Addressing Acculturation Skills

by Fredricka Stoller

When one contemplates the cultural and ethnic diversity in our classrooms, one should not be surprised that ESL students' behavior is unlike that in the typical American classroom. Yet, some ESL teachers continue to be surprised by foreign students. Often we hear ESL teachers comment:

"I don't understand why Yoshio never volunteers to speak in class. And I refuse to call on him; he's just going to have to learn on his own that he had better speak up if he wants to improve his English."

"He just copied the words straight from the text! No quotation marks. No citations. Doesn't that student realize he could be kicked out of school for such blatant plagiarism?"

"Five weeks into the term and Pangaro so still comes late. But what's even more disturbing and disruptive is that he knocks on the classroom door before entering. Have you ever heard of anything so impolite?"

"I asked my students to critique this article. One student refused to write down any negative comments. He said that if the article was published, it must be correct. Isn't that absurd?"

As common as these complaints may be, they reflect cultural rather than individual problems which students face as they come to terms with the behavioral expectations of the American classroom.

As ESL teachers, we should not be so frustrated by such inappropriate behavior. Our ESL students come to class with diverse culturally-determined expectations which translate into different classroom behaviors. Each student's cultural orientation places its own restrictions on what is appropriate and what is not. Unfortunately, what may be perfectly acceptable in one's native country may be considered inappropriate here in the United States.

While it is necessary for students to adapt, it is equally important for teachers to be culturally sensitive to students' diverse behaviors. To expect foreign students to fully adapt themselves to our American classroom is unrealistic. Yet, with the guidance of the ESL teacher, students can learn gradually to adapt to American classroom expectations.

As frequently as cultural differences surface in our classrooms, it is interesting to note that ESL methodology and classroom textbooks rarely make reference to acculturation skills, those skills which allow students to cope with the American educational system and corresponding expectations and behaviors. Most ESL related texts focus properly on language skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening — and academic study skills; they often ignore acculturation skills completely. Perhaps it is assumed that students will develop these skills on their own. Yet, foreign students who have intentions of staying in the American university system, for example, for a short period of time are at a great disadvantage if they are not introduced to these expectations and behaviors at an early stage in their academic careers. These students need to develop appropriate academic behaviors; they must learn what they can expect from others — their colleagues and professors — and what their professors expect from them. These skills are crucial for academic success.

ESL classrooms provide an ideal forum for these skills. An orientation to our American educational system and corresponding expectations and behaviors can be woven into any classroom. With culturally determined assumptions so deeply ingrained in our unconscious behavior, it is useful to design activities that allow students to discover their own native assumptions and later contrast them with American expectations. Something as simple as the following exercise, practical at any level of instruction, allows teachers to highlight such differences in follow-up activities:

List the characteristics of:

A. An effective teacher
B. An ineffective teacher

A. A successful student
1. 1.
2. 2.
3. 3.

B. An unsuccessful student
1. 1.
2. 2.
3. 3.

Similar exercises which help students explore topics such as teacher-student relationships, tardiness, plagiarism, student participation, and modes of instruction, studying and testing are constructive and equally valuable.

"Until students have the opportunity to experience this..." (Continued on page 9)

King's Trial

by Allison Brewster

In addition to being an adept volleyball player, kayaker, and novelist Kevin King is an innovative teacher of ESL. He is continually working on developing new materials to explore with his students. His recently published and well-received book, Trial by Jury, is a testimony to his creativity as a teacher.

Kevin began teaching ESL in the Peace Corps in Senegal and also taught in Mexico and various Middle Eastern Countries. In the Boston area he has taught at the Kennedy School of Government, the University of Massachusetts and the Harvard EFL Summer Program and Extension.

In regard to education, Kevin felt that there was a lack of pedagogical material available to encourage students to learn to articulate a point of view in a meaningful context. So he wrote a book in an attempt to fill the gap.

