

Minnesota Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages



# MinneTESOL Journal

Volume 3

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# MinneTESOL Journal

Minnesota Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Business correspondence should be addressed to: Editor, MinneTESOL Journal, Program in ESL, 152 Klæber Court, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

## Editorial Policy

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

## Manuscripts

Manuscripts submitted to the MinneTESOL Journal must conform to the guidelines in the TESOL Quarterly (June, 1983). Two copies of each manuscript should be submitted with an abstract of not more than 200 words.

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## FOREWORD

This third volume of the MinneTESOL Journal includes two articles on ESL course design, an article dealing with the social and psychological factors affecting the acquisition of a second language, and two articles concerning the training of teachers.

There is some evidence in the field to suggest that content-based courses, such as the one described by Terry Fredrickson in the first paper, are beginning to supplement and even replace skills-based courses for advanced students, especially at the college level. However, while it may be true that the daily news is the focus of the course "Current Events for ESL Students"—and this focus enhances student motivation—the development of listening, reading, and discussion skills and the structure of journalistic writing are also given comprehensive treatment in the course described in the paper.

The next two articles reflect the fact that Minnesota has become a major center of Hmong immigration. The first of these, Adele G. Hansen's "Cultivating the Cabbages: An ESP Course for Refugees," describes a course that taught functional and communicative skills to the Hmong through the content areas of agriculture, math, and business. Lois Malcolm's "Hmong Bilinguals: How did They Learn English?" explores a range of factors that influence the process of acquiring a second language. Of particular interest is her finding, on the basis of a limited number of subjects, that a positive relationship existed between time spent in formal education and English proficiency, but that there was no such relationship between time spent in the ESL classroom and proficiency.

Teacher training is the general subject of the last two articles. Nancy Stenson, Jan Smith, and William Perry make an important contribution to the controversial area of teacher evaluation and the often elusive role of the teacher-trainer or supervisor in "Facilitating Teacher Growth: An Approach to Training and Evaluation." The final article in this volume draws upon case studies to evaluate the course Classroom Communication for Foreign Teaching Assistants, which has been offered at various times at the University of Minnesota since 1978 in response to a widely recognized need.

One theme of the articles in Volume III is the important role of ESL in promoting communication between non-native speakers of English in the state and long-time Minnesotans, who may have just recently become aware that the field of ESL exists. This issue is dedicated to these people who have come to depend upon our field: students struggling to understand the nightly TV news, vocational-technical instructors explaining equipment manuals to refugee stu-

dents, Indochinese case workers and their American colleagues, and American undergraduates and their foreign teaching assistants in calculus and other classes. For these groups the purpose of MinnetESOL's existence has never been more compelling.

M.L.

## CURRENT EVENTS FOR ESL STUDENTS: A Course Description for the Teacher

Terry L. Fredrickson

This paper is for the teacher who might be interested in teaching a "content" ESL course. It describes a course based not on a particular language skill, but on a particular subject area—in this case, world news. After giving a rationale for teaching such a course, the article discusses preliminary decisions in organizing the course. Specific questions raised by the use of the various media are addressed in the second half of the paper. Examples of appropriate materials are given in the appendix.

Current Events for ESL Students, a ten-week non-credit course at the University of Minnesota, is intended for upper intermediate and advanced learners. It meets for five 45-minute periods a week. It is designed to help the learner develop the skills necessary to make use of the English language news media, first as a means to language enrichment and growth and, ultimately, as a source of information and entertainment. Course content is based on the major international and national news events of the day as portrayed in newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV news broadcasts.

### I. Rationale

Current Events (CE) is a bridge between traditional ESL courses where language acquisition is the paramount concern and academic courses where language is primarily a tool for obtaining new information. It is an ESL course in the sense that language skills are conscientiously developed, but it is also much like an academic course in that these skills are a means to a higher end—the understanding of the news. Thus, students listen to a news analysis not

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simply as a listening exercise but to find out why the Russians are hostile to President Reagan's arms control plan. They scan a Time magazine article on West Germany partly to develop this skill, but more importantly to gain perspective on the upcoming elections—a story which will soon dominate the international section of the local newspaper.

Basing an ESL course on the news media has a number of advantages. The content is timely, interesting, useful, and above all accessible. Ambitious learners have innumerable chances to master the subject matter. They can get a five-minute radio news summary on the hour, a 30-minute television report in the evening, a detailed recapitulation in the morning newspaper, and a more reflective account of the very same news from a weekly news magazine. News presentation is, for the most part, formulaic, so the teacher can concentrate on the particular rhetorical patterns common to journalism. Subject matter is recurrent and much of the vocabulary is subject specific. Stories about fires have one set of high-frequency terms; reports of election results have another. CE avoids the artificiality common to most ESL courses. Students can work up to their capacity and interest. Each day the task is clear, and there is little question as to why a particular skill must be mastered.

Perhaps the strongest justification for CE is that it introduces learners to a lifetime self-study program which should enrich their experience in the United States and help prevent the stagnation of language development which so often sets in upon return to the native country. The English language news media is well represented abroad. News broadcasts are available through the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Voice of America. Most major cities have at least one local English language newspaper, and the International Herald Tribune and the Wall Street Journal use satellite technology to give same-day distribution to most of the world. Time and Newsweek also have international editions.

The news is inherently interesting. If the teacher acquaints the students with what is available from the media and how to get the most out of it, they will do the rest on their own.

## 2. Preliminary Decisions

**2.1: *Choosing Materials:*** The key text is unquestionably the daily newspaper. It is only through regular attention to the newspaper that students see the recurrent nature of news stories and acquire the background necessary for successful use of the other news media. Fortunately, student subscriptions are available (see details below). It is also important, however, that students be exposed to a range of materials, so that they can see how the news is presented throughout the mass media.



The following materials are used in the Minnesota course:

- 1) Minneapolis Star and Tribune. This is available weekdays at the student subscription rate of ten cents a day (minimum of 10 copies a day).
- 2) Excerpts from English by Newspaper by Fredrickson and Wedel (Newbury House, forthcoming). This is a self-study text which covers both the hard news format and the other styles of newspaper writing.
- 3) News magazines. Students are assigned periodically to read excerpts from Time and Newsweek and are required to buy one of these magazines at least once during the term.
- 4) Articles from the New York Times and USA Today.
- 5) Taped radio news reports.
- 6) Videotaped TV news broadcasts.

*2.2 Determining the focus:* It would appear that the teacher faces a major decision in focusing the course. Is it to be primarily a language course which only incidentally draws its material from the news media? Or is it to be a content course whose only language input comes from the fact that English is the medium of instruction? In fact, there is no conflict. Mastery of content requires the development of (1) background and (2) language competence. Presumably, students who enroll in this course are deficient in both, and the course must, therefore, deal with both.

*2.3 Organizing the News Component:* There seem to be two basic approaches to dealing with the news in the classroom. Class sessions could be devoted to the daily news, drawing heavily on the newspaper and the radio. Or they could be concerned with in-depth studies of major events, with one or more sessions devoted to a single topic and drawing on a wider range of materials.

The first approach is somewhat unwieldy, especially for a 45-minute class. It is difficult to cover many stories in this time, and it is impossible to deal adequately with the background necessary for a real understanding of current events. The second approach has a number of advantages. Major stories are often long-term, recurring periodically for weeks, months, even years. Thus, an in-depth look at a major story can pay dividends over the entire term. Equally important, this approach gives the teacher time to collect material from a variety of sources, and students can research different aspects of a situation.

Topics are chosen in three ways. Certain stories are known well in advance. During the winter of 1983, for example, it was clear from the beginning that the West German elections would take place on March 6. The arms control talks in Europe, a major issue in this

campaign, were scheduled to reconvene in late January. The crisis in Lebanon showed no signs of resolution and was bound to make news throughout the term. Other stories happen without warning, but when they occur it is immediately clear that in some cases they will be long-term. The 1983 oil price war is a good example. Finally, class composition and student interest must figure in story selection. A large Latin American contingent will warrant emphasis on this region of the world. Students want a say in determining course content.

**2.4 Organizing the Skills Component:** For the most part, the skills component follows automatically from the content covered in the course. Reading skills must be sharpened to deal with the print media and listening skills to deal with radio and TV. Students must learn to deal efficiently with massive amounts of new vocabulary. But in addition to the skills necessary to comprehending the news, there is considerable opportunity to improve spoken and written competence as well. Students can, for example, learn to organize, lead, contribute to, and summarize discussions. And they can submit written reports of their conclusions.

Each of these skills will be dealt with in detail in the next section. In organizing the course, however, it is necessary to have a clear idea of how skill development will mesh with the presentation of content. Vocabulary acquisition requires immediate attention since it is only through a systematic approach that retention is maximized. Discussion activities, too, should begin immediately, with various techniques introduced progressively throughout the course. For example, students should learn how to prepare for discussions, how to make and defend their points, and how to disagree with opposing positions. The strongest students could also be trained as discussion leaders.

Major news events will largely determine the subject matter of the newspaper stories, news broadcasts, and magazine articles assigned, but skill development can proceed irrespective of content. With the newspaper, for example, the highly systematic hard news format would be considered prior to the more idiosyncratic feature format. The news magazine, a far more difficult medium, would be used initially for skimming and scanning activities to supplement. A radio news broadcast might simply be used to update the morning newspaper. As the course progresses, however, the radio could be used independently of the newspaper—especially for news analysis and interpretation.

### 3. Presentation

**3.1 General Organization:** Classes are of three basic types.

- 1) One type of class session deals with one or more major issues

in the news. The ability to use the news media to gain information is as much a matter of background as it is of language. This type of class is devoted primarily to building this background through lectures, handouts, and student research.

The lecture is a good way of presenting information on subjects for which readings would normally be long and complex—subjects such as the U.S. budget or the U.S. electoral system. As with any listening activity, however, there is the danger that many students will miss essential information. For this reason, the teacher may want to hand out a summary of the lecture in the following session, underlining, and sometimes defining, new vocabulary items. The summary fills in the gaps for the weaker students and acts as a review sheet as well.

It is inevitable that at least one story considered during the term will be a continuation of a story which first appeared in the news months prior to the start of the course. In such cases, it is helpful for the teacher to prepare a background handout which includes a brief history and some of the vocabulary likely to be associated with a story of this type. Since this involves a great deal of work, a useful format for the handout is a timetable which lists major events in chronological order and can be easily updated from term to term. (I am still able to use material on Poland which I developed in 1980.)

Particularly complex stories provide opportunities for group work. If, for example, Time magazine produced a lengthy article on nuclear weapons in Europe, one group might focus on the weapons systems involved, another on the NATO position, and another on the Soviet position. Alternatively, the various groups might examine magazine, newspaper, and radio treatments of the same problem. They would then, of course, pool their information.

Major events have the nasty propensity of occurring simultaneously, and there is no way a course of this allotted time can keep abreast of everything. During the spring of 1983, however, I was able to cover a surprisingly large number of stories by delegating responsibility. By giving different homework assignments culled from newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts to individual class members, and by encouraging students to retrieve this information during class discussions, I was able to increase the information content of the course dramatically. To focus these discussions, I prepared worksheets using both a multiple-choice format and open-ended questions. Many of these questions could be answered from general knowledge or from previous background sessions, but certain questions could only be answered conclusively from the individualized homework assignments. I purposely gave many of these assignments to weaker students to ensure that they would have something to contribute. I particularly like this type of activity since it provides for purposeful

homework assignments and at the same time it fosters a sense of community effort.

2) Another type of class deals with the news of the day. During the spring of 1983, I devoted one class session a week to the viewing of a videotape of the day's news. I taped the noon news for a 1:15 class, so the content was extremely current. I conducted this class in a variety of ways with a variety of purposes. The first several sessions dealt strictly with the TV news broadcast. Students would first try to anticipate what would be on the news on the basis of the morning newspaper, or from any other news broadcast they might have heard. I would then play the tape through once (7-8 minutes) without stopping, and students would summarize what they were able to catch. We would then decide what additional information was needed to understand this broadcast, and I would assign individuals to listen for specific points. I would then replay the tape, stopping whenever necessary and discussing content and vocabulary as needed.

Later in the course, I would also tape a radio news broadcast and prepare a handout glossing essential vocabulary. In class I would give the tape to a group of students, who would go to another room to work on the tape for a specified period of time—usually 25 minutes. In the meantime, I would work on the videotape with the remainder of the class. When the radio group returned, I would replay the videotape. The TV group would explain any difficult content, and the radio group would supplement the TV broadcast with information gleaned from the radio.

Still later in the course, the TV and radio groups would produce their own 'newscasts,' in which students would alternate coming to the front of the room and 'anchoring' stories. Announcers were often chosen from the weaker students, the better students having acted as language coaches during the listening sessions.

Aside from the advantage derived from the division of labor, the comparison between radio and TV broadcasting was in itself instructive. Radio, unburdened by the need for film footage, was usually strongest in covering the late-breaking story, but was at the same time severely restricted by its four-minute allotment. TV—at least the noon variety—was strongest on the feature story, but often missed major stories which had broken during the morning.

3) The third type of class is devoted to skills development. Several classes during the term were devoted strictly to the development of particular skills. These sessions involved vocabulary acquisition, the hard news format, and the news magazine. For the most part, however, language skills were covered within the context of a news story. For example, the first ten minutes of a discussion activity might be devoted to a particular discussion technique, but the bulk of the class would involve the discussion itself.

**3.2 Vocabulary Acquisition:** The vocabulary acquisition process can be broken down into four steps: (1) the use of context for guessing meaning, (2) dictionary use, (3) retention of essential vocabulary, and (4) activizing vocabulary. All should be addressed early in the course.

