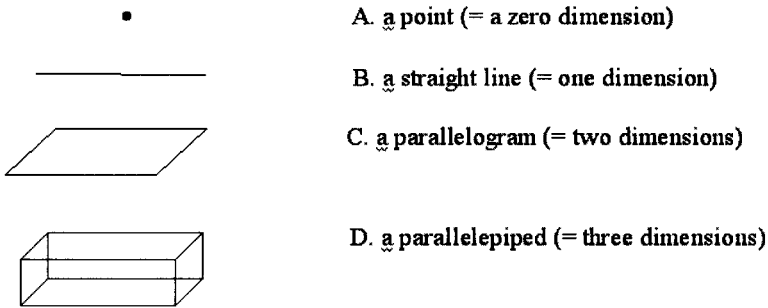
Quirk, et al., have gone beyond the specific versus general contrast of Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman and Master to illustrate these prepositions in terms of spatial relations, which include dimensions, positive and negative destinations and positions. Type zero dimension refers to a point, type one or two dimension a line or surface, and type two-three an area or volume. "Destination" is movement toward or away from a designated location, and "position" refers to a definite stationary

location that does not involve movement. Semantically, "positive" indicates movement toward a destination and its resultant position whereas "negative" indicates movement away from a destination and its resultant position.

## Dimensionality

The term "dimension" can appropriately be associated with our experience of seeing a "3-D movie." In mathematics, dimensions are defined as "a property of space; extension in a given direction: A straight line has one dimension, a parallelogram has two dimensions, and a parallelepiped has three dimensions" (*Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, 1996:555). This can be illustrated in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2**  
**The Concept of Dimensions**






As illustrated above, a point has a zero dimension; a straight line has one dimension; a parallelogram has two dimensions; and a parallelepiped has three dimensions. Using the definition of dimensions in mathematics helps us visualize the concept expressed by the particle-like prepositions because Figure 2 offers a precise picture of the spatial relationship each dimension represents.<sup>1</sup>

We can represent some of the prepositions related to space and dimensions in a matrix to illustrate the concept. The following figure is adapted from Quirk, et al. (1985, p. 674), and Reid (1986).

We use the mathematical symbol ">" to represent "greater than" and "<" "less than." *At*, *to*, *from* all have a zero dimension, and *to* and *from* involves directionality, that is, movement either "toward" or "away from" a point or position. The dimensions suggested by *on*, *onto*, or *off* are greater than zero, but less than three. *In*, *into*, and *out of*, on the other hand, have two or three dimensions depending on the reference of ei-

ther an area or volume. The underlined prepositional phrases in the following examples will illustrate the dimensions involved in the context.

**TABLE 3**  
**Illustration of Spatial Prepositions Adapted from Quirk et al and Reid**

DIMENSIONS	LOCATION	MOVEMENT TOWARD	MOVEMENT AWAY FROM
0 (point)	at • X	to → X	from X →
>0, <3 (line or surface)	on — •	onto ↓	off (of) ↑
2/3 (area or volume)	in 	into 	out of 

9. How much beer is too much? *At* the University of Massachusetts *at* Amherst, 24 cans per dormitory room has been the standard for years. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*)
10. "You know what that line is?" She said. "It's the road. That line is *the road* we're driving *on*. We're going right along this line." (Alice Munro)
11. More debates would take place not only *in the home* but among children and adults everywhere. Adults would also benefit if politics were talked about *in libraries, churches, stores, laundromats, and other places* where children gather. (Rita Wallace)

The preposition *at* used in "at the University of Massachusetts," and "at Amherst" indicates a concept of a point with a zero dimension. "On the road" refers to a line, a one-dimensional entity seen especially from the perspective of pointing a line on a map. "In the home," "in the libraries," and other places indicating a structure or building are considered to be with three dimensions.

The dimensionality issue is not always clear-cut and dry. Amherst is a city in Massachusetts. As a general rule we may say "in Amherst," but from a different perspective, we say the University of Massachusetts "at Amherst," instead of "in Amherst." The dimension changes when the perception of spatial relationship shifts. For example, when we say, "The university is *in* Amherst," we mean that the university is within the city boundary. When we say, "The snow is falling *on* Amherst," we mean that the snow is covering the whole area like a blanket spreading on it. When we say "Flight 900 to Washington has a stop *at* Amherst," we mean that there is a stop at a point on a journey to

Washington. One comment on the dimensional chart is that the dimensions implied in the use of *on* and *in* span from one to three. Therefore, we cannot automatically assume that *on* is of two dimensions and *in* three dimensions.