"Trial by Jury is an upper-intermediate discussion text that deals with legal cases and the issues involved. In groups students read about a situation, discuss the legal and moral issues involved, and come to a decision for which they receive points. The various cultural perspectives an ESL class brings to the situation always elicit lively discussion. It's stimulating and provokes controversy," says Kevin. "It demands a certain ethical, as well as common-sense approach, which everyone is capable of. It also takes the focus off English skills, and therefore the student becomes less self-conscious of his shortcomings in grammar."

(Continued on page 9)
Musings
by Jacklyn Clayton

MATSL is like the crazy-patch quilt I was working on for Christmas: a patch of one color and grain and texture alongside another, anchored to an underlying foundation common to all individual pieces.

We have diversity in our vocations — be it administration, research or teaching, and even within those vocations. We have diversity in our backgrounds, in the circumstances that surround our employment and the attitudes that shape the job. While all of these may seem to be forces of divergence rather than cohesion, we can celebrate the diversity if we understand and take advantage of the fact that MATSL is not a one-interest, one-issue organization.

We have commonality in the bond of ESL instruction, including all that connotes. We have unity in our concern for our students and their needs, in promoting understanding across lines that separate. We have unity in our desires to strengthen our profession. We have experiences to share that expand ideas, or lighten anxieties, or enhance each others’ viewpoints.

The tie that makes us strong is the communication with others in our own areas of interest as well as in other areas, the interaction experienced in community, not the theory read in seclusion. The growth in our field challenges us, individually and collectively, to address issues that are of particular concern, to work for quality in our programs and continuing professional development in our field.

The individual pieces of my quilt sat in a box, isolated, unused, taking up space. The finished quilt is warm, bright, sturdy, usable, the result of different juxtapositions bound together by a common bond.

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Acculturation Skills
(Continued from page 1)

explore these culture-specific issues directly, they are likely to violate unintentionally some of our "rules" and frustrate their teachers and colleagues. The student who does not volunteer in class may not realize that participation is highly valued here in the U.S.; the student that plagiarizes may have no notion of its serious consequences in American universities; the late student that knocks on the door before entering has no way of knowing that he should quietly "sneak" in and take the first available seat; the student who has trouble critiquing an article needs to learn that it is acceptable and expected. Classroom activities involving readings, lectures, polls and interviews (both in-class and out-of-class), take a variety of activities, can help foreign students learn to deal more effectively with their new surroundings. The different cultural expectations and behaviors our students bring with them to class should be "exploited" for positive ends rather than seen as a hindrance and a source of frustration.

1 Acculturation skills related to testing would include understanding what testing involves as opposed to study skill strategies which deal with how to take a test.

2 Some textbooks that contain readings for consciousness raising and acculturation include:
   b. For and Against, by Alexander, Longman.
   d. Read/Instruct, by Byrd and Clemente-Cabelas, Regents.
   e. Read On Speak Out, by Ferreira and Vai, Newbury House.
   g. The American Way: An Introduction to American Culture, by E. Kearny, M. Kearny and Crandell, Prentice-Hall.
   h. Yesterday and Today in the U.S.A., by Harris Live, Prentice-Hall.

Fredericka Steller is a lecturer at the American Language Institute, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She is also a summer faculty member at Harvard University.

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Language and Culture in Transition
Nina Wallerstein
Addison-Wesley, 1983
Reviewed by Lynne Weintraub

Should teachers of immigrants, refugees, and members of low socioeconomic backgrounds consider the philosophical implications of "survival"-oriented teaching? Yes, writes Nina Wallerstein, effectively and compellingly in her recent book, Language and Culture in Conflict: Problem-Posing in the ESL Classroom.

Based on the literacy empowerment approach developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, Wallerstein presents a viable strategy and rationale for raising cultural consciousness and developing language abilities simultaneously.

Traditional ESL texts and methods tend to perpetuate students' feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy by failing to acknowledge or honestly confront basic realities in their lives — problems such as unsafe housing, poor access to medical care, and worker exploitation. Without offering the informational tools and skills needed for self-defense, or even the opportunity to acknowledge one another's common experience, most materials simply ignore the unpleasant realities, or gloss over them condescendingly, with stilted dialogues and simplistic remedies. The teacher presents a survival topic, supplies some naïve advice, like, "Work hard and always show up on time," throws in some verb conjugations, pattern drills, or "competency objectives," and then leaves the students to fend for themselves somehow in the real world, feeling isolated, and often even responsible for their own dilemmas. ("It never happened that way in the textbook.") Similarly, the conventional classroom set-up, with teacher-imposed curriculum and passive-recipient students, does nothing to foster assertive behavior, independent thought, or constructive, meaningful interaction.