The first two topics are covered thoroughly in the text English by Newspaper. Vocabulary retention is handled in several ways. First, students are introduced to the concept of 'core vocabulary,' the vocabulary likely to be encountered in a particular subject area. A story about a fire would have its own set of terms, including items such as char, gut, extinguish, explode, and arson. A report of a trial might include indict, testimony, verdict, and appeal, depending on the stage of the proceedings. During the spring of 1983, when the situation warranted it, I would make up a list of core vocabulary items to which the students could add as a story developed. The advantage of this approach is that such items do recur, greatly increasing the chances of retention. I also used the class summary for retention purposes and consciously recycled previously introduced vocabulary in handouts.

The final step—making a word part of the active vocabulary—is by far the most difficult. It involves comprehension, pronunciation, forming a hypothesis as to how a word is used, actual use in writing or conversation, assessing the native speaker's reaction, reevaluating the hypothesis, and reuse. During the last term, I developed a handout which outlines an eleven-step procedure (See Appendix 1).

**3.3 The Newspaper:** Newspaper stories are written in a variety of formats, some more amenable to description than others. CE considers the following four: (1) the hard news format, (2) the feature format, (3) the news analysis, and (4) the editorial.

The hard news format is known in the newspaper parlance as the 'inverted pyramid.' This format is used for most basic news stories and is by far the most common story-type encountered by students in CE. In many respects, it is an ideal format for the learner. A story is summarized at the beginning and then retold in greater detail. Items are arranged in descending order of importance. Sentence structure is highly consistent, and vocabulary is largely topic specific. Technical vocabulary is explained, and the writer supplies necessary background.

It is the teacher's job to make the students aware of the predictable nature of this format and how to exploit it. A simple reading comprehension procedure for students to follow might be:

1) Read the beginning of a story very carefully because it contains the most important facts.

2) Try to anticipate what will follow in the rest of the story. Good journalists carefully consider the questions their readers are likely to have, and they answer them.

3) If you don't understand something at the beginning of a story, keep reading. You will often get a second (and perhaps a third) chance to understand.

Feature stories are far less systematic than hard news stories and offer serious difficulties to the learner. Since their purpose is often to entertain as much as inform, they contain troublesome interest-catching devices. Key facts are often delayed, and it may take three or four paragraphs to find out a story's topic. Features tend to be lengthy and concentrate on stories with high human interest value. Considerably more attention is spent on setting and character development.

Since CE is primarily concerned with hard news, the feature format is a minor subject in the course. It is important, however, to point out the difference between the inverted pyramid and the feature format to avoid creating the false impression that all news stories can be read the same way.

News analysis is usually clearly marked as such and is quite straight-forward. Here, it is not style but background that creates the most serious problem for the learner. A news analysis will not be particularly meaningful unless the student has had previous exposure to the news event under discussion. Yet news analyses are especially useful to a current events course because they organize and interpret the facts discussed in hard news stories, and they give the learner an idea of how a story might develop in the future.

The editorial is, of course, a statement of opinion. The learner's purpose should be to find out (1) the topic under consideration, (2) the writer's opinion, and (3) the writer's supporting arguments. A quick look at the beginning and the end of the editorial will generally yield the first two points and set the stage for the third. While there are as many styles as there are editorial writers, it is helpful to point out one very common editorial format: (1) the statement of the problem, (2) the consideration and rejection of opposing solutions, and (3) the presentation and defense of the favored solution.

The text English by Newspaper deals extensively with the language of newspaper journalism—especially the hard news variety. Since the text is designed to be a self-study program, many of the formulaic aspects of news writing can be dealt with in homework assignments. Classroom time can therefore be spent on the application of the principles learned in the homework to actual news stories. Here, the emphasis is on content rather than format.

**3.4 Radio and TV:** One of the delightful features of a current events class is that the learner gets more than one chance to understand the material. The subject matter discussed in the print media is also available through radio and television, so the learner has a listening back-up to reading, and vice versa.

The teacher's overriding purpose in using material from the electronic media is to make the students aware of this accessible resource and to help them to use it. One of the best ways of doing this is to schedule a regular radio and TV session, such as the one discussed earlier in this paper. (See 2 in section 3.1.) Many teachers, of course, do not have access to TV in the classroom, but it is a simple matter for a teacher to obtain taped, even live, radio material for a class.

There are many ways of using this material. The five-minute news summary, an essential topic for CE, can be used to update the morning newspaper. Students can take control of the tape recorder, stopping the tape wherever necessary and discussing the content. In such a situation, the teacher is merely a resource person. Another useful activity is to compare newspaper and radio treatments of the same story.

News analyses such as those found on National Public Radio are another good source of material. They can be used in small research groups or sent home with individual class members. If they are used without teacher supervision (a good idea), the teacher should supply a gloss of new vocabulary and give explicit listening tasks to give purpose to the exercise. The teacher should provide the students with a list of regularly-scheduled news programs to encourage independent listening.

**3.5 *The News Magazine:*** Throughout most of the course, I use magazine articles as supplementary material for the major news stories we have been following in the newspaper. I make copies of articles for small groups, or for individuals who act as experts in class discussion. During the spring of 1983, I noticed that more and more of the better students were actually buying Time or Newsweek on a weekly basis. I eventually had the whole class buy one issue. We spent several weeks working on the magazine article format and discussing how it fits into a student's learning program. The suggestion sheet in Appendix 2 is a partial result of that unit.

#### 4. A Final Consideration

In this short paper I have concentrated on class organization and some of the presentation techniques that might be used in a content course on the news media. The teacher should not, however, lose sight of the ultimate goal of such a course. Success is measured in what happens after the course has been completed—the goal is for the student to acquire the 'news habit' and actively use the English language news media.

## Appendix I

## MAKING A WORD PART OF YOUR ACTIVE VOCABULARY

Suppose you are reading a newspaper and you find the word "access." Suppose you have already seen this word many times before, but you have never looked it up in the dictionary. Now you want to know its exact meaning and you want to learn how to use it—you want to make it part of your active vocabulary. What do you do?

1. Look at the full sentence in which you found the word.

"There is no way that the developing countries can repay their debts if they don't have access to growing markets in the industrialized world."

2. Find out what part of speech the word is. (Is it a noun, verb, etc.?) In the above sentence "access" is clearly a noun. It is the object of the verb "have."

3. Find out as much as you can about the word by looking at the sentence.

—"Access" is something that you can have.

—You can have access to a market.

—Developing countries need to have access to markets in the industrialized world in order to repay their debts. Therefore, it seems that "having access" must be something good. It allows a country to repay its debts.

4. If you can, try to make a guess at the word's meaning. A good guess for "access" would be "the ability to use, enter or compete in."

5. Now look in your Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. (The guess you make in step 4 will help you find the most appropriate meaning if the word has many meanings.) Find the correct meaning of the word.

access 1. (C) means of entering; way in; entrance.

2. (U) means or right of using, reaching or entering.

3. (C) a sudden attack.

Meaning 2, "right of using," is the most suitable meaning.

6. Study the word's pronunciation. This is necessary because you want to be able to use the word in speaking as well as writing.

access / 'ækses / Notice that the stress is on the first syllable.

7. If the word is a noun, find out how to form the plural. If it is a verb, find out its various forms and whether or not it can take an object (The Longman dictionary uses "T" for transitive and "I" for intransitive.)



access n. 2. (U) means or right of using.

(U) means "uncountable" so "access" has no plural form.

8. Look at any example phrases or sentences in your dictionary. Notice any surrounding words.

2. (U) means or right of using, reaching or entering. "Students need easy access to books."

Note: need easy access to books

9. Look back to the sentence where you found the word. Notice the words that surround it.

"have access to markets"

"Access" seems to occur with "to" + object.

10. Try to make up several sentences using the word.

"I need access to speakers of English."

"I don't have access to a tape recorder."

"Mexico needs access to low interest loans."

11. Try to use the word in a conversation with a native speaker. Watch the native speaker's reaction. If the person doesn't seem to understand, use a synonym and again watch the reaction.

## Appendix 2

### THE NEWS MAGAZINE

The news magazine is another tool that you can use to learn about the world and to improve your English.

Most people who read news magazines also read newspapers and follow the news on radio and TV, so they already know much about the news before they begin their magazine. Thus, the function of the news magazine cannot primarily be to report the news. Instead, its purpose is to analyze and interpret the news.

While the news magazine is not as up-to-date as your daily newspaper, it does have certain advantages. Probably the biggest advantage is time. The news magazine has one week to prepare its stories and they are, therefore, better researched and better organized than newspaper stories. The news magazine also provides pictures, charts, and graphs to help you understand each story.

Magazine articles are similar to newspaper feature stories, so they may appear difficult. If you follow these suggestions, however, you should be able to catch the main points:

### PREREADING

1. Look at the contents at the beginning of the magazine. It often gives short summaries of the main stories.
2. Look through the whole magazine for stories of interest.
3. Look at the pictures, at the captions beneath the pictures, and at the headlines.
4. If a story looks interesting, skim through it to see if it really is interesting and if it is easy enough to understand.

### READING A STORY OF YOUR CHOICE

1. Read the headline carefully.
2. Look at the pictures and read the captions.
3. Read the first paragraph to get a general idea of what the story is about. The first few sentences of the first paragraph are often "interest catchers." The main point of the paragraph generally comes towards the end.
4. Skim the rest of the story, focusing on the first sentence of each paragraph. These sentences usually
  - a) connect the paragraph with the previous paragraph
  - b) introduce the topic of the new paragraphThese sentences can be very informative. For example:

"However, the next experiment succeeded."

"However," is a connective of contrast. The preceeding paragraph must have discussed a failed experiment. The new paragraph discusses the opposite situation: a successful experiment.
5. If you get lost, reread the headline and the picture captions to remind you of the story's main point.

## **CULTIVATING THE CABBAGES: An ESP Program for Refugees**

Adele G. Hansen

This article describes the creation and development of an English for Special Purposes (ESP) curriculum used in a refugee agriculture project. That project, funded by Church World Service and Hennepin Technical Center, was aimed at teaching American agricultural techniques to adult refugees. The first participants of the program, Hmong refugees, had little or no formal education in their native land. The ESP curriculum focused on these students' needs. It consisted of two components: 1) an ESL component which stressed the language of agriculture and used everyday functional and communicative skills and 2) a math and business skills component which taught mathematical computations and financial considerations. Course development necessitated close cooperation between technical and language instructors.

### 1. Background

The late 1970's saw an influx of Hmong refugees into the state of Minnesota. These people were different from earlier groups of refugees in that most had little or no formal education in their native land. Some were prenumerate (unfamiliar with any formal written numerical system) as well as preliterate. These refugees presented a challenge for adult education programs.

Most adult education instructors were trained to work with students literate in their own language, students who had the experience of at least a few years in school and who possessed some study skills. Suddenly this new group entered ESL classrooms, forcing teachers to revise their methods. Instead of teaching English grammar, reading, and composition, instructors began to focus on the functional role of

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Adele G. Hansen is an instructor of English as a Second Language at Hennepin Technical Center. She is currently working with the Refugee Agriculture Project at that school.

English in various survival situations. Students were taught how to locate apartments, find health care, become knowledgeable consumers, and search for jobs.

For many of the Hmong refugees, the hope of finding employment in their new land became an elusive dream. Most had no marketable skills. They had lived as subsistence farmers in an agrarian economy in small villages. In the United States, they had been placed in an urban environment that valued technical skills. Language learning was a slow process, made even slower by budget cuts at the federal and state levels which reduced the number of available language programs and decreased the number of classroom hours. The refugees' limited English and lack of marketable skills made most jobs unattainable to them.

In 1981, a Church World Service survey of Hmong in the Twin Cities found that many of the refugees hoped to move to the countryside, where they could once again farm. Service administrators discussed the idea of providing a farm for the Hmong. Their discussion focused on how American farming differed from that practiced in the Laotian hills and on the need that the refugees would have for instruction in American agricultural techniques.

At the same time, Hennepin Technical Center's ESL coordinator and Agriculture Resource Management coordinator were discussing the feasibility of operating an agricultural training program specifically for refugees. The school offered vocational training in specialty crop production at its Long Lake campus. With some modification, that training could be made suitable for refugees; however, financial sponsorship was necessary.

Pure chance brought the sponsoring agency and the training program together, and the Refugee Agriculture Project was born. This program could give the refugees hands-on training in the fields—planting, cultivating, and harvesting a variety of vegetables and fruits. Area markets could be utilized and studied by the trainees. Planners introduced the idea of teaching technical English along with agriculture.

At its conception, the project planners assumed that program participants had studied in a traditional adult education program. They also assumed that the participants possessed some basic knowledge of English, but no initial assessment of English skills was made. The main criterion in the screening process was an interest in farming.

Ten male refugees were selected for the first class. All had been in the U.S. for eighteen or more months. All were employed as primary wage earners. English competence among the ten varied widely.

## 2. Planning

An important step in the ESP curriculum planning was an analysis of the language used in agriculture. This involved an in-depth interview with the instructor of the agriculture class. The interview led to the compilation of an agriculture vocabulary list which included words for tools, machines, and various activities.

Oral language was the primary need of the program participants. The students learned by watching the instructor, listening to his explanations, and then repeating his actions. Specific activities were performed under his direction. Given the technical nature of the language, close cooperation between the agriculture and language instructors was essential. Weekly meetings were planned so that instructors could discuss the progress of the students and their farming activities.

The project also involved the refugees in marketing. They would communicate with many people and transact business. A knowledge of American money and basic mathematics was necessary. The language instructor needed to teach math and business skills as well as language skills.

The students studied a total of 40 hours per week. Language class met two hours per day, five days per week. Four days emphasized language skills. One day emphasized math and business skills. The rudiments of an ESP curriculum were shaped.

## 3. Implementation

Language classes began in June, 1982. Skills were assessed with the multiple choice Ilyin Structure Test of English Language (STEL) and a general interview. Most of the students needed general English communication skills. A majority of the class had limited vocabularies, nine could not sustain conversation, and two were illiterate.