12. The farmlands also change color, as tepees of cornstalks and bales of shredded-wheat-textured hay stand drying *in the fields*. (Diane Ackerman)

13. My parents seldom left their only child to play *in the street* when they traveled from the farm to Minnesota for some errand. (Bill Holm)

Obviously, "in the fields" has an implied meaning of two dimensions, not three, and "in the street" may have one dimension in meaning if we consider it as "along or down the street" or two dimensions if we consider it an area with a surface. To straighten out the ambiguities, we need to examine these "either-or" situations from a different angle of what I call the perspective.

## Perspective

The discussion of perspective aims at exploring yet another important aspect in the use of prepositions. We have seen prepositions used interchangeably to indicate the same meaning as in "at night" or "in the night" and "on the road" or "in the road" or different prepositions preceding the same noun as in "at Amherst" and "on Amherst" to indicate the same concepts from different perspectives. Close (1992, p. 128) succinctly notes:

In using the prepositions we are concerned not so much with objective measurements, i.e. with the actual dimensions of the things to which we are referring, as with how we imagine them to be at the time of speaking. Thus we can imagine a town as a point on the map, as a surface to go across, or as a space we live in or walk through.

Close's point serves to explain many of the dilemmas we face in interpreting the use of prepositions in the cases such as "on the train" or "in the train" and "at night" or "in the night." It is a matter of different perspectives or the way we see the reality at the time when we speak. Cruse (2000, p. 117) illustrated perspective this way:

A simple way to explaining these [perspectives] would be by analogy with looking at an everyday object from in front, from the sides, from behind, from on top, etc. All these different views are perceptually distinct, but the mind unifies them into a single conceptual unity.

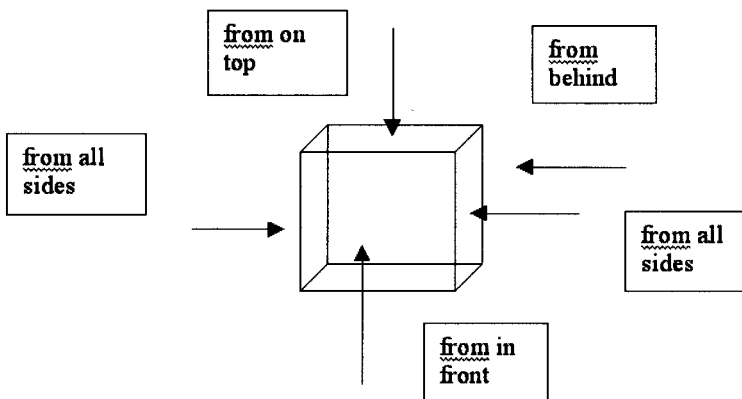
Now I will illustrate the perspective concept by comparing and contrasting a few prepositional phrases that employ various prepositions.



### "On the Islands" versus "In the Islands"

In the examples of "on the islands" and "in the islands," the difference is, in fact, one of perspectives. An island can either be considered as a relatively "large (area) or a political entity with boundaries" (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, p. 147) such as Taiwan or Cuba or a small place with a surface to form two dimensions. In Somerset Maugham's

FIGURE 3  
Illustration of Cruse's Concept of Perspectives



short stories, the author used "on the islands" and "in the islands" as if they had no difference. Compare the following examples:

14. There were Americans, sailors from the ships in port, enlisted men off the gunboats, sombrely drunk, and soldiers from the regiments, white and black, quartered *on the islands*.
15. But for some reason, that evening the missionary's thoughts travelled back to the early days he and his wife had spent *on the islands*.
16. She was an old woman, for the women *on the islands* age quickly, and if he had no love for her any more, he had tolerance.
17. And in the evening after the high tea which was their last meal, while they sat in the stiff parlour, the ladies working and Dr. Macphail smoking his pipe, the missionary told them of his work *in the islands*.
18. He was a South Sea merchant, and he had agencies *in many of the islands* of the Pacific.
19. "It's such a damned long time since I heard it that I almost forget it myself. But for thirty years now *in the islands* they've always called me Red."

Indeed, we see that both expressions can be used interchange-

ably. It is just a matter of perspective on the part of the writer or speaker as how he or she perceives the intended message at the time of writing or speaking.

**"On the Road/Street" versus "In the Road/Street"**

In a similar fashion, "on the road or street" and "in the road or street" constitute another comparison between the use of *on* and *in*.