Wallerstein suggests that rather than simply transmitting language information, the teacher can serve as a "problem-poser" in order to stimulate meaningful dialogue in a two-way process. Presenting a carefully selected "code" (a picture, dialogue, song, story, etc., which addresses a key issue for her particular group), she initiates a discussion of questions which lead participants gradually to define, personalize, analyze, and finally, formulate their own solutions to the problem.

Fortunately, Wallerstein does more than espouse a philosophy; she presents eight well-developed sample units which deal with topics such as "culture and conflict," "health care," "work," and "money." Within these units, each lesson contains a code (usually a picture or dialogue), "tools for dialogues" (possible discussion questions), suggested exercises for language practice, and ideas for learning activities concerning the problem theme.

While "pure" language instruction is never excluded from the lesson, it is only one component of an overall scheme providing a meaningful application of critical ideas and is intimately tied into the experience and contributions of the people for whom it is intended.

Wallerstein's book displays an unusual sensitivity toward the cultural issues and philosophical implications of "survival" ESL. Beyond this, it offers an unprecedented opportunity for teachers and students to share in the exploration of personal and community development. For caring and conscientious teachers, Language and Culture in Conflict is a breakthrough.

Lynne Weintraub teaches ESL in the Holyoke Public Schools and is a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst.

Open Sesame!
Jane Zion
Oxford University Press
Reviewed by Linda Bebeau

Open Sesame, by Jane Zion, is a lively, refreshing and colorful six-stage English as a Second Language Series for children, featuring the Sesame Street Muppets. Open Sesame's approach to language learning encourages the development of essential language skills, those of communicating, listening, and speaking.

Beginning with stage A, Big Bird's Yellow Book, Open Sesame sets many goals to encourage the development of students' conceptual, perceptual and motor skills. Lessons are structured to motivate and stimulate the beginning English student's active participation through colorful pictures, zesty songs, rhythmical chants and challenging games. The situations students encounter in this book offer interesting, inspiring, and useful oral language.

Students proceed sequentially to Stage B, Ernie and Bert's Red Book, which expands their vocabulary and introduces speaking and reading skills. Developing higher cognitive abilities necessary for success in an English-speaking environment.

The activities and practice provided in Open Sesame are varied and spirited. The series has provided my students with an increased excitement, confidence, and security in using their newly acquired language, enabling them to interact comfortably with other English speaking children in their school and neighborhood. Open Sesame is a welcomed addition to my English as a Second Language program.

Linda Bebeau is an ESL teacher at the Charlotte Comming School in Framingham.

Express English: Transitions
Linda Ferreira
Newbury House, 1984
Reviewed by Mark Stepner

ESL teachers on the lookout for textbooks which stress communicative skills and are an enjoyable springboard for language learning may wish to look carefully at Linda Ferreira's Transitions, the intermediate-level book in the Express English series (Newbury House Publishers, 1984).

Geared for "intermediate-level students and false beginners," Transitions is the first text in the series to be published so far. The text integrates all four language skills and features "Uptown," a story in the style of a soap opera, with brief grammar explanations and varied activities, many of which have a strong functional emphasis. Included at this level are the student book, the workbook, the set of two cassettes, and the teacher's edition. The student book features color photography as well as high-quality illustrations, and the cassettes are exceptionally fine ones, with the workbook being a useful optional component. Transitions skillfully treads a fine line between being primarily a grammar-based book and being a totally function-oriented one with no grammatical explication.

The fabric of the text is interwoven with "Uptown," described as "the continuing story of the struggle between powerful New York businessman Preston Wade and the tenants of Tudor Village." What happens to the characters throughout the book provides a starting point for numerous contextualized activities. In fact, the skillful integration of the story and the characters throughout most of the student book and the workbook constitutes one of the greatest strengths of Transitions.