Theoretically, a technical English curriculum is meant to "clarify and reinforce the language needed in order to succeed in a particular training program" (Menges and Kelly, 1981). Such a course is not meant to be a substitute for a general ESL course. Yet because of the special needs of the Hmong, a language course with special English for agriculture topics was created.

The ESP curriculum consisted of two components: 1) a language component of eight units emphasizing mathematical computations and farm management skills. Material within the units was presented in a spiral fashion so that the students had the constant review necessary to make new language meaningful. Within the language component, units were presented and then reviewed as more grammatical patterns were practiced. The math/business skills compo-

ment first introduced basic computations and then related them to farming and business transactions.

#### 4. The ESL Component

The focus of the first part of the ESL component was on the language of agriculture. The students' interest in their technical studies served as an incentive to acquire some basic linguistic skills. Grammar was taught within the context of agriculture-related subject matter. The students profited most from the material when it directly related to their experience in the fields. In coordination with the technical instructor, the curriculum units were sequenced to follow the order of the vocational training.

Despite the emphasis on oral work, some written exercises were created to reinforce particular grammatical patterns. To solve the problem of a multilevel class, two versions of the exercises were prepared.

Reading skills were not ignored. Volunteer tutors were enlisted to work with the lower level students.<sup>1</sup> Three ESP reading lessons were created for the more advanced students. Each of these lessons contained an illustrated reading passage, comprehension questions, and grammatical exercises based on the language used within the passage. The passages focused on technical subject matter, but the passages were not used to teach new material. They were rather a supplement to technical coursework. For example, a passage about insects and pesticides was used after the students had sprayed pesticide on their fields and had discussed spraying in their technical class.

The units of the language component aimed at introducing new technical vocabulary and increasing the oral fluency of the students. Language was taught as a function of specific situations, and grammatical exercises were related to the farm context. (For a more complete description of the curriculum, see the appendix.)

Four units, Units 1,2,3, and 7, emphasized description in an effort to build the students' vocabularies. In Unit 1 (Introductions), the students practiced the verb be while describing themselves. They also practiced some new descriptive vocabulary that they would later use

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<sup>1</sup>These tutors, trained by the Minnesota Literary Council and the Westtonka Adult Education Program, used the Laubach Skill books and the supplementary reader, Hills' Garden Shop, which contained many agriculture-related vocabulary items.

when filling out business forms. In Unit 2 (Vegetables and Fruits), the students first identified some common Minnesota crops and then practiced describing them. The vocabulary in the unit was later reviewed when information about count and non-count nouns was presented.

Hand tools were identified and described in Unit 3 (Common Hand Tools). In this unit the passive voice was practiced. While this grammatical point is not ordinarily taught to low-level general ESL students, it is prominent in English for science and technology texts.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the students were taught to use sentences containing passive constructions when they described various tools. (Two examples of practice sentences are The sprayer is made of metal and The rake is used for cultivating.)

Unit 7 (Domestic and Wild Animals) was the fourth unit emphasizing description. In this unit, the students identified and described various animals that they might encounter in the fields. This unit was created after one refugee had an encounter with a skunk, and all participants agreed that the skunk was a dangerous animal. The vocabulary in this unit was useful when the students practiced comparative sentences.

Unit 4 (General Activities) and Unit 5 (Routine Activities) were included to help the students review and learn some new verbs as well as to practice the English tense system. The specialized nature of the class was evident as low-level students learned vocabulary such as cultivate, till and harvest in order to discuss their activities in the fields.

Unit 6 (Health and Safety) focused on the functional use of English as students reviewed the vocabulary used to talk about health problems and discussed the idea of health maintenance. Program participants also learned some common first aid procedures. A nurse and a CPR instructor were enlisted to help present some of the material in this unit, and with them the class described some traditional Hmong remedies and enthusiastically practiced CPR.

In Unit 8 (The Tractor), the students learned new vocabulary and practiced various adverbial constructions. The material was later reviewed when causative constructions were introduced.

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<sup>2</sup>Writing Scientific English, John Swales; Nucleus General Science, Martin Bates and Toney Dudley-Evans; A First Course in Technical English, Lynette Beardwood, Hugh Templeton and Martin Webber; and A Course in Basic Scientific English, J.R. Ewer and G. Latorre are four examples of such texts.

The final two units were created because the instructors believed that all the students would need some specialized reading and writing skills. Since most farmers rely on seed catalogs for information about various crop varieties, a unit on ordering supplies (Unit 9) was created. The class read excerpts from various catalogs, discussed their content and then answered specific questions about the information that they had read. They also practiced filling out catalog order forms.

A unit on the banking system (Unit 10) was included so that project participants would learn the vocabulary needed to use an American bank. All of the students had a chance to practice writing checks, balancing a checkbook, and reading a bank statement.

### 5. The Math/Business Skills Component

The second major part of the ESP curriculum taught math and business skills. The students seemed intrinsically interested in this material. The Hmong students entered the program with varied mathematical abilities. Some were acquainted with the four basic mathematical processes; others simply had more new material to learn.

The first three units of the math/business component dealt with basic mathematical procedures: addition and subtraction, multiplication, and division. Because the students needed to know the four math functions in order to sell their produce, all math procedures were eventually related to the marketing task. In the fifth unit (American Money), the students had to practice computing total sales, making correct change, and calculating prices of fractional amounts of produce.

Unit 4 (Fractions) introduced most of the students to the concept of fractions, which they utilized in their marketing transactions as well as in the sixth unit of study (Measurement). In this latter unit, students were taught the English vocabulary for measures of length and weight. They practiced using a ruler and various scales. They also practiced measuring volume with the various containers and dry measures used by farmers. While the math/business component concentrated on using mathematical procedures, certain linguistic structures that seemed appropriate were introduced and practiced during the units. For example, comparatives were studied in the measurement unit.

Sound business skills are a necessary part of farm management. For students from a culture with little or no written history, the concept of recordkeeping was a new idea. A unit on budgeting (Unit 7) was created to foster an awareness of the various expenses an American farmer would incur and to demonstrate the value of



keeping accurate records of those expenditures. This unit was taught late in the course of the year and the students were able to use information about their own project to calculate annual farm income and expenses.

Finally, Unit 8 (The Tax System) was created so that the students would become aware of the various types of taxes and familiar with the forms associated with those taxes. Given the complexity of the tax system, the students were not expected to comprehend the various forms. Rather, it was hoped that they would learn to recognize where tax information and assistance could be obtained and what type of records should be kept for tax purposes.

## 6. Cooperation Between Technical and Language Instructors

An important element in an ESP program is the supportive interaction between technical and language faculty.

Technical instructors are an easily located source of information about a particular field of study. In this project, the agriculture instructor was extremely helpful in providing information about the training program and the day-to-day activities in the fields. Technical expertise also permitted the development of the business skills curriculum directly related to specialty crop farming.

During the course of the year, both technical and language instructors attended each others' classes to gain an understanding of the students' educational needs. The technical instructor was a resource person for the specialized vocabulary of agriculture. The language instructor was able to suggest to the technical instructor teaching methods which suited non-native speakers of English. The technical instructor provided a weekly schedule of field activities so that the language instructor could relate grammar exercises to the students' vocational training. Because of the free flow of information between the instructors, the language class was able to review material discussed in earlier technical classes. This additional review was especially helpful for the refugees.

ESP curricula are essentially ad hoc because they cater to the needs of a particular group of students. Each new group poses different problems for the instructors. An open channel of communication between language and technical faculty permits speedy curriculum revision to meet the needs of each new group of students. In such a way, language learning can be an integral part of a vocational training program.

## APPENDIX

Hennepin Technical Center Refugee Agriculture Project  
ESP Curriculum

## ESL Component

## Unit 1 Introductions

Objectives: The students will introduce themselves.  
The students will describe themselves.

## Unit 2 Common American Vegetables and Fruits

Objectives: The students will identify the names of some common vegetables and fruits.  
The students will describe the vegetables and fruits.

## Unit 3 Common Hand Tools

Objectives: The students will identify some common hand tools.  
The students will describe the tools in terms of length, weight, and composition.  
The students will correctly state the use of some common hand tools.

## Unit 4 General Activities

Objectives: The students will review some general activities vocabulary.  
The students will learn some general activities vocabulary related to farming.

## Unit 5 Routine Activities

Objectives: The students will review vocabulary pertinent to daily routine activities.  
The students will describe their daily activities.  
The students will learn vocabulary pertinent to seasonal farm activities.  
The students will learn vocabulary pertinent to cyclical events related to agriculture.

## Unit 6 Health and Safety

Objectives: The students will know the English vocabulary for talking about health problems.  
The students will be able to ask and answer questions about health problems.  
The students will know some American remedies for some common ailments.

The students will be aware of the concept of health maintenance and relate this awareness to their own lives.

The students will know the English vocabulary for describing accidents.

The students will know some common first aid procedures.

The students will be aware of American drug laws.

Unit 7 Common Domestic and Wild Animals Found in Minnesota

Objectives: The students will identify some common domestic and wild animals.

The students will describe some common domestic and wild animals.

Unit 8 The Tractor

Objectives: The students will learn the vocabulary for the different parts of the tractor.

The students will describe the functions of the different parts of the tractor.

Unit 9 Ordering Supplies

Objectives: The students will learn how to use seed catalogs to order some supplies.

The students will learn how to fill out an order form.

Unit 10 The Banking System

Objectives: The students will learn the terms necessary for using the American banking system.

The students will practice using a checking account.

The students will learn how to open a savings account.

Math and Business Skills Component

Unit 1 Review of Addition and Subtraction

Objectives: The students will review the English numerical system.

The students will review the principles of addition.

The students will review the principles of subtraction.

The students will apply the principles of addition and subtraction to simple business transactions.

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- Unit 2    **Multiplication**  
Objectives:    The students will learn the principles of multiplication.  
                         The students will use multiplication in business transactions.
- Unit 3    **Division**  
Objectives:    The students will learn the principles of division.  
                         The students will use division in business transactions.
- Unit 4    **Fractions**  
Objectives:    The students will understand the concept of fractions.  
                         The students will correctly pronounce the names of some common fractions.  
                         The students will use fractions when completing some business transactions.
- Unit 5    **American Money**  
Objectives:    The students will recognize the different types of American bills and coins.  
                         The students will transact simple business (marketing) using American money.
- Unit 6    **Measurement**  
Objectives:    The students will learn the American English vocabulary for measuring length and weight (solid and liquid).  
                         The students will correctly state the measurements of various objects.
- Unit 7    **Budgeting and Record Keeping**  
Objectives:    The students will learn about various farm expenditures.  
                         The students will prepare a budget based on the income and expenses of a farm.  
                         The students will recognize the function of business receipts, sales brochures, and check stubs.  
                         The students will learn the importance of recordkeeping.  
                         The students will learn that effective farm management depends on recordkeeping.
- Unit 8    **The American Tax system**  
Objectives:    The students will be aware of the various taxes.

The students will be familiar with the vocabulary related to the tax system.

The students will be aware of the uses of tax dollars.

The students will be familiar with some of the forms associated with taxes.

The students will know where to locate tax information and assistance.

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## HMONG BILINGUALS: How did They Learn English?

Lois Malcolm

How does bilingualism evolve? Sociolinguistic studies of the contact between two speech communities have focused on the larger social, political, and economic forces affecting language usage patterns. Most research in second language learning, however, has been concerned with the variables affecting an individual's acquisition of another language. This paper raises the following question: Does the social structure emerging when two cultural groups interact influence the strategies and skills individuals bring to the task of language learning? The intent in this study is to discuss the nature of the role played by bilingual facilitators of Hmong resettlement, and to describe aspects in the experience of these individuals that have enabled them to function in these roles. The suggestion is made that social role within the intersection of speech communities is an important variable affecting the potential individuals bring to the task of learning another language.

### I. Introduction\*

What factors influence the development of bilingualism? Sociolinguistic studies have looked at this issue from the perspective of the social and political forces affecting the contact between two speech communities. The bulk of research on second language

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\*This study is based on work done under a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for the study of Hmong resettlement in the Twin Cities. I would like to express my appreciation to the facilitators who graciously took time out of their busy schedules to participate in interviews. William Smalley (senior researcher on the NEH study project) initially suggested that I explore this area and has given much time helping me develop the study.

acquisition, however, has focused on factors affecting the individual, for example, motivation, attitudes towards the target language community, personality, and cognitive styles. The following questions can be raised: Are there sociological forces shaping the effect these variables have on an individual's language learning? More specifically, do specialized roles within the intersection of two speech communities affect the strategies and motivations individuals use in acquiring another language? This paper looks at one group of successful language learners, Hmong bilinguals<sup>1</sup> serving as facilitators in Hmong resettlement, and discusses aspects of their experience in light of these questions.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Sociolinguistic studies of populations that use more than one speech variety have been concerned with the effect social processes have on the degree of change (stability) in language usage patterns (Fishman 1972, Haugen 1953). A variety of questions can be considered in regard to an immigrant population's acquisition of a new language. To what extent, for example, does the minority group wish to identify itself with the host culture? Is the goal to assimilate fully with members becoming increasingly monolingual in the host language? Or is the goal to maintain a strong ethnic identity within the mainstream culture, and establish a stable state of bilingualism where the host language is used for one set of functions and domains, and the native language another? Practically speaking, how will such a minority identity be maintained when economic advancement is often correlated with the dislocation of traditional home, neighborhood, and organizational practices (Fishman 1972)? And what are the host population's attitudes towards the immigrant group (Gardner and Lambert 1972)? More important, what are the prevailing economic and social conditions influencing these attitudes?

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<sup>1</sup>The term bilingual is used here to refer to persons who possess at least one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing), even to a minimal extent, in a second language.