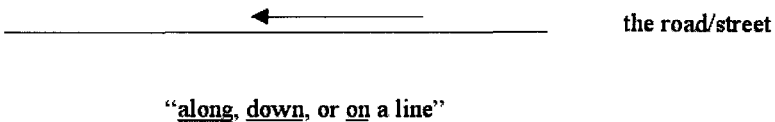
- 20. Now and then we could see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear *on the streets*. (William Faulkner)
- 21. "I (have) seen more ghosts than I got fingers and toes. One stopped me *on the road* the other night." (Arna Bontemps)
- 22. "Do you want to see for me if there's a body *in the road*? No body *in the road*?" "Nothing is there." (Father's Day)
- 23. *In the street*, I had been the most articulate hustler out there – I had commanded attention when I said something. (Malcolm X)

The difference here is again of different perspectives. The preposition *on* has the meaning of "on the surface of or along a line." "On the road or street" can be considered as something or somebody is "on the surface" of the road or street. We can also consider the road or street that will lead to somewhere as "along the road" or "along the street." The idea of "along a line" involves certain directions. In this sense, "down the road" or "down the street" is also a natural choice in expressing the same meaning.

- 24. No word was exchanged, and they set out in silence *down the road*. (Somerset W. Maugham)
- 25. He was fond of this spot. He could stand there for hours smoking his pipe and waiting for something unusual or exciting to come *down Alameda Road*. (Arna Bontemps)

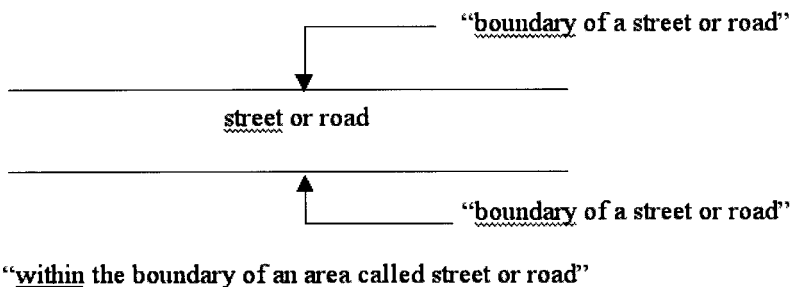
"On the road" or "on the street" can be illustrated this way:

**FIGURE 4  
On the Road/Street**



"In the road" or "in the street," on the other hand, suggests an area with boundaries. The expression can be interpreted as "within the

FIGURE 5  
In the Street/Road



boundaries or limits of an area called road or street.” It may not have the meaning that something will have to be in the middle, but as long as it is within the confines or limits, it is called “*in the road*” or “*in the street*.”

#### “UW at Madison” versus “USC in Los Angeles”

In addition to the examples we have discussed, the perspective issue can be illustrated by the contrastive examples of “the University of Wisconsin *at* Madison” and “University of Southern California” (USC) *in* Los Angeles. Usually the names of cities are preceded by “*in*,” such as “*in* River Falls” or “*in* Madison” or “*in* Milwaukee.” When indicating institutions of higher learning in a system, we say “UW *at* Madison,” “UW *at* River Falls,” and “UW *at* Milwaukee,” or “California State University *at* Long Beach” and “California State University *at* Northridge.” However, when we add the city as the location to University of Southern California, we will say University of Southern California *in* Los Angeles, not “*at* Los Angeles.” The location is usually not part of the institution identifier.

University of Wisconsin and California State University are two statewide systems and USC is a single campus university. English speakers or writers tend to look at a statewide university system with multiple campuses at different locations on a state map. A typical illustration is a state map with points showing different cities where these campuses locate. The point “*at* Madison” is conceived in contrast to “*at* River Falls,” “*at* Milwaukee” and other points on a state map. For a single campus such as University of Southern California located in Los Angeles, there is no such contrast. Therefore, the city of Los Angeles is preceded by “*in*,” not a point versus other points on the map such as the point “*at* Long Beach” versus other points “*at* Northridge” and “*at* Chan-

nel Islands." But even when mentioning a statewide system with multiple campuses, if the speaker or writer has the city as the location of the university in mind, he or she may use *in*.

26. After receiving his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina *in Chapel Hill* and then working for a year, Fred attended the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University, receiving a Master of Management degree in 1981. (Faith Adams)

The writer's focus is obviously on the city itself as the location from where Fred graduated, not one point of the city of Chapel Hill versus many other points on a state map.