Composed of twenty-four units, the student book revolves around "Uptown" and has several different components. Each unit is six pages in length, with two "Scene" pages (episodes), two "Practice" sections (grammar practice), one "Expression" page (functional focus), and, depending on the unit, either a "Readabout/Writeabout" portion (in odd-numbered units) or a "Speakabout" one (less formal discourse — in even-numbered units). In addition, Appendix 1 has the "Expression" tascpts. Appendix 2 contains the "Speakabout" scripts, and the last page has a list of the principal parts of common irregular verbs. The "Readabout/Writeabout" sections contain brief journalistic reading passages. Dealing with diverse themes, including many related to "moral issues" based on the work of Laurence Kolberg, this section also offers opportunities for discussions and follow-up writing practice.

(Continued on page 10)

Please send book reviews for the Spring issue to C. Sadow, ELC, Northeastern U., Boston, MA before April 2, 1985.

Linda Ferreira is an ESL teacher at the Charlotte Comming School in Framingham.
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Electives at Harvard
by Carol Houser Piresno

For the past twelve years Anne Dato has directed the ESL programs at Harvard University. In the following interview she expresses her ideas about the elective component, an essential part of the intensive eight-week summer course.

CHP: Could you talk about the program at Harvard and what role the elective component plays?

AD: The summer intensive is where electives come into play. Students are in class five hours a day. On the basis of CELT structure and listening scores students are placed in integrated-skills "homerooms" for two hours a day. The other three hours of the day are made up of elective courses which students select from the array available to them. We divide the homerooms into four different levels for the purpose of choosing electives. Some electives are offered to sections across all levels and others occur only at the upper or lower level. Some of the highly specialized or professional electives are for the advanced upper levels and more general survival skills electives at the lower levels. Basically, the electives we offer now cover a broad range of subjects. There are over twenty choices for each level, so we end up with over one hundred discrete courses once we sort students into sections.

CHP: How many students do you have in each course then?

AD: A section may run from five to fifteen students. In an occasional, exceptional elective we may permit a few extra students because it has a format that tolerates that. But we may also have a very tiny section because we've decided that it's important to have a program for just the Japanese speakers at a certain proficiency level. We start out with a menu that the students can choose from, we sort students and decide how many sections of this or that we're going to have, and then we put the system in motion. It's really more complicated than that implies; we have a very systematic computer program that helps in arranging the data I need to make those decisions.

CHP: How do you decide what electives to offer?

AD: The whole process really starts back in February when we approach the veteran teachers who are coming back or the new teachers in interview, and ask "What kind of elective would you LIKE to teach?" Then they say "I've always wanted to do this, but no one gave me the chance," or "I did this last year but I really like to refine it." Sometimes it's something they've done often and sometimes it's something they've never done, but the main thing is it's something THEY WANT to do. And so they propose an elective and I look at all the proposals of everybody I'm expecting to hire and I say, "Well, if I gave everybody their first choice, we might have a few too many of this or that." I might tinker and approach people, but usually people have given me a couple of options, and by juggling these options around, I can come up with a diet that makes sense for the students. A lot of our students have been in the U.S. before, it's not a big novelty. Not everybody wants cultural orientation, so electives that stress it go in and out of fashion.

CHP: So, essentially students can study whatever they want.

AD: They feel the TOEFL is all-important and everything they do must pay off in terms of the test. We can't expect them to write plays if we don't persuade them that writing plays is going to improve their English. Years ago one of our teachers offered a course called "Themes in American Literature and Film" and nobody wanted to take it, so the second term — at that time we were running four-week electives — I rewrote the description in terms almost as blatant as "How to pass the TOEFL by reading books and going to movies", and students came out of the woodwork and loved the course. But you have to meet them halfway instead of making it look like fun, because some of them are afraid to use their time at Harvard having fun. So you say "Not to worry! It's fun but it's also going to do this and this and this for your English". "It's a con job partly, it's P.R."