Although sociolinguistic questions are important to an understanding of second language learning, the bulk of research in second language acquisition has focused on the variables affecting the individual learner. One such variable, motivation, has been described as being either 'integrative,' in which the learner wants to communicate with speakers of the other language, or 'instrumental,' in which the learner wants to use the language for some utilitarian purpose. Of these two, the integrative appears to be more crucial (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Related to motivation are the attitudes a language learner may have towards the foreign culture. Although yielding slightly different conclusions, studies by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and John Oller and his colleagues (Oller *et al* 1977, 1978) have shown that positive attitudes towards the target language group enhance proficiency. With regard to studies of personality characteristics, the little research carried out on the relationship between self-esteem and second language acquisition suggests that the self-confident, secure person is more successful at language learning (Dulay *et al* 1982). In a similar vein, Gardner and Lambert have proposed that individuals with a high need for achievement are better language learners. Other studies have explored differences in cognitive styles and the effect this has on language learning (Naiman 1978). Krashen (1976) has looked at the effect of formal education as well.

The few studies on Hmong acquisition of English have dealt with both sociological and individual factors. Reder (1982) studied the English acquisition of a 3,000-member Hmong community in an urban center in the western United States. He concluded that both the social organization of Hmong communities in Laos and the characteristics of their resettlement in the United States influence the motivations and strategies individuals used in learning English. Robson (1982) came to similar conclusions with regard to factors in the native environment. She studied the effect of Hmong literacy and formal education on the performance of 114 students in ESL classes at the Ban Vinai camp in Thailand and found that both Hmong literacy and formal education were correlated with better English proficiency. With regard to characteristics of the resettlement community in the U.S., Schwartz (1982) observed a relationship among isolation from the broader English-speaking community, unemployment, and limited English proficiency in a study of 40 Hmong students in Orange County, California.

From another perspective, Downing and Dwyer (1982) have postulated that a category of 'communal communication strategies,' involving the selection of one fluent speaker to represent the group, must be recognized in analyzing second language communication among tightly knit groups such as the Hmong family. They analyzed the English language interactions of one Hmong family and found that



spokespersons were usually employed in situations where communication with English speakers could not be avoided.

Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between the communal strategies used by a family and the strategies for communication utilized by an immigrant group within the host culture. In the same way that certain individuals are chosen to represent the family, perhaps a particular group of individuals within the Hmong community is chosen to represent that minority group in its interactions with the broader host society. Factors partially determined by the social organization of the Hmong community in Laos (access to literacy, formal education, contact with the Lao society, etc.) help to develop in these individuals' capabilities for effective language learning. These capabilities enable them to rapidly acquire a functional competence in English. A functional competence in English qualifies them for facilitating positions in Hmong resettlement. These roles, in turn, provide access to a variety of contacts with native English speakers which further enhance English proficiency. Thus, it can be seen that both the social structure in the native environment, and the social patterns that emerge within the resettled community shape the potential certain individuals have for acquiring another language.

This paper explores this interaction between social forces and individual motivations and strategies in regard to language learning. It describes the experience of those individuals serving as facilitators in Hmong resettlement, and discusses factors relevant to their role within the interface of Hmong and English speech communities.

### 3. Method

**3.1 Informants:** Interviews were requested of seventeen Hmong bilinguals serving in professional positions as facilitators in Hmong resettlement. 'Facilitator' is used here to refer to those persons hired by social agencies, church groups, etc., to aid in the resettlement process of Hmong refugees in Minnesota. Table 1 lists the agencies these facilitators represented along with their job title, age, and sex.

Table 1

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Job Title</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>
<u>Ramsey County</u>			
Welfare Department	Social Worker	30's	male
Public Housing	Management Interpreter	30's	male
East-West			
Metro Project	Interpreter	20's	female
	Interpreter	30's	female

Voluntary Agencies

International Institute	Hmong Case-worker	40's	male
Project RISE	Hmong Case-worker	40's	male
Lao Family	Bilingual Education		
Community, Inc.	Coordinator	30's	male
Hmong Enterprise			
Project	Director	30's	female

Church related Agencies

Lutheran Social			
Services	Hmong Case-worker	40's	male
Catholic Charities	Hmong Case-worker	40's	male
Church World Service	Hmong Case-worker	30's	male
Hmong Christian			
Church	Clergyman	40's	male
Southeast Asian			
Ministries	Interpreter	20's	female

University of Minnesota

College of Education	Bilingual Specialist	40's	male
Southeast Asian			
Refugee	Bilingual Assistant	20's	male
Studies Project	Bilingual Assistant	20's	male
	Bilingual Assistant	20's	male

These informants were chosen because they are functionally competent in English, i.e. they have been hired for their positions precisely because they are able to function well enough in both English and Hmong to accomplish the tasks entailed by these roles.

**3.2 Procedures:** The following content areas were covered in 45-minute interviews: 1) a list of languages the facilitators speak, where they learned them, how, for what purposes, and with whom they spoke them; 2) a description of their formal education, including time spent in the ESL classroom; and 3) a description of the jobs they have held both in Laos and in the U.S.

The interviews followed an approach to ethnographic interviewing suggested in Spradley (1979). Descriptive and structural questions developed the content areas in different ways depending on the nature of each interview. Descriptive questions were used to elicit as much information as possible about particular events in the facilitators' lives. They included such general 'grand tour' questions as "Could you tell me about your experience in the military?" These were then narrowed to 'mini-tour' questions like "Could you describe the responsibilities you had as a colonel in the army?" Facilitators were also asked to give accounts of particular incidents they experienced, for example, in the army, refugee camps, ESL classes, etc. Structural questions were used to obtain an understanding of the facilitators' organization of relationships within a domain or category being discussed, for example getting a picture of how the different

ranks in the primarily Hmong section of the Royal Lao Army were seen in relation to each other.

#### 4. Findings

**4.1 *Degree of Multilingualism:*** With the exception of one 20-year old woman who had not attended school in Laos and was therefore illiterate in Lao, all of those interviewed could speak, understand, read, and write in Hmong, English, and Lao. Eleven had some familiarity with French. Ability in this language tended to be related to the level of education attained. Two were highly proficient: both had gone through graduate training in French and had lived in France for at least three years prior to coming to the U.S.; one of these had published in French. Four others had gone to the Lycee (high school) in Vientianne where classes were held in French. The five remaining had not reached the high school level but had gone to school in the province of Xieng Khouang during the 1950's when classes were still held in French. Those who could not speak French attended public schools during the late 1960's and early 1970's when French was only taught on an everyday basis in the private schools (or at the Lycee). All said that they could understand Thai. The only ones who had to actually use it, however, were those who had to communicate with Thai officials as part of their responsibilities in resettling Hmong refugees at the Thai refugee camps. (Seven had such responsibilities). Two facilitators were proficient in Vietnamese. One of these could speak Cambodian as well; he had been granted a scholarship to Cambodia but studied in French there and so had only used and learned Cambodian informally.

To provide some comparison with the rest of the Hmong population, Reder's study of 3,000 Hmong showed that only 2.5 percent were proficient in spoken Lao and only 1 percent were literate in this language prior to coming to the U.S.

**4.2 *Educational Background:*** Table 2 displays an estimate of the number of years these facilitators have been in school along with the level of education each has attained.

Table 2

<u>Estimate of Years in School</u>	<u>Level Attained</u>	<u>Number of Facilitators</u>
20	Ph. D	1
15	Equivalent to graduate work	2
15	Enrolled in university	3
10	High School (Laos)	2
5-7	Grade School	8
3	High School (U.S.)	1
	TOTAL	17

This group shows a high level of academic achievement in comparison with the rest of the Hmong population. In his study of 3,000 Hmong, Reder (1982) found that only 27 percent had any education in Laos. Of this group, less than four percent had more than four years of school.

**4.3 English Training:** The most common experience for male facilitators over thirty was to have had from around three to six months of intensive ESL instruction (four hours a day, five days a week) immediately after arriving in the U.S. They would stop taking classes as soon as they got jobs or went on for vocational-technical training. Within this group, four had some English instruction in Laos, two through the Royal Lao army (one for six months and the other for two years), another at the Lao-American Association (for three months, four hours a day, five days a week), and finally one attended classes held by independently hired Hmong teachers who had been educated in a teacher's college in Vientianne. As a variation in this pattern, one facilitator attended ESL classes for more than a year after arriving in the U.S. and had more than a year of English classes in Laos taught by independently hired Hmong and Lao teachers.

Those in the university attended ESL classes in their high schools and were mainstreamed into regular American classes after at least a year. At the university, they took ESL classes geared for Southeast Asian students and were mainstreamed into regular courses after several quarters. Again, in an exceptional case, one facilitator did not attend high school in the U.S. but went straight into the university-level ESL courses, and after one quarter, took a regular college course load. The three married women could not attend ESL classes on a regular basis because of responsibilities in the home. Each mentioned having attended ESL classes sporadically, however, for at least a three-month period. Of the remaining facilitators, one is currently enrolled in the English Program for International Students at the University of Minnesota, and the other has not attended any ESL classes at all.

**4.4 Job Experience:** The following paragraph describes job experience prior to arrival in the U.S. The one Ph.D. recently arrived from France, where he was a freelance writer and columnist. Prior to the communist take-over, he had served in a number of important government positions in Laos. Six other facilitators had served in high-ranking positions in the Hmong army. Of these men, one served with the Laotian National Treasury and the Department of Agriculture before working with the military. He also came from France, where he served as the President of the Lao-Franco Association. All of these high-ranking military and government officials had positions of

responsibility in the refugee camps (e.g. deciding who was to be in which camp, assisting in transferring refugees to third countries, rationing supplies, etc.). Of the others, one worked as a supply officer with General Vang Pao's army, and another worked for the U.S. Embassy. A third worked for the Public Works Division of the U.S. government (U.S.A.I.D.) and was involved as a lay evangelist among Christian churches for about eight years. Of the university students, one had been a hospital administrator in a refugee camp in Thailand. The rest of the facilitators (the women and the other university students) had not worked prior to coming to the U.S.

In regard to employment since arrival in the U.S., the majority in this group have been employed throughout most of their stay in the U.S. By contrast, 70 percent of the adult refugees surveyed in a study funded by the Office for Refugee Resettlement were unemployed in the U.S. in 1982. These persons have moved rapidly into professional positions. Those with more than ten years of formal education have gone straight into professional jobs after arriving in the U.S. Those with less than ten years have worked in manual labor positions for around two to three years before working in facilitator roles. Of the women, three interviewed are in their first jobs. The fourth, who had more than ten years of education, has worked in three different facilitating roles since she arrived in the U.S. and is now the director of a Hmong needlework business.

**4.5 Facilitators' Roles in Resettlement:** The following sections are organized according to the types of facilitating roles these individuals have.

**4.5.1. General Welfare:** Case workers working with voluntary and church-related agencies play a crucial role in both the initial and ongoing phases of Hmong resettlement. Responsibilities during the initial phase of resettlement include assisting new arrivals with the application process for Public Assistance, finding low-cost housing for them, placing them in ESL or vocational training courses, and channeling them to agencies that provide job placement. Other responsibilities include acquainting them with the U.S. medical system, the public transportation system, the money system, and a variety of other more technical details like social security numbers, tax forms, insurance policies, etc. Work with refugees who have been in the U.S. for a period of time revolves primarily around problems related to unemployment or limited access to ESL classes. Crises also arise such as being cut off from public assistance, running out of food, encountering snags in the American legal system, and so forth, and these need to be dealt with as well.

Case workers have also had to serve as counselors for a variety of personal problems that have emerged as a result of contact with

American society. Two main areas of conflict have been the changing roles in husband/wife and parent/child relationships. Conflicts have also emerged in relationships with American sponsors.

These case workers show a strong commitment to their work. Several were being paid for less than 40 hours a week. All said that their work continued beyond a 40 hour work week since involvement with individual families often carried over into evenings and week-ends.

**4.5.2. Job Development:** Two case workers were specifically assigned to the task of finding employment for refugees. This entails, first, an assessment of the skills, educational background, and health of each Hmong client. Following assessment comes placement in a program that can train the client in a particular skill area. The next, more difficult step is placement in an actual job. Not only are few jobs available, but those that are are usually low-paying and temporary. Job development is even more difficult. This entails developing contacts with businesses and encouraging them to either hire Hmong for existing jobs or create jobs suited for them. Smaller companies usually do not have the capital to develop jobs for refugee labor, and larger businesses will not negotiate with the facilitators unless they have official labor union connections. These are difficult to obtain, however, since unions generally see refugee labor as a threat to their earnings.

One facilitator serves as the director of a small business established for the purpose of creating jobs for Hmong women. The intent of this project is to use the abilities Hmong women have in embroidery and applique to create marketable products suitable for American customers.

**4.5.3. Housing:** One facilitator has been hired to work with Hmong clients that apply for public housing assistance. He takes housing applications from all Indochinese who apply for assistance and serves as an interpreter for the Lao and Hmong in their dealings with the American staff in his office.

**4.5.4. Medical Services:** Two female facilitators serve as interpreters for medical services provided by Ramsey County hospitals. Their job description includes taking incoming calls from Hmong patients, interpreting for American nurses on home visits, and interpreting for doctors and nurses in the hospital. Much of this entails explaining the American medical system to the Hmong clients as well as explaining Hmong patterns for handling illness to American medical personnel.

**4.5.5. ESL:** Two facilitators were involved with English language training. One serves as the director of the bilingual program at the Lao Family Community. This entails coordinating the full-time bilingual teachers and the Hmong and American volunteers who assist with teaching, developing the curriculum for the English classes, and

training both the teachers and volunteers. The other facilitator serves as a bilingual specialist with the College of Education at the University of Minnesota. His role involves course presentations for college courses on Hmong culture, language, and refugee resettlement at the University of Minnesota, as well as work with state and local programs for limited English students.