### "On a Train" versus "In a Train"

The perspective approach serves to explain some other frequently used prepositional expressions. We say "*in a train*" or "*on a train*," "*in a boat*" or "*on a boat*," but "*in a car*" and "*in a canoe*." A train can be considered as having a three-dimensional space or enclosure so people can be inside a train, but in the meantime, it has an enough surface area to allow people to stand on or move around. The same thing can be said of a boat as well. However, a car or a canoe does not have such a surface area to allow people to stand on or move around. In this sense, *on* is not an appropriate choice for a car, a taxi, or a canoe, where the vehicle's size and shape allow room only for sitting.

### "On the Team" and "On the List"

Some English nouns can associate with specific prepositions to indicate membership. For instance, "board," "committee," "commission," "faculty," "staff," and "team" only collocate with the preposition "on" as in "on the board," "on the committee," "on the commission," "on the faculty," "on the staff," and "on the team" or even "*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*," a James Bond movie in the late 1960s. The perspective I can offer here is that when we examine these prepositional phrases carefully, we notice that each of these organized entities possesses an essential characteristic, that is, they are organized in such a way that all members are "on a list." If your name is "on the list," you are "*on the board, committee, or team*." A nurse "*on the hospital staff*" is a nurse whose name is "*on the list or the payroll*" of the hospital. In a different context, "*We decided that in the committee meeting*" can be reduced to "*We decided that in the committee*." The preposition "in" is obviously collocated with "the meeting." Another example that illustrates a different context is "*There's disagreement in the faculty*." We assume that "in" is used because there is disagreement (with)in the ranks of faculty. Both examples illustrate a different context, but they do not relate to membership or the concept of "on a list." We can see that preposition use in context deter-

mines the meaning of the concept and our perception of such meaning.

### **"At Night," "In the Night" versus "On the Night"**

A final note on the discussion of the perspective is the contrast between "at night," "in the night," and "on the night." It is logical to make an assumption that "at night" indicates the time to sleep with no activities going on, while "in the night" suggests that there are activities going on during the dark hours of the night. What about "on the night"? Let's take a look at some contrasting examples using all three phrases to see if we can find some answers.

27. It was the best of times and the worst of times to run to that state for refuge. Best, because the summer air was so laden with honeysuckle and spiraea it almost drugged the senses *at night*. (Arna Bontemps)
28. Instead of chasing possums *at night* and swimming in creeks in the daytime, this bunch of kids without jobs and nothing else to do had taken to riding empty box cars. (Arna Bontemps)
29. But the day after when, exultant, he went to see her he found that *in the night* she had burnt down the hut in which she and Red had lived together. (Somerset W. Maugham)
30. He raped her, pistol-whipped her, pumped two rounds into her, and then left her for dead. She saw a house light and crawled toward it. The people inside feared her pounding *in the night* and did not want to open up. (Charles Bowden)
31. Hot tea *on a cold night*. Grand memories of celebrating St. Patrick's Day in Dublin: parades, pubs, downpours and a gesture of warmth. (The Globe and Mail)
32. He thought once more over all he had said to her *on the previous night*. He didn't know how else he could have put it. (Somerset Maugham)

It seems that "at night" may refer to the early hours of the night and "in the night" somewhat later, but I believe that both can be used interchangeably with the same meaning. The reason is that the preposition *at* can be used not only to indicate "a point in time," but also "a period of time." "At nine o'clock," "at noon," and "at midnight" are points in time, but "at Christmas," "at the weekend" (BrE), "at Easter," and "at night" indicate periods of time. In this regard, "at night" and "in the night" has the same meaning because a period of time can be expressed using the preposition "during" as in "*during* the day" ("*in* the day") and "*during* the night" ("*in* the night"). The same is true with "*during* Christmas," "*during* Easter," or "*during* the weekend." These periods of time can easily be perceived as points in time on a calendar. From the perspective of a year or a multi-year calendar, it is not unlikely that we take these periods of time as points in time in a larger or more gen-

eral sense of time.

"On the night," however, is used in contrast with "on the day" similar to that between "in the day" and "in the night." When questioning a suspect, the police would ask, "Where were you *on the night* of September 10<sup>th</sup>? When talking about a habitual activity, we would say, "We go dancing *on Saturday night(s)*." It appears that the focus of "on the night" is on "the dark hours of the day or date," also known as the night in contrast with "the light hours" of the day or date. The focus of "at night" and "in the night" is on "the duration or the period of these dark hours."