C: Isn't it awfully shaky for you at the beginning of the semester having this array of elective teachers and courses, not knowing if anybody is going to take them? How do you handle the paperwork, contracts and what teachers expect?

A: With a certain amount of mutual respect, trust and flexibility, Teachers know that they're contracted to do a certain number of hours at a given price. And I have a pretty good crystal ball on the regular patterns of summer enrollment. I can predict within five to ten percent the range of scores, how many people at what score and what nationality they'll be because we have a long track record of steady growth and steady patterns within it. Usually I come within one person of the number of people I need to hire and what they have to teach. It's amazing, but these things do work out.

CHP: I just have one last question. Considering the intensity of the program and setting up the classes, how do you survive Harvard? Do you go to the Bahamas afterward for a vacation?

A: My idea of a good time is indeed to go somewhere sunny when I get a chance and fortunately I do like the sunny spots that are nice in winter, but I don't get away to too many of them. Last year I gave myself the luxury of a hiking and diving trip in South America along the Inca Trail and in the Galapagos. That was a package deal of two dreams come true, but trips of that duration have been very rare. It's hard to get away for long periods of time.

This interview was conducted by Carol Houser Piresno, coordinator of electives at CELOP, Boston University.

King
(Continued from page 1)

There are several reasons Kevin used law cases as a foundation for a discussion text. Some years ago during a Boston lawsuit the prosecuting party wished to withdraw in the midst of the proceedings, but under U.S. law the suit had to continue. Kevin used this case as a springboard to stimulate class discussion. Comparing the diverse legal systems of the students' countries was a topic that prompted debate. Another idea Kevin came across was a law exam, which gave anecdotes he felt could induce thoughtful discussion. These events, coupled with his personal interest in law proved to be the impetus behind Trial by Jury.

Applications of the text can vary. Kevin suggests that the students do a lot of work at home to save class time for the trial and discussion of legal questions. The reading, exercises, vocabulary, and preparation of pretrial questions are best done at home. "Class time", he feels, "is best devoted to listening comprehension, discussion of law, which had to be carefully paced by the teacher, and the trial itself which should proceed as quickly as possible." Another application suggested by a colleague was to divide the class into two groups and assign different chapters to each group. Students then had to relate relevant facts of their case to the other group who had to listen closely in order to make an objective decision.

True to his creative nature, Kevin has been experimenting and developing lessons revolving around the concept of justice. He has taken the legal questions raised in Trial by Jury a step further and presented cases which question the nature of justice. These, he says, never fail to spark interesting and provocative discussion.

Allison Braustein is a graduate student in the ESL Master's Program at UMASS/Boston.

Wallace Lambert at the UMASS/Boston Lecture Series.

And in April . . .

STEPHEN KRAHSEN
Sponsored by MATSOL and UMASS/Boston, 9
Transitions

(Continued from page 4)

There are several shortcomings worth noting. For example, the student-centered methodology reflected throughout much of Transitions is not the focus of the “Writeabout” component, which treats different aspects of expository writing. Students are provided with frames as writing models and instructed to “produce well-developed paragraphs, with topic and concluding sentences” as well as a preliminary outline. Such a very structured, rather restrictive approach to writing is clearly teacher-centered and may, at times, be an obstacle to student creativity. Also, the “Speakabout” section is confusingly top-heavy with listening cues. Finally, there could be more introductory information provided about Carlos, one of the fairly major characters in “Uptown.”

The teacher edition has copious notes on how to present the material, including pronunciation work and follow-up suggestions for each unit. At the end of the teacher edition are sample multiple-choice midterm and final tests, answer sheets and answer keys for both a final answer key for the workbook, and the Grammar Appendix. In sum, the teacher edition is a very helpful component.

I have used selections from a number of the Transitions units with intermediate-level students. The students were consistently enthusiastic about “Uptown” and looked forward to hearing a new story, a saga of love conflicts and intrigues, which made learning grammar a more memorable experience for them.