*4.5.6. Study of Hmong Resettlement:* Three facilitators serve as bilingual research assistants on research projects at the University of Minnesota that study Hmong resettlement. Their duties include interpreting and independent interviewing in the local Hmong community, transcribing and translating tape-recorded Hmong conversations, and providing first-hand information on Hmong language, culture, and resettlement.

## 5. Discussion

Factors probably due to both social patterns within the Hmong community structure and individual abilities and motivations enabled these facilitators to have access to a variety of educational, occupational, and linguistic opportunities in Laos, many of which were not shared by the rest of the Hmong population. Not only did these individuals have more formal education than most Hmong, but a majority also participated in high-ranking positions in Lao military and civilian life, or were employed by the U.S. Embassy. These educational and employment opportunities, along with other factors, gave them exposure to a variety of languages in both spoken and written form. For example, exposure to the Lao school system entailed acquisition of both spoken and written Lao.

Such experiences apparently had an impact on the potential these individuals brought to the task of learning English, since, although these individuals spent little time in the ESL classroom, they learned English rapidly enough to be hired as bilinguals in facilitating positions for resettlement. Functioning in these roles, in turn, has provided further access to language learning contacts. Not only does the facilitating role entail involvement at crucial points of contact between the Hmong community and the wider U.S. society, but the very nature of that role implies much verbal exchange in both Hmong and English.

It should be pointed out that this group's contact with Americans is primarily through their specialized roles as facilitators. Most of these facilitators' free time is spent within the Hmong community, with Hmong family and friends. To a large extent, it appears that their primary motivation for acquiring competency in English is instrumental: to function within the facilitating role. However, integrative factors can be seen operating as well since congenial

relationships are established through contact within the facilitating role. Yet, it is apparent that these facilitators' primary identification is with the Hmong community; they wish to maintain a core of Hmong values and traditions even while participating within the broader American society.

The longevity of these facilitating roles is contingent on the length of time the Hmong community is able to contain itself as a minority culture within the intersection of these two speech communities where the differentiation of functions within the resettled community necessitates that some members maintain a level of functional competency in both English and Hmong, thereby allowing other members to survive in the American context without the same level of competency. How long will this allocation of functions last? Will economic survival within the broader American culture require all Hmong to reach a level of functional competence in English? Will this participation in American society in turn lead to the decreasing importance of traditional home, neighborhood, and organizational practices giving little reason for maintaining fluency in Hmong? If the Hmong community were to head in the direction towards functional competency in English for all Hmong society members, then the facilitating role would not be as necessary to the survival of the group. Regardless of future directions, however, it appears, from observations of the facilitating function at this time, that the social role of individuals functioning at points of contact between two speech communities does affect the strategies and motivations these individuals bring to the task of developing English proficiency.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the experience of one successful group of language learners: Hmong bilinguals serving as facilitators in Hmong resettlement. The intent has been to discuss the nature of the role these individuals have in Hmong resettlement and to describe aspects in their experience that have enabled them to function in these roles. It has been suggested that the factors emerging from social patterns within the Hmong community in Laos have shaped the potential these individuals have for language learning. This potential has led to the acquisition of functional competency in English enabling these individuals to operate in facilitating roles. Participation in such roles, in turn, has provided further access to opportunities for improving English proficiency. Whether or not this facilitating role continues to serve a vital function for the Hmong community is contingent on the directions this resettled group takes in regard to assimilation within U.S. society.

Regardless of the directions the Hmong may take in the future, it can be suggested from observations made at this point in the



resettlement process that the social role of individuals functioning within the intersection of two speech communities needs to be considered as a variable affecting second language acquisition.

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## **FACILITATING TEACHER GROWTH: An Approach to Training and Evaluation**

Nancy Stenson, Jan Smith,  
and William Perry

The role of teacher trainers and supervisors in promoting effective teaching is described and analyzed through a study of a series of videotaped discussions of ESL classes. Five components of teacher development are identified and discussed, and the language and discussion strategies by which a trainer/supervisor can support this development are described. The importance of encouraging teachers to take an active role in their own development is stressed. By providing feedback in a non-threatening manner, the trainer/supervisor can facilitate the development of teacher introspection and internal motivation for appropriate change.

### 1. Introduction\*

The basic goal of any ESL teacher trainer or supervisor is to

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\*This paper grew out of a workshop presented at the 1979 TESOL Convention in Boston on the use of videotape in the training and evaluation of ESL teachers. The comments and questions of participants in that workshop have greatly helped us in clarifying our ideas about videotape and the role of the facilitator. We have profited immeasurably from conversations with Dennis Godfrey, as well as from observation of his ESL Practicum classes at the University of Minnesota, and thank him for providing the original inspiration for our own work in teacher training and evaluation. We are also grateful to Elaine Tarone and Kathryn Winkler for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

promote effective training. Though it is unlikely that anyone would take issue with such a general statement, we would like to suggest in the following paper that the claim has broader implications which are often overlooked in the process of training and evaluating teachers. In particular, we wish to emphasize the choice of the word promote and distinguish promoting teaching effectiveness from creating (or controlling) it. Effective teaching is not simply a matter of knowledge gained through instruction, but is a skill which must be developed, and for which each teacher must take ultimate responsibility. To help teachers achieve the goal of effective teaching, however, a teacher trainer/supervisor may feel compelled to exert authority over teachers who appear reluctant to change or may be tempted to try to control the development of new teachers by assuming the role of expert. A major focus of this paper will be to argue that only when the trainer/supervisor is willing to give up a certain amount of control in order to allow the teacher to take an active role in the evaluation process will professional growth be possible.

Our work in the use of videotape for teacher training and evaluation has led us to see that acquiring effective teaching skills is a developmental process. We will begin by describing five necessary components of this developmental process, delineating in each component the role of the teacher and that of the trainer/supervisor. We will then discuss in more detail some ways in which a trainer/supervisor can assist the teacher through this process.

## 2. Five Components of the Developmental Process

**2.1 *Obtaining Feedback:*** In order to determine how effective their teaching is, teachers first need to have information about their performance in the classroom. Obtaining feedback is thus the first component of the developmental process. This feedback may come from the teacher's own observations of class response or from the comments of a trained observer. We have found that a crucial aspect of feedback is the extent to which the teacher feels able to accept it and work with it. Videotape, when properly used, can be an invaluable tool for providing teachers with objective information about their classroom performance.

**2.2 *Becoming Introspective:*** Given a source of feedback, the teacher needs to be able to analyze the information in a productive way. We feel that the most important factor of this component is the ability to be introspective about one's own teaching. The teacher must begin to develop the capacity for self-evaluation rather than continue to rely on external judgement. The trainer/supervisor can assist at this

stage by helping to focus the teacher's attention on basic questions (and away from trivialities if necessary)<sup>2</sup> and by encouraging the teacher to think constructively about the process. What the teacher trainer/supervisor cannot do is force a teacher to become introspective or to begin to develop the practice of constructive self-evaluation.

**2.3 *Accepting Responsibility:*** The ability to be introspective and to evaluate one's own teaching is a prerequisite to the third component, the teacher's acceptance of responsibility for his or her further growth as a teacher. Only from this point of view is it possible to recognize and accept both positive and negative aspects of one's own teaching as a preparation for bringing about appropriate change.

**2.4 *Choosing What to Change:*** The fourth developmental component involves the teacher's decision to devote the time and energy necessary to effect change. A major part of this decision will be the teacher's choice of which aspects of teaching to work on. It is our experience that it is only when teachers themselves decide when and what to change that any real change occurs. Outside pressures may produce superficial or temporary change, but such change is unlikely to last if the teacher does not understand and accept the need for it. Internal motivation for change is the only guarantee that a teacher will continue to grow throughout his or her career, independent of external control.

It must be emphasized that the developmental components involving the teacher's capacity for introspection, acceptance of responsibility, and internal motivation for change are all aspects of teacher behavior that no trainer/supervisor can control. The most that the trainer/supervisor can do, regardless of what he or she might want to do, is to act as a guide and resource and provide an atmosphere conducive to the process of teacher growth. To do this effectively, a trainer/supervisor must be willing to give up control, acknowledge the teacher's ultimate responsibility for the classroom, and allow the teacher to take an active role in the evaluation process. In so doing, the trainer/supervisor provides the appropriate

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<sup>2</sup>Teachers who are unable to focus on basic teaching problems and ways of resolving them may feel powerless to change their teaching due to low self-esteem. These individuals may be so critical of their own teaching that they are unable to see what they have done well. In this case, the role of the teacher trainer/supervisor will be to help focus the teacher's attention on positive aspects of his or her teaching.

atmosphere for growth and accepts the fact that the task of effecting change belongs to the teacher alone.

**2.5 *Effecting Change:*** The final component of the growth process addresses the need of teachers who have chosen to change some aspect of their teaching and are looking for information on ways of bringing about the desired changes. Such individuals may also need help in seeing how the acquisition of a particular teaching skill can be achieved in manageable steps. At this point the trainer/supervisor can take an active role, serving as a resource for the teacher by suggesting alternative techniques, providing bibliographical references, demonstration videotapes, etc. The value to the trainee of contributions from a more experienced observer will be obvious, but we feel that the observations of a peer can be equally valuable to experienced teachers in creating an opportunity for discussion of problems of mutual concern, sharing new perspectives on a problem, or just providing a sounding-board for the teacher's own ideas.

It is important to stress that the growth process we have described above is a continuous one and that all teachers, no matter how experienced, can profit from introspection about and analysis of their own teaching. An important task of the teacher trainer/supervisor, then, is to help teachers develop the capacity for introspection about their teaching by encouraging objective self-evaluation.

### 3. Videotape as a Source of Feedback

The Committee on Language Programs' Teacher Learning Resource Center (COLP Center) at the University of Minnesota was established to provide language programs with a means of promoting teacher effectiveness through the use of videotape. In our work at the center, we have found videotape to be a valuable source of feedback because it allows teachers to see themselves from the students' point of view and to obtain an accurate record of what happens in the classroom. By viewing tapes of their classes, teachers can profit from the information videotape provides on teacher performance, student participation, and the lesson itself.

The value of videotape lies in its objectivity. The tape can show specific aspects of a teacher's behavior, techniques of presentation and practice, sequencing of materials, and methods of providing feedback to students. It can show the verbal and nonverbal performance of students, their degree of participation in the class and level of attention, as well as individual student behavior. Finally, the tape can provide information on the content and organization of the lesson, variety and pacing of classroom activities, use of teaching aids, and ratio of teacher talk to student talk. Videotape provides the facts without itself making any judgements.

By viewing a tape of his or her class the teacher can relive the experience from a different point of view. Teachers may become aware of aspects of their own performance, the lesson, or student behavior that they did not notice during the class session because they were too involved in the actual teaching process. For example, the teacher may have failed to notice students' mistakes in drills, may have called on some students more than others without realizing it, or may have overlooked an essential step in giving directions.

Videotape also allows a teacher to gain emotional distance from the class by viewing the tape at a later time. For example, a teacher may wish that a particular classroom incident had been handled differently. Upon viewing the tape of the class, the teacher can step back from the image on the screen, and with this new perspective, may be able to determine how to handle the situation the next time it arises.

The availability of information alone may not be enough to ensure that a teacher can make use of this information profitably. Initially we assumed that merely exposing teachers to videotapes of their classes would be enough to enable them to make use of the information on videotape to effect appropriate changes in their teaching. In some cases, they did not know what to look for because of inexperience; in others, the inherent threat of videotape caused them to focus on superficial aspects of the tape and to react only to their appearance or to the shock of seeing themselves; in still other cases, teachers felt they were too experienced to benefit from viewing the tape. It became apparent that teachers need guidance in the use of videotape to evaluate their teaching. What is needed is someone who can facilitate the viewing of the tape by (a) raising topics of discussion and (b) encouraging teachers to become introspective about what they see on the tape. It is our contention that all teachers, no matter now experienced or inexperienced, can benefit from discussion generated by viewing themselves on tape. The presence of a second person, a facilitator who can focus the attention of the teacher on particular issues, is crucial in motivating teachers to become introspective about their role in the classroom. The role of the facilitator can be taken on by anyone who works with teachers, whether as a peer or as a trainer or supervisor.

#### 4. Teacher-centered Evaluation As an Aid to Teacher Growth

In the framework outlined above, the goal of the evaluation component of a training or ongoing teaching program is to enable teachers to become independent of external evaluation and take control of their growth as teachers. The degree to which this is possible may be influenced by a number of variables, including the

teacher's attitude about his or her teaching, the teacher's past experience with evaluation sessions, the degree to which the facilitator's behavior is seen as non-threatening, and the facilitator's ability to determine which steps a teacher might be ready to take to improve his or her teaching effectiveness. A facilitator who is sensitive to the interaction of these variables is more apt to be able to help the teacher develop self-awareness and self-sufficiency.

The role of the teacher in the evaluation session can be compared to that of the learner in the language classroom. Teachers, like learners, may take active or passive roles in their development, depending on the degree to which they feel capable of making desired changes. The teacher who perceives the challenge of teaching to be an overwhelming one may have adopted a passive attitude about teaching, responding only to external demands for change and exhibiting a defensive attitude toward the process of learning to become more effective in the classroom. Conversely, a teacher who has assumed an active role in the development of his or her teaching is more likely to welcome an opportunity to learn from the evaluation session, and through the process of introspection may decide to make certain changes in his or her teaching and then put these changes into effect.

Just as we as language teachers strive to develop learner-centered classrooms, where learners take an active role in facing the challenges of learning another language, so should language teacher trainers and evaluators strive to create conditions in which teachers can take an active role in their own development. A teacher who has developed a sense of control over his or her teaching skills can move away from the need for and fear of external control through external evaluation and begin to rely on the continuous internal process of self-evaluation. Such teachers are more open to constructive feedback and are able to actively participate in discussion centering on their teaching.