## CONCLUSION

The examination of meaning related to time and space, dimensionality, and perspective has revealed a few different aspects that affect the perception and use of some troublesome prepositions. By taking a holistic approach to understanding these prepositions, we can grapple with the complexity involved in meaning and use in a variety of context, and we are able to offer some functional explanations to the interchangeability of use of these prepositions. ESL teachers and students will benefit from the conceptual analysis that explains the behavior of these particle-like prepositions. After all, the meaning of these prepositions is expressed through not only the lexical and semantic, but also the conceptual representation of reality. Although prepositions are classified as modifiers, they are a vital part in the structure of the English language that we cannot afford to ignore.

## THE AUTHOR

Carl Zhonggang Gao is an assistant professor of English at University of Wisconsin, River Falls, where he teaches courses in language acquisition, linguistics, structure and history of English, TESOL practicum, and methods. His primary research interests include first and second language acquisition, grammar theories, and application of linguistic theories in language education.

## REFERENCES

Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen Freeman, D. (1983). *The grammar book: An*

- ESL/EFL teacher's course*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Close, R. A. (1992). *A teachers' grammar: The central problems of English*. Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications.
- Cruse, A. (2000). *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, S. & Bradford, W. (1991) *Bilingual grammar of English-Spanish syntax: A manual with exercises*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Master, P. (1996). *Systems in English grammar: An introduction for language teachers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Quirk, R. & Greenbaum, S. (1973). *A concise grammar of contemporary English*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

# SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

**HAMLIN**  
**UNIVERSITY**

*Graduate School of Education*

**inspiring**  
**challenging**  
**transforming**

## ESL AND BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL ED

- Programs for both practicing teachers and those seeking initial licensure
- Flexible scheduling — evenings and weekends
- Online licensure coursework available

### Options

- ESL Licensure
- BiEd Licensure
- Coursework & Certificate for teachers of adult ESL students
- Coursework & Certificate for mainstream teachers who serve ESL students
- Master of Arts in Education with an ESL emphasis
- Master of Arts in Teaching in ESL
- Master of Arts in ESL

## TEFL CERTIFICATE COURSE

- Designed for individuals who wish to teach English overseas
- Internationally recognized; graduates have taught in over 30 countries
- Practical instruction; student teaching with adult learners
- Participants earn graduate credit
- Career counseling available during and after the course

### Options

- One month intensives: April, July, August
- Evening extensive: September - March

**Learn from  
teachers who  
connect theory  
to practice**

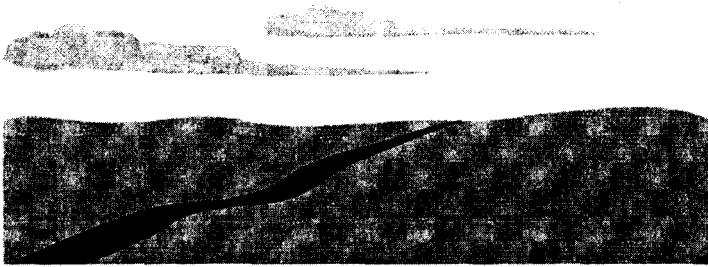
**Center for Second Language Teaching and Learning**

**For more information: 651-523-2900 or 800-753-9753**

**Fax: 651-523-2489**

**E-mail: [gradprog@gw.hamline.edu](mailto:gradprog@gw.hamline.edu)**





**Voices across the Prairie**  
**Midwest Regional TESOL Conference**  
**November 7 - 9, 2002**

Thunderbird Hotel and Convention Center  
2201 East 78th Street • Bloomington, MN 55427

**Keynote Speakers:**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7th**

**Bill Holm**

Southwest State University, Marshall, Minnesota  
Minnesota Author of "Coming Home Crazy"

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8th**

**Marguerite Ann Snow**

University of California, Los Angeles, California  
"Content-Based Instruction:  
Looking Back, Looking Forward"

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9th**

**Linda Harklau**

University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia  
"From High School to College:  
Generation 1.5 Students in Transition"

**Contact person: Adele Hansen: [hanse002@umn.edu](mailto:hanse002@umn.edu)**

**Check our website for conference information: <http://www.minnetesol.org>**

The *MinneTESOL*/  
*WITESOL* Journal  
P.O. Box 141072  
Minneapolis, MN 55414

**PRSR** STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Mpls., MN  
Permit No. 155



Jenise Rowekamp  
3215 33rd Ave. S.  
Minneapolis MN 55406