Linda Ferreira, a faculty member of Columbia University’s Teachers’ College, has produced a generally well-integrated intermediate text with a compelling story and a whole panoply of activities that bring contextualized, functional use of grammar into play. This is a very useful addition to the pool of ESL texts based on a “communicative approach” from which teachers can choose materials to help their students achieve functional fluency.

Mark Steoper is the director of curriculum at the American Language Academy on the campus of Babson College.

Unmusical Saws

i. I don’t want my son sent to Central America to be used as cattle fodder.

ii. The problem is they play it too close to the vest,” said Casper. “When something goes wrong, they circle the wagon.”

iii. He may have a college degree, but he’s as dumb as a post.

iv. . . . for all intensive purposes.

v. . . . it’s a doggy dog world.

vi. This room was restored with tender love and care.

found under old wallpaper

Somewhere between words and sentences there lies a dim, nebulous region which is the natural habitat of several varieties of linguistic grotesques. Among these are memorized bits of religious and patriotic texts, lock combinations, and words like ‘albeit’, ‘nevertheless’, and ‘whatchamacallit’ which aren’t really sure whether they are words or sentences.

The principal fauna of this region, by far, though, are cliches. Known also as bromides or saws, they seem to be big chunks of language swallowed whole and stored as a single element.

Starting, I assume, as admired well-turned phrases, as cliches acquire conventional status, their words begin to lose their individuality and the cliches, themselves, begin to develop a phonological, semantic, and syntactic lives of their own. The examples above of cliches gone awry bear this out.

The first example is wonderful. I wish I’d said it myself. The journey from cannon to cattle is such a pleasant one. In some part, it may be phonological, by feature analysis cannon and cattle are not so far apart. Mostly, though, it is semantic; our concerned citizen knows that fodder is food and that cannons don’t eat.

In the second, all that is missing is a plural. Circle the wagons if fine. However, from the rest of the article cited it is clear that the speaker’s mental picture is of people surrounding something, in this case a school, in order to protect it rather than visa versa. It is actually rather an apt image: its strangeness comes only from its having no status in the cliché bank.

The next muddled cliche seems to have historical roots. Dumb almost always means stupid these days and hardly ever aphasic. This given, the speaker erects a demented syllogism: Poses are not very smart. This person is not very smart. Therefore, this person is dumb as a post.

The remaining examples, are phonology driven errors. Dog eat dog world actually is pronounced doggy dog world because of the assimilation of the final and initial alveolars. The only way I know that the speaker was indeed saying doggy is because my informant asked her.

Likewise, the /p/ in purposes labilizes the /s/ in intents and sufficiently that a speaker more accustomed to receiving language aurally than visually could easily hear a /p/ and arrive at intensive purposes. And, tender loving care and tender love and care are pronounced essentially the same by most speakers. Moreover, since nouns have a much lower markedness than participial adjectives, the error comes as no surprise.

Mulling over these fractured cliches in a post-holiday funk, I am reminded of two things: First, of a Jewish friend who went home from school and asked her father who Ron Yon Virgin was (he smiled and told her to ask her teacher), and secondly, of the fact that I was old enough to vote before I realized that Orient Are was not a place.

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Bill Biddle, who works at a famous university, submits the following, culled from a spy novel, as a challenge for grammar teachers:

   “Good God, there’s a chap listed here as having died in Ethiopia in 1968. What on Earth was he doing here?”

   “Search me. . . . You might as well ask ten years from now what I was doing in Mayo tomorrow night.”

2. Maureen Dezell wishes to call our attention to a poster for the Mass Literacy/Campaign which adorned the subway sometime back. “Every child can and does have the right to read.”

3. I plan soon to do a column on ‘phrasal verbs’. By this I mean words like whodunit and sticktoitiveness which are sentence parts which have collapsed into single lexical items. I would deeply appreciate your sending me lists of such words.

Please send these and any linguistic tidbits or grammar questions to:

Gregg Singer
CELOP 730 Comm. Ave.
Boston University 02215

Please send Teaching ideas for the Spring issue to Ralph Radell, Bunker Hill Community College, Boston, MA 02129 before April 2, 1985.
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Suzanne Ferro is an assistant professor at UMass/Boston.


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