Teachers may also enter the session with an attitude of fear and resistance due to previous experiences with the evaluation process. From the teacher's point of view, the thought of being judged may pose a significant threat. To the extent that the facilitator is in fact in a position of authority over the teacher, this threat is likely to be increased, but even where no such authority exists, the very fact of exposing one's class to view is for many a frightening experience.

In order to diminish this threat and to be more effective in encouraging the teacher to take an active role in the evaluation process, the facilitator must be aware of both the teacher's perception of the session's purpose and the balance of control between teacher and facilitator. We have found that a facilitator who can demonstrate an openness to different points of view and who can take



the role of concerned colleague rather than expert or authority figure is much less threatening and better able to involve the teacher in the process of active self-evaluation.

As a colleague, the facilitator must become aware of his or her biases and refrain from imposing them on the teacher. The facilitator can encourage the teacher to think out the reasons for a particular choice of lesson, help in pointing out the pros and cons of a method or technique, and offer alternatives for the teacher to choose among, without necessarily advocating a particular one. In taking on the role of resource person, asking challenging but non-threatening questions, and encouraging the teacher to focus on issues the teacher is ready to face, the facilitator can create an atmosphere in which the teacher is able to begin to take responsibility for his or her own development. By providing an atmosphere open to an exchange of ideas based on mutual respect, the facilitator is able to step back and relinquish control of the session, allowing the teacher to take a more active role. Evaluation then becomes an ongoing process of development, rather than a test which a teacher will either pass or fail.

We have found it useful to conceptualize the variables of interaction in the evaluation process in terms of a continuum that reflects the dynamic nature of teacher-facilitator interaction. Possible attitudes of both teacher and facilitator toward the evaluation process can be described by the continua shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1  
Continua for Teacher and Facilitator Attitudes

Teacher	
External control	Internal control
Defensiveness	Openness
Reliance on the judgement of others	Introspection
Lack of confidence	Self-confidence
Passive role	Active role
Resistance	Acceptance
Facilitator	
Judgemental	Open to different points of view
Egocentric	Empathetic
Expert	Colleague
Authority	Resource

When both teacher and facilitator attitudes fall closer to the right hand side of the continua, the evaluation process itself is more likely to move toward the right hand side of the continuum as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

### The Evaluation Process

Testing	Training
Evaluation by	Self-evaluation
facilitator	by teacher
Teacher avoids	Teacher learns to
introspection	control teaching
	behavior

## 5. The Evaluation Process

In an effort to identify the components of successful interaction, we videotaped and examined a number of sessions in which a COLP Center staff member and an ESL teacher viewed and discussed an earlier videotape of the teacher's class. Participating teachers ranged in experience from those with several years' teaching to those in the first months of a training program. In viewing the tape of our discussions with teachers, we became aware of our behavior as facilitators and were able to use the videotaped sessions to analyze our effectiveness in much the same way as teachers can use videotape as feedback in becoming introspective about their teaching. We were able to isolate a variety of linguistic forms and discussion strategies which seemed to us to affect the success of the sessions. Our judgements of the success of a session, like teachers' decisions about the success of a particular class, are mainly subjective. While such factors as a teacher's active involvement in the session may be cited as an indication of success, the grounds for determining whether or not a particular session is successful are necessarily intuitive. What follows, then, is a summary of what we learned from viewing the tapes and includes suggestions on language and discussion strategies which we feel will prove effective in future sessions with teachers. It is our hope that these suggestions may serve as a guide to others involved in the training and supervision of language teachers.

**5.1 Language:** The language the facilitator uses can contribute to reducing the threat of evaluation. Throughout the tapes we found

ourselves constantly qualifying comments with 'hedges' which had an overall effect of evoking a tone of suggestion rather than instruction. Adverbial qualifiers, such as maybe, sometimes, in general, in a way, modifiers such as some, kind of, a little, and introductory phrases like as far as I know seem to us to de-emphasize the role of the facilitator as expert and give the teacher the opportunity to reflect on the comment as no more than a possibility being presented and to accept or reject it in favor of an alternative. Likewise, we feel that qualification of negatives (not necessarily, not exactly, not really, maybe not) diminishes the threat of disagreement from the facilitator and reduces the teacher's perception of the facilitator as an authority figure, as does a tendency to choose the more qualified of the modal auxiliaries: would/could instead of will/can, could/might instead of should.

In keeping with the need to separate fact from judgement and to identify the latter as such, we also found ourselves using a variety of subordinating mechanisms, such as I think, I suppose, and perception verbs like seems, looks like, sounds like, to introduce opinions or interpretations of the facts shown by the videotape. The relative nature of such interpretations was further suggested by the use of statements in which the facilitator identified his or her thoughts and feelings as subjective: I found it difficult to understand, I don't think it was clear. These allow for the possibility that other viewers might react differently, which not only is true, but also lets the teacher know that the facilitator doesn't have all the answers.

All of the above share the feature of contributing indirectness to the dialogue and providing a kind of 'escape hatch' for the teacher who isn't yet prepared to accept a particular aspect of a lesson as needing work. The syntax used by the facilitator can also contribute to the sense of relativity and indirectness in a number of ways.

The use of sentences which present a topic before commenting on it provides an indirect approach to making suggestions. Sentences beginning with such phrases as

One thing you could do is . . .

Another thing I wondered is . . .

I think what you're doing is . . .

The question I'd ask is . . .

give the teacher time to prepare for what's coming and suggest more tentativeness than a flat statement, without in any way indicating uncertainty about the suggestion. A similar syntactic device which contributes to indirectness is the use of existential there. Sentences like There's a problem with X, or There are a couple of ways to do this tend to be less abrupt than X is a problem or This is the way to do it. Existentials have the added advantage of being somewhat more impersonal (and therefore less directly threatening) than more direct

statements. Thus, the above phrase, There's a problem with X is less likely to be taken personally than a more direct reference to the teacher's performance such as You had a problem with X or X was a problem for you, but suggest much the same content.

Other means of depersonalizing commentary which occurred in the tapes include use of agentless passives and expletive it (It was unclear what was expected of them rather than They didn't understand what you expected of them; That might have been mentioned rather than You might have mentioned that) and use of generic verb tenses rather than specific reference to the moment on tape (Do you think you perceive . . . , Do you often find that things take longer. . .).

*5.2 Strategies to Encourage Teacher Participation:* The teacher's own participation in the interaction is of paramount importance, and the facilitator's language and discussion strategies should be aimed at this goal. The sessions we felt were most successful all shared one thing: the teacher whose class was being discussed was actively involved; the teacher was not merely responding to observations from the facilitator but initiating dialogue as well, thinking aloud about what appeared on the tape and pursuing consideration of alternative approaches. Teacher participation in the session is crucial to the development of self-evaluation skills, and therefore is to be encouraged. Where the teacher is a reluctant participant, various techniques can help draw out the beginnings of introspection.

The objectivity of videotape can be exploited to aid in reducing the threat of judgement by allowing the facilitator to focus the discussion on the classroom and away from the individual teacher. This requires that the facilitator be able to distinguish observations from judgements in commenting on the videotape, and to reserve judgement whenever possible. Ultimately, the teacher must learn to monitor his or her class alone, and the facilitator who can encourage the teacher to do this through the teacher's own interpretation of the observable facts provided by the tape will thereby do more to help the teacher than a facilitator who imposes judgements which may cause the teacher to assume a more passive role and abdicate responsibility for decisions about the class.

By focusing on specific classroom events, rather than the teacher's performance, the facilitator can make use of the distance videotape offers to trigger general discussions of the teacher's goals for the class and view of the teaching role. This can begin with a brief discussion of goals and objectives even before viewing the tape. While some teachers may be inclined to be excessively harsh on themselves, the teacher's own interpretation can often provide the basis for productive discussion of why the class worked the way it

did, what was intended, and what alternative approaches might be available. Using the teacher's comments as the starting point for any specific suggestions not only assures that a suggestion will be taken seriously by the teacher (because it addresses a need the teacher recognizes), but also shows that the facilitator takes the teacher's role in the session seriously.

When discussing the class, it is important for the facilitator to be sensitive in interpreting the teacher's own remarks and questions. The fact that a teacher has asked for an opinion on a particular point of the lesson does not necessarily mean that the teacher is prepared to hear whatever the facilitator may have to say; rather he or she may be looking for reassurance. Instead of a judgement, a counter-question addressed to the teacher's goals for that segment of the lesson or to the student's responses will accomplish more toward the goal of getting the teacher to think independently about the lesson and about teaching in general. In most cases, questions asking for the teacher's observations on a specific aspect of the class or comments on a particular issue in language teaching can be valuable in promoting teacher introspection. It must be noted, however, that even carefully phrased questions may be interpreted as criticism by over-sensitive teachers, or that the facilitator may be unaware of the judgemental undertones of some questions. In this regard, it is important for the facilitator to take care to formulate questions in as non-judgemental and open-ended a way as possible.

In situations where a facilitator feels obliged to express an opinion, doing so in general terms rather than with specific reference to the particular teacher can help to take pressure off the individual teacher and depersonalize the comment. What is important when expressing opinions is to identify them as such, thus maintaining the distinction between objective facts and judgements about those facts.

Whenever possible, it can be helpful to provide the teacher with choices, as a means of encouraging autonomy. This gives the teacher control even in a situation where he or she might expect to be a passive participant. Choice can also be suggested by presenting only one approach but showing a consequence of that choice. The teacher who does not wish to accept this consequence may well take the initiative in seeking an alternative approach.

In the case where a teacher makes a choice that would not be the facilitator's, it is important for the facilitator to recognize both that there may be more than one right answer and that only the teacher can determine, by trial and error if necessary, whether or not a particular choice is appropriate for his or her class.

Acknowledgement of the teacher's expertise where appropriate can also facilitate the teacher's active participation in the session. For example, a videotaped session with a beginning teacher who had

had extensive phonetic training showed the facilitator focusing discussion of a pronunciation drill on phonetic detail to a greater degree than might have been done with a teacher less well-trained in phonetics. This permitted the discussion to center on phonetic facts and their implications, which led the teacher to recognize certain flaws in the presentation of the drill without the facilitator having directly pointed them out. At the same time, the teacher was made aware of an already established area of expertise that could be useful in further developing her teaching skills.

At some point selective avoidance of certain topics may be necessary. Teachers are often more sensitive about some aspects of their teaching than others, and at times this sensitivity may interfere with their ability to think objectively about that aspect of the class, despite the best efforts of the facilitator. In such cases, we have found that forcing the issue is not likely to achieve anything beyond upsetting the teacher to the extent that he or she cannot deal with any aspect of the session. Since the goal of the sessions is to get the teacher to think constructively about teaching, pressing a sensitive issue may be counterproductive.

Finally, in selecting what is to be discussed in the time allotted, it is important to balance qualified criticism and thought-provoking questions with positive feedback. Teachers need to know when they are doing well. Often the most effective teachers are unable to recognize their own expertise in language teaching and thus waste time worrying over points they have already mastered. Less experienced teachers may desperately need positive feedback as encouragement to keep trying. It must be pointed out, however, that while every teacher needs positive feedback, restricting one's comments only to the positive can be dangerous. Depending on the teacher's experience, self-esteem, and dedication, constant praise may lead to complacency and destroy motivation to think and grow as a teacher. On the other hand, it may simply not be taken seriously by the teacher who lacks confidence or experience, or who recognizes from class response that improvement is needed. What is important is to balance the discussion, focusing on areas where the teacher is effective and on areas where the use of introspection and self-evaluation may prompt the teacher to make the changes which will lead to more effective teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

Through our work using videotape in teacher training and evaluation, we have found that learning to be a more effective teacher is a process of ongoing development.

The five components of this process which we have identified are obtaining feedback, becoming introspective, accepting responsibility,

choosing what to change, and effecting change. The teacher who recognizes that professional growth is a continuous process is able to focus on one aspect of his or her teaching at a time, without feeling compelled to confront everything at once. It is our opinion that all teachers, regardless of experience and training, can benefit from discussion and analysis of their teaching. It is important, however, to note that each teacher comes to the evaluation session at a different point in this developmental process, and that these differences will influence the course a particular session takes. For example, some teachers will still need help in finding a productive way to analyze their performance in the classroom, whereas others may fully recognize a need for change but need help in discovering ways to increase their teaching effectiveness. In all cases, however, we believe that the facilitator should encourage the teacher to take an active role in assessing his or her performance because it is the teacher, not the trainer/supervisor who bears the ultimate responsibility for decisions about his or her own teaching.

Though part of the facilitator's role is to offer suggestions of possible ways to implement change, it is our belief that if change in teaching is to be permanent, teachers themselves must first take responsibility for self-evaluation and for finding the means of changing their teaching to conform to their own goals. A facilitator using videotape as a training tool has the potential to help teachers through each step of the process by providing the guidance and encouragement necessary for development of the internal motivation to accept this responsibility. With an understanding of the many variables of interaction, the facilitator can help create a non-threatening atmosphere conducive to the development of introspection and self-confidence. In this way, all teachers, regardless of where they are in their own professional development, can remain open to the possibility of change. If a facilitator can enable the teacher to recognize the need for continuous growth and to assume responsibility for changes in his or her own teaching, then the goal of promoting effective teaching will be achieved.

### Appendix

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# AN EVALUATION OF A TRAINING COURSE FOR FOREIGN TEACHING ASSISTANTS: A Case Study Approach

Mark Landa and William Perry

This paper is an evaluation of an ESL course that was designed to train foreign graduate teaching assistants (TAs) at the University of Minnesota. The evaluation was done through case studies of foreign TAs who had completed the course at least one year before they were interviewed. An analysis of the data obtained in this course evaluation has led not only to improvement of the TA course but also to a means of isolating the variables that affect the foreign TA's success in the American classroom. It has been widely assumed that the problems of foreign TAs and their students derive solely from the TAs' lack of proficiency in English. This investigation found that culturally appropriate teaching skills and a flexible attitude toward differences in educational systems are also essential to the foreign TA's success.

## I. Introduction

Since the early 1970's a serious problem regarding the role of foreign graduate students as teaching assistants in the American classroom has arisen. This problem is clearly reflected in the following excerpts:

This is directed to all University academic departments which hire foreign students as teaching assistants and instructors. It is not fair for students to take a class such as math, economics, or statistics and listen to someone whom they cannot understand lecture, but whose material they are responsible for to pass with a satisfactory

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grade . . . It is ridiculous to go in to obtain individualized instruction when students can't understand the teacher to begin with. Note that . . . one cannot understand their writing either . . .

(Student letter to the editor,  
Minnesota Daily, Sept. 29, 1977)

My concern is the use of foreign teaching assistants (TAs) to teach our students at the University. I do not object to the foreign person being an instructor, but I do strongly object to the very, very poor English they use in trying to communicate to our students, particularly in such technical subjects as math and chemistry, among others. I'm sure I need not remind anyone at the University that teaching is a true form of communication, and to try and communicate to American students with people who can barely speak our language seems a very inefficient way indeed to instruct our young people. I further object for the taxpayers in this state, who include the parents of these students, who are forced to pay considerable sums of money to highly paid professors to educate their children and then in turn have them subjected to this very poor communication technique.

(Correspondence from concerned  
citizen to University administrator)

It is not a secret that foreign-student TAs have some language problems. Therefore, it is only natural that there are some complaints about their teaching. It is unrealistic, however, to believe that the House Education Subcommittee "hears more complaints about this problem than any other higher education matter."

As a foreign student TA, I myself have experienced a student complaint regarding my speaking ability. Feeling concerned about this, I consulted with other foreign-student TAs. To my surprise, I learned that they too had experienced similar criticism. In no case, however, was there any criticism

of our knowledge of the subject. In my own case, in fact, I have received a number of evaluations praising me for my professionalism.

(Student letter to the editor,  
Minnesota Daily, May 27, 1983.)

We . . . find ourselves with a veritable glut of foreign TAs, most of whom cannot speak English . . . It pains me grievously to see my peers sit anxiously in class on the first day, awaiting . . . the first words out of the TA's mouth to determine if he or she speaks English . . . TAs are only required to pass written tests of English proficiency. No verbal tests are administered. Complaints by students are considered sour grapes. Selections of TAs are made according to academic standing and it's terrible to see qualified American TAs driving cabs for lack of positions.

(Student letter to the editor,  
Minnesota Daily, May 15, 1978)

In an age of increasing consumerism and ethnocentrism, the foreign TA has been criticized for not providing the quality of education that undergraduate students demand. American undergraduates complain that their learning is often severely hampered by foreign TAs. They argue that it is impossible to learn the required course material unless they are able to understand their TAs. As a result of this attitude, the credibility of foreign students as effective classroom teachers has been greatly undermined.

Overall English language proficiency has traditionally been measured by standardized written tests such as the TOEFL<sup>1</sup> and the Michigan tests.<sup>2</sup> These generally include sections on grammar, reading, vocabulary, and listening comprehension but no measures designed to assess oral production. In the late 1970s the Educational Testing Service (ETS) introduced the TSE.<sup>3</sup> This standardized test of

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<sup>1</sup>Test of English as a Foreign Language, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup>Michigan Test of Aural Comprehension and Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, Testing and Certification Division, English Language Institute, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>3</sup>Test of Spoken English, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey.

oral production provides a variety of situations requiring spoken English. The test-taker's responses are recorded on an audiocassette, then reviewed and scored by a panel of expert raters at ETS.

University graduate departments, which in the past have had to rely only on scores on written English tests to determine the language proficiency of prospective students, can now get a reliable measure of spoken English by requiring the TSE. If a graduate student has been offered financial support in the form of a classroom teaching assistantship, and if, upon arrival, the TA's command of English does not meet the standards of the department, the TA may be referred to an intensive English program for further training. If the institution offers a special course for foreign TAs, they may receive training directly related to the use of English in the classroom.

The purposes of this investigation are to evaluate the foreign TA course developed at the University of Minnesota and to attempt to isolate the variables affecting the success of the foreign TA in the American classroom. The variables that will be examined include English language proficiency and classroom teaching skills as well as the individual TA's attitude toward the role of teacher at an American university.

## 2. Description of the TA Course

The first course for foreign TAs at the University of Minnesota grew out of a faculty seminar on instructional design. It was initially designed and taught by an ESL instructor. The ten-week course focused on improving the TA's interactional skills, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The class met twice a week, and each TA had a weekly tutorial session with the instructor. Videotape feedback was used, but on a very limited basis. When the course was offered for the second and third times, it maintained the primary focus on interactional skills and added a component emphasizing effective teaching skills using extensive videotape feedback. The fourth offering of the course, made possible by a Cooperative Projects Grant from the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs, included three weekly class sessions and an individual tutorial. The classroom work was divided into an ESL component and a cross-cultural/teaching component.<sup>4</sup> The course has subsequently been offered during three academic terms.

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<sup>4</sup>This project has resulted in two sets of videotapes: one set for those who are interested in developing a course of this type and one set for the foreign TAs themselves. A detailed manual accompanies these sets of tapes. The purpose of the videotape package is not to give solutions to the problems but to help those who are designing and teaching foreign TA courses to become aware of the questions and issues involved in such an undertaking.

The experience of developing the course has brought with it a variety of insights concerning the needs of the foreign TAs. It is apparent that they need to concentrate on specific language problems in an intensive, individualized tutorial program. They also need practice in performing a range of teaching tasks which can be followed by group and individual feedback sessions.

The ESL component of the foreign TA course is designed to place the TA in a variety of classroom situations requiring different types of interactional skills (Appendix 1). The teaching tasks include simulating the first day of class; defining a specialized term or concept; fielding student questions; giving oral instructions; explaining a diagram, model, or illustration; presenting a short lecture; and leading a group discussion. During the class sessions the TAs are not only expected to make their own presentations but also to evaluate the performances of other TAs. As the course continues, the TAs assume major responsibility for providing useful feedback to the presenters. An atmosphere of trust and openness gradually emerges among the TAs in the class, helping them develop self-confidence and the ability to evaluate themselves in their own roles as teachers. Self-evaluation is encouraged throughout the course in the development of both teaching and language skills. In order to become more effective classroom teachers, however, they also learn to integrate these skills with an understanding of the cultural variables involved in classroom interaction.

### 3. Method

In evaluating the effectiveness of the course, a case study method was adopted. This method made it possible to interpret the TAs' evaluative responses on a questionnaire concerning the course in relation to their success as classroom teachers (Appendix 2). An attempt was made to determine whether the TA had successfully integrated into the academic community and the extent to which success could be attributed to the foreign TA training course.

The evaluative questionnaire was divided into a set of introspective questions focusing on the TAs' feelings about their actual teaching experiences, and a set of retrospective questions concerning the foreign TA training course that had been completed twelve to fifteen months prior to the investigation. Both sets of questions were open-ended and were intended to allow the TAs to comment at length on their own development and on the various aspects of the course.

The following procedure was used: Ten TAs (eight men and two women) who had completed the course were given the three-page questionnaire. They were asked to give factual information, including TOEFL scores, positions held in their departments, and an estimate of their amount of daily interaction with English speakers. They were also asked to rate themselves in the areas of listening, pronunciation, speaking, composition, and grammar. The questionnaires were completed prior to individual interviews.

Using the questionnaire as a guide, two instructors of the foreign TA course conducted interviews with each of the TAs. The TAs were given an opportunity to expand on Parts II and III of the questionnaire. The interviewers were interested not in eliciting any particular kind of response but in creating an atmosphere in which the TAs would feel comfortable discussing their teaching and the effectiveness of the foreign TA course. Their oral responses were used as a means of assessing their spoken English proficiency and attitude toward teaching. Having served as foreign TA course instructors, the interviewers were in a position to comment on changes in language proficiency and attitude. The interview information was used to complement the other sources of evaluation, such as direct observations of classroom teaching, interviews with colleagues and supervisors, and student opinion surveys.

#### 4. Results

In their evaluations of the foreign TA course, the TAs' were asked to name the most useful component of the course. There appeared to be agreement that videotaping, follow-up tutorials, peer teaching practice, and individual exercises on language difficulties were thought to be valuable features of the course.

Most of the TAs felt that the course helped them improve their English language skills. Several commented that they had seen no marked improvement in their language skills. However, they were at least aware of what their problems were and of what specific kinds of practice might help them improve. Most of the TAs found the teaching component of the course quite useful. They gained a new appreciation of the importance of communication with an audience and also became aware of the need to adapt, to an appropriate extent, to student expectations in the American classroom. Several of the TAs stated that the course was too short to deal effectively

with the problems facing the foreign TA. Only one felt that the course was not useful.

A more detailed case by case analysis made it possible to complement the written data with the deeper insights that could be gained through the interview process. In considering individual cases, an interpretation of each TA's evaluative statements was made. From an analysis of these statements, it was possible to construct four distinct profiles or types grouped according to two factors: first, whether the TAs in question had decided to continue working as teachers in an American classroom after taking the TA course, as opposed to working under a professor as a research assistant (RA) or as a paper-grader; and second, whether the TAs' evaluations of themselves as speakers of English and as classroom teachers were consistent with external evaluations (interviews, classroom observations, comments from academic advisors, supervisors and colleagues, and student evaluations).

Figure 1

	Did not continue teaching	Continued teaching
Self-evaluation consistent with external evaluation	A N=2	B N=5
Self-evaluation not consistent with external evaluation	C N=1	D N=2

(N=Number of subjects)

In Category A are the TAs whose evaluations of themselves matched external evaluations but who chose not to teach. This choice appeared to be based on their concern for high standards in education, which, in their view, depended greatly upon the teacher's ability to communicate effectively in English. These TAs were aware of the inadequacies in their communication skills and felt that they needed more specific training before taking on the responsibilities of teaching in the American classroom. They consistently made efforts to improve, but by the end of the course, they were still not satisfied with their improvement and chose not to teach.

The first TA in this category came to Minnesota from another university in the U.S. where he had earned an M.A. in a social

science field without having to demonstrate proficiency in English. He had written his thesis and all of his papers in his native language. Upon arrival at Minnesota, he was required to take courses in English as a Second Language before pursuing his Ph.D. One year after fulfilling the minimum ESL requirement and having studied at the Ph.D. level, he voluntarily returned to the ESL Program and expressed doubts about the adequacy of his English. He wanted to support himself with a teaching assistantship, but his lack of proficiency in teaching in the English language made him hesitant to do so. He then enrolled in the course for foreign TAs.

By viewing his videotapes with the instructor of the foreign TA course, he was able to understand how his language differed from that of native speakers of English. He began to monitor himself carefully and to improve his English. Even though he did manage to improve, he chose not to teach because of his concern for the educational needs of American students. He still felt his skills were inadequate for a regular teaching assistantship in his department, though he would lecture in English on special occasions.

Among the ten case studies there is a second example of a TA whose decision not to continue teaching was based upon feelings of language inadequacy. As a research assistant in a clinical field, he realized that the Americans with whom he came in contact were not understanding him. During the TA course he learned how to interact more effectively with clients, but his speaking skills remained clearly inadequate for classroom teaching. However, it is interesting to note that even his academic advisor was reluctant to tell him that his pronunciation was unintelligible.

When interviewed eighteen months after completing the course, the TA reported that he had worked six months with a speech therapist but had finally given up his hope of becoming a classroom TA. He reluctantly chose to support himself by working as a test-grader.

The five case studies that comprise Category B are those TAs who evaluated themselves in essentially the same way they were evaluated by others and who chose to continue teaching. They were aware of the factors inhibiting their successful communication with American undergraduate students, but nevertheless chose to support themselves as classroom teachers. They developed strategies for integrating into the academic environment and for coping with their classroom communication problems. Through the TA course, they became aware of obstacles to communication and took steps to improve. They learned from the TA course that the success of their own courses also depended in part on the cooperation and motivation of the students. They recognized their own need to develop techniques for interacting with American students who had never en-



countered a non-native speaker of English in the role of classroom teacher.

Although each of the five TAs in this category had unique problems in the areas of language and teaching, their evaluations of themselves were consistent with external evaluations which were based on classroom observations, interviews, student evaluations, and comments from people they worked with on a daily basis. TAs in this group tended to rate their proficiency in the various skills in English as either good or fair with pronunciation consistently given the latter rating. They felt there was only slight improvement in their ability to use English for teaching, but all of these TAs felt confident about teaching, and most of them noted improvement in their teaching since they had begun as TAs.

The most salient characteristic shared by TAs in this group was their concern that their students understand them. One TA emphasized the importance of being able to pass on her knowledge to her students. She found it was essential to understand her American students in order to succeed in this. Her attitude was shared by the other TAs in this category. They actively sought feedback from their students regarding communication in the classroom. An analysis of their successful integration showed that each of them had a different set of needs, but that all of them had either very little or no previous teaching experience.

In Category C is a TA who chose not to continue as a classroom teacher and whose evaluation of herself did not match the external evaluations. She lacked self-confidence, although her colleagues and supervisors believed she had excellent language skills and considerable potential for classroom teaching. Interviews with her and videotapes of her teaching led to the same conclusions. She rated her proficiency as fair in all skills except composition, in which she rated herself as poor.

As a person of small stature, she faced the problem of projecting her soft voice over the background noise in lab science classes. Even in traditional lecture settings, her students found it difficult to hear her. She attempted to solve this problem by using a microphone but found the situation unsatisfactory and decided to support herself as a research assistant rather than as a classroom teacher.

In the final category, Category D, are the TAs who decided to continue as classroom teachers, yet whose evaluations of the themselves did not match external evaluation. These TAs are of particular concern in contrast to those in Category B, who also continued teaching. There are two TAs in this category.

The first is a teacher of an introductory lab course who had considerable teaching experience before coming to the United States. When asked how he felt about his teaching, he responded in writing

that it was a perfect way to learn English. He felt that 90 to 95 percent of foreign TAs are effective teachers and that if their students did not understand them, the students need only to "watch and learn." He felt he had no problems in teaching or in using English despite the fact that his TOEFL score barely met the minimum requirements of his department at the time of his admission to graduate school. He rated his skills in all language areas as good. As for the evaluative questionnaires filled out by his students every term, he read and destroyed them routinely, so none were available for this analysis.

When he was observed in the classroom for this study, both his language use and teaching style were highly formal. For the first 30 minutes of the 45-minute class period, he lectured to the twelve undergraduates by commenting on a totally pre-written outline on the blackboard. He was seated on a table at the side of the room and spoke in a low monotone with his eyes fixed on the board. He asked two questions during the period, but the students were unable to answer them. Student names were not used. The TA provided the answers to his questions and said that he hoped they understood. He then urged the students not to sleep.

After this observation, it was concluded that either the students understood the concepts taught before the class session had begun or they had arrived at new insights during the period without choosing to interact with the TA. A third very real possibility, of course, was that they still had not grasped the concepts by the end of the period. In any case, the TA did not modify his lecture style even though the class was small. At this point it was suspected that the TA's concept of an effective teacher did not match the expectations of the students.

The other TA in this category taught a beginning language course. He had been teaching his native language in the U.S. for four years at the time of the study. He rated himself as good in listening, speaking and pronunciation, and as fair in grammar and composition. When he assumed his TA position, he had difficulties associated with his lack of experience in teaching and with aural comprehension. As he gained experience, he became very confident and felt that he was an effective classroom teacher. Like the first TA, he felt that his English improved through his teaching and through contact with Americans. He felt he had no problems with his teaching.

There was, however, considerable discrepancy between this TA's evaluation of himself and others' evaluations of him. In an interview it was found that his English had in fact improved markedly. He was able to understand and respond to all of the questions with little or no difficulty and appeared to be confident in his use of English. He felt that he had reached a point at which his teaching was effective and saw no need to be interested in further improvement.

A subsequent interview with his supervisor and an analysis of his students' evaluations of him revealed a very different profile from the one he had given. His supervisor had received a number of complaints about his teaching, and in her observations of him she felt that he had considerable difficulty communicating with the students in his classroom. The written evaluations of the instructor were generally favorable except for several complaints concerning the lack of clarity in his grammatical explanations in English. His students also complained about not having an opportunity to practice the target language in class. One student wrote that the teacher and the class were "seldom on the same wave-length," which made learning difficult. An analysis of a videotape of this TA's classroom teaching confirmed the discrepancy described above. The atmosphere in his classroom was highly formal with only minimal interaction between the TA and the students. It was perhaps easier for the students to accept his shortcomings as a teacher because he was teaching a foreign language not requiring exclusive dependence on English for instruction. Because he was teaching a language course and not a course in a field like math or physics, the students may have extended some degree of cultural acceptance to him that would most likely not have been extended to his counterpart in those other fields.

## 5. Discussion

Although each of the participants entered the foreign TA course with unique characteristics and specific needs, it was possible to isolate the variables of English language proficiency, teaching skill, and attitude for each TA. The development of the four discrete categories presented in the previous section has facilitated analysis of these variables and has led to some useful generalizations about each of the variables.

Most of the TAs felt that English was their main problem. Although some TAs showed dramatic improvement in various areas of English language proficiency, this was generally not the case. As the course continued, the TAs in Category B saw the need to compensate for their lack of fluency in the classroom setting, realizing that language improvement at their level would take place only as a gradual process. These TAs were especially open to classroom strategies designed to support their oral presentations—for example, using the blackboard to ensure that students have understood particularly troublesome vocabulary items or asking for immediate feedback on key points in the presentation.

On the other hand, the TAs in Category D, who also chose to continue teaching, remained convinced that a mastery of English was the key to being a successful classroom teacher. TAs in this group

were open to activities specifically designed to improve their English language ability. They were less interested in learning strategies to support their communication with students in the classroom.

Even though language is clearly a major variable in classroom interaction, immediate or dramatic improvement in this area was not frequently observed or expected. It appears to be extremely important that the TAs be persuaded that there are crucial variables other than English involved in overall teaching effectiveness.

In the area of teaching skills, it was found that the TAs with limited teaching experience were very open to making changes in their teaching and that, in many cases, these changes were made quickly. On the other hand, some of the TAs who had previous teaching experience came into the foreign TA course with certain preconceived notions about teaching and learning and were not as open to change or adaptation. They came into the course with specific ideas and expectations concerning their roles as teachers at an American university and left the course with essentially the same ideas. It appeared that they had decided in advance that they had certain deficiencies, particularly in language ability, which, when remedied, would make them effective classroom teachers. They resisted the idea of looking at the whole range of skills and attitudes that might affect their performance as TAs. The other TAs with teaching experience chose not to teach even after taking the foreign TA course because of their respect for high standards in education. They felt that because of their inadequacies in English, they would take non-teaching positions until they had improved sufficiently. It was apparent that some of the TAs in this category could have functioned adequately as classroom teachers.

In contrast to the variable of language proficiency, dramatic improvement was frequently observed in the area of teaching skills. It was often easier for inexperienced teachers to make changes in their teaching because they generally had not developed rigid ideas concerning the best way to teach and learn. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, were faced with the difficult task of adapting their notions of teaching and learning to the expectations of their American students. For both experienced and inexperienced foreign TAs, an appropriate attitude toward differences in educational systems seemed to be essential. The TAs who were successful in this area developed an appreciation of their students' perspectives on classroom interaction.

The cultural and attitudinal variables involved in teaching are perhaps the most difficult to isolate and analyze but at the same time may be the most reliable predictors of success. When foreign students come to the United States, they find themselves in a very difficult situation. They may have a strong desire to integrate

completely into their new environment. For many of them, this may mean trying to become like the Americans they encounter in their daily lives. Through this desire to become a part of American culture, they may try to minimize differences and emphasize similarities.

This desire to identify with Americans may be the reason that most of the TAs in this study claimed that English was the primary factor determining their success in the classroom. This perception may have been the reason that some of the TAs were not open to activities designed to improve their teaching effectiveness or to increase their awareness of cultural differences in the classroom. However, the cultural differences involved in classroom teaching, including assumptions about learning, may be the source of the greatest difficulty for the foreign TA in the American classroom. Therefore, a foreign TA who is not receptive to analysis and discussion of these differences will have limited success.

## 6. Conclusion

A foreign TA in an American university is faced with a difficult situation. These TAs, who are required to provide quality education to their students, may encounter serious problems in classroom communication because of their level of proficiency in the English language, their teaching skills and experience, and their attitude toward classroom education.

This paper has presented ten case studies of foreign TAs who had taken a special course designed to improve their classroom effectiveness. Although the TAs had different language needs, different levels of teaching experience, and different attitudes toward the educational process, it was possible to create four distinct categories based on 1) how the TAs evaluated themselves, 2) how they were evaluated by others, and 3) whether or not they chose to continue as classroom teachers after completing the training course for foreign TAs.

The two categories of TAs who chose not to continue as classroom teachers, Categories A and C, are not of particular interest in this study because these TAs, for a variety of reasons, have made the choice not to be involved in the education of American undergraduates. On the other hand, Categories B and D include the TAs who have continued as classroom teachers.

Those in Category B, the largest group, achieved some degree of successful integration into the American classroom. Although each of them still had specific difficulties in the areas of language and teaching skills, their open attitudes toward classroom education in the United States served as a moderating variable. These TAs had a realistic perception of themselves as speakers of English and as classroom teachers, as shown by the match between their evaluations

of themselves and external evaluation. They saw classroom teaching and language skills both as gradual processes requiring constant attention for improvement to take place.

In contrast, the TAs in Category D, who also continued teaching, did not show the same degree of successful integration into the American classroom. These TAs had shown improvement in their English language skills but exhibited a rigid attitude toward classroom education. They had specific preconceived notions about the educational process which may have been a reflection of their cultural or personal attitudes toward education. The study found that these TAs did not have a realistic perception of themselves as speakers of English or as classroom teachers. They saw English language proficiency and effective teaching skills as two separate, unrelated variables. (Their attitude toward improving classroom effectiveness was that if their English skills improved, they would become more effective teachers.) The discrepancy found in the way these TAs perceived themselves and the way others, including American undergraduate students and immediate supervisors, perceived them suggests that this category requires the most immediate attention, assuming that quality education for undergraduates is a high priority.

These case studies support the commonsense notion that proficiency in the English language and adequate teaching skills are essential to the foreign TA's success in the American classroom. More important, the studies indicate that the individual TA's attitude toward the educational process in the United States is a key variable in classroom effectiveness that merits further attention and research.

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## Appendix I

### CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION FOR FOREIGN TAs

#### Description of Teaching Activities

##### Presenting a Syllabus

The TAs present the syllabus and essential information for the course they are teaching. The focus of this first activity is on clearly presenting the pertinent information and establishing rapport with the class. (3-4 min.)

##### 2. Definition of a Term

In this activity the TAs present a definition of a special term or concept from their fields. It is essential that the TAs adapt their material to meet the general level of the audience and that the length of the presentation be kept within the prescribed time limit. (5-7 min.)

##### 3. Explaining a Diagram, Model, or Illustration

The TAs choose a diagram, model, or illustration from their fields to present to the class. This activity requires the TAs to use the blackboard or some other teaching aid and at the same time to maintain adequate eye contact with the class. (5-7 min.)

##### 4. Giving Directions to the Class

In this activity the TAs give the class directions for drawing something (usually a geometric design or symbol). Only oral communication can be used. The class members can ask questions to focus or clarify the TA's directions. The TAs receive immediate feedback on their success in communicating the specified information.

##### 5. Fielding Question

Questions based on each TA's previous presentation asked by native speakers of English are audiotaped and then played for the TAs to answer. The TAs are videotaped in front of the class as they listen to, restate, and answer the questions. The class members can ask for clarification or elaboration. This activity

focuses on listening ability as well as the ability to restate questions clearly and accurately.

6. Short Lecture

The TAs present short lectures based on topics of general interest from their fields. This activity requires the TAs to synthesize the skills emphasized in the course and is intended to give them a clear sense of what they have accomplished during the quarter. (10 min.)

7. Follow-up Lecture

In this activity the TAs can draw on the information presented in the previous lecture and can assume a certain amount of shared knowledge on the part of the class members. This gives them an opportunity to clarify problems from the previous presentation and to elaborate on a specific point. (10 min.)

Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR INTERNATIONAL TAs  
FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Department \_\_\_\_\_
3. Primary area of interest \_\_\_\_\_
4. When did you begin your studies at the U of M? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many graduate credits do you usually take per quarter? \_\_\_\_\_
6. When do you plan to finish your degree? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What types of assistantships have you held at the U of M? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What classes have you taught at the U of M? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Are you teaching this quarter? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How large are the classes you teach? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How often do you have TA meetings? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Native language \_\_\_\_\_
13. Country \_\_\_\_\_



14. TOEFL Score \_\_\_\_\_
15. Michigan Test Score \_\_\_\_\_
16. What language do you speak at home? \_\_\_\_\_
17. How many hours do you generally speak English? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Please give the name of at least one person who has observed your teaching or has a good idea of your proficiency in English.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PART II

Please rate your own proficiency in English in the following areas:

Grammar	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Listening Comprehension	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Speaking	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Pronunciation	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Composition	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor

(For people who have been teaching during the last year.)

- How do you feel about teaching at the U of M?
- Have there been any changes in your *teaching* since you have been at the U of M?
- If you feel your teaching has changed, what do you think the causes of the change are?
- Have there been any changes in your *ability to use English* for teaching?

5. If you feel your proficiency in English has changed, what do you think the causes of the change are?

### PART III

1. Thinking back on the course "Classroom Communication for International TAs" that you took, what were the most useful parts of the course for you?
2. What specific benefits did you gain from the various parts of the course?
3. As a student or TA at the University of Minnesota, what specific problems do you *still* have that the course did not help you with?
4. How could the course have helped you with these problems?
5. If you were a foreign TA just beginning at the U of M, would you take this course? Why or why not?
6. Would you recommend that other foreign TAs take it? Why or why not?

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**new  
acquisition activities**

Jami Ferrer & Patty Warner de Poleo

## Bridge the Gap

**A Three Tier Approach to Grammatically Structured  
Acquisition Activities**

The authors have devised a three-tiered model for contextual, situational, communicative activities that tend to evoke only particular structures without opening a Pandora's box of communicative or structural problems:



Highly controlled exchanges in Tier One require only a simple 2-part communication between teacher and student or between student and student. Although Tier One activities might resemble traditional drilling, the highly active and personalized content shifts the focus from repetitious pattern practice to meaningful communication.

Activities in Tier Two require four-to-six part interchanges. In either whole class or small group activities, the teacher has a less dominant role. Students rely less on teacher prompting, and more on context to stimulate target structures.



Tier Three activities stimulate open-ended communication allowing for maximum autonomy and creativity on the part of the students. These activities involve students in prolonged conversation while continuing to provide practice of target structures. The situations are defined but allow for free exchanges.

**Bridge the Gap** is designed to bridge the gap between tightly controlled pattern practice of grammatical structures *in vacco* and spontaneous communicative discourse *in vivo*.

This Three-Tiered framework and the activities in **Bridge the Gap** were developed for ESL and field tested both in University and Elementary School settings. The authors have also found them to be invaluable in Special Education, native speakers who are delayed in language acquisition. Bibliography.

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