December 1991 Vol. 1, No. 2

College ESL

A Journal of Theory and Practice in the Teaching of English as a Second Language

Student Choice: An Alternative to Teacher-Selected Reading Materials
Rebecca Mlynarczyk 1

The Discredited Speaker: Listener Reactions to ESL Discourse
Sally Mettler 9

Issues In ESL: Putting ESL In Its Place 21

A Technological Primrose Path? ESL Students and Computer-Assisted Writing Programs
Donald E. Sampson
James F. Gregory 29

Reading Problematical ESL Placement Essays
Mary K. Ruetten 37

Recommended Readings for Teachers 47

Errors: Windows Into the Mind
Ann Raimes 55

Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs,
The City University of New York

College ESL

A Journal of Theory and Practice in the Teaching of English as a Second Language

Volume 1, Number 2 **December 1991**

Gay Brookes
Editor

Virginia Slaughter
Associate and Managing Editor

Roddy Potter
Associate Editor

Ellen Block
Diane Foster
Jack Gantzer
Editorial Associates

◆◆◆

College ESL provides a unique forum for exploring questions and concerns regarding the education of English as a second language (ESL) students, specifically urban immigrant and refugee adults in college and pre-college settings. The journal welcomes articles and essays supported by research or theory on:

- current instructional practices in ESL and other disciplines;
- innovations in curriculum and pedagogy;
- research studies;
- teacher education and training;
- the culture, history, sociology, and anthropology of ESL populations;
- relevant ethical, legal, and political issues.

Send for submissions guidelines to *College ESL,* Instructional Resource Center, The City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

© 1991 The City University of New York

College ESL Editorial Advisory Board

Elsa Auerbach
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Nathalie Bailey
Lehman College, CUNY

Sarah Benesch
The College of Staten Island

Ellen Block
Baruch College, CUNY

Donna Christian
Center for Applied Linguistics

Martha Clark Cummings
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Jim Cummins
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

David Eskey
University of Southern California

John Fanselow
Teachers College, Columbia University

Douglas Flahive
Colorado State University

Pamela Frame
Harrow Education Department (Great Britain)

Jack Gantzer
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Sally Mettler
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Leslee Oppenheim
Office of Academic Affairs, CUNY

Kyle Perkins
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

Teresa Pica
University of Pennsylvania

Ann Raimes
Hunter College, CUNY

Leslie Robbins
Riverside Adult Learning Center

Christine Uber-Grosse
Florida International University

Marguerite Ann Snow
California State University, Los Angeles

Anita Wenden
York College, CUNY

Jean Withrow
Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

Rita Wong
San Francisco State University

Vivian Zamel
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Additional Readers: **Robert Oprandy**, Teachers College, Columbia University; **Tracey Forrest**, Baruch College, CUNY.

Special thanks to **Dean Harvey Wiener** for his continued support for this journal and his efforts in behalf of the ESL community.

Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of *College ESL*. The first issue was well-received, and we hope this issue meets your expectations.

As the note on the title page says, we are a unique forum for exploring issues and concerns regarding the education of ESL students, specifically urban immigrant and refugee adults in college and pre-college settings. If these are your students and your concerns, please join us. Add your voice by writing of your experience, classroom research and practices, innovative programs, materials, and pedagogy, or contributing your view on ethical or political issues. If you have particular knowledge of groups of people who make up ESL classes or ideas about faculty development and teacher preparation, please share it. We welcome, indeed solicit, your articles.

The articles in this issue address concerns of ESL teachers and relate experiences they hope will enlighten readers or strategies they have found useful in the classroom. The authors blend research, reading, experience, and practices in ways that seem both down-to-earth and yet thoughtful, specific yet conceptual, colloquial yet scholarly, personal yet academic.

Rebecca Mlynarczyk tells about taking the plunge, letting her students choose their own books from the universe of paperbacks. What happened in that classroom thus transformed students and teacher alike.

Donald Sampson and *James Gregory* describe what happened when students, unsupervised, used a style-checking computer program to check their essays. The feedback they got was somewhat misleading, to say the least, and suggests that teachers need to guide students along the technological path.

Sally Mettler tells of her study of listener reactions toward the oral language of non-native speakers. She points out the potential for discreditation of such speakers by the listener and the need to emphasize oral language in the classroom.

Mary Ruetten reports on her examination of a group of "problematical" placement essays that received divergent scores by two holistic readers and required a third reader. She finds the divergence seems to result from the process of reading a text that doesn't fit the reader's expectations.

Ann Raimes looks at teachers' questions and researchers' answers on what to do about errors in student writing. Viewing errors as helpful to learning and teaching, she offers six strategies to put error correction in the hands of students, calling on their intelligence and creativity.

The regular feature, *Recommended Readings for Teachers*, contains short reviews of books and articles on computers, sociological and anthropological studies, professional topics, and some fiction. I invite you to recommend your favorites for future issues.

In this issue we introduce a column called *Issues in ESL*. The column will act as a forum for the concerns of ESL teachers. The first of these asks: Where is the best place for ESL at a college? Next time we will ask: Should ESL courses receive full academic credit?

This column has an innovative feature: It will be accessible through a world-wide computer network for ESL educators, TESL-L. From anywhere in the world you will be able to express your point of view electronically on the issue. Read the instructions on page 28, hook into the international network, TESL-L, and join the discussion.

Gay Brookes
Editor

Rebecca Mlynarczyk

STUDENT CHOICE: AN ALTERNATIVE TO TEACHER-SELECTED READING MATERIALS

> We enjoy best and engage most readily in activities which we *experience as freely chosen*. We do not like being controlled, we like controlling ourselves. (Margaret Donaldson, 1978, p. 124)

In the past decade, educators in many different fields have extolled the advantages of giving students more control over their learning (see, for example, Walworth, 1990; Graves, 1983; Moffett, 1982). Such innovations as dialogue journals, free choice of writing topics, and collaborative learning sound good in theory. In practice, however, they often pose new problems for teachers and students. It is important that teachers not expect instant success but allow their students to work through the problems, trusting that, in the end, they will benefit from their increased autonomy. I experienced some of the challenges and rewards of these new methods when I allowed my advanced ESL writing students to choose their own reading materials.

I am a firm believer in the value of incorporating reading into writing courses, but I had become dissatisfied with assigning one novel or nonfiction book to an entire class. The courses I teach often include students from fifteen different countries, representing ten different languages. In addition, the students have widely different reading levels and degrees of sophistication. A colleague, Steven Haber, had been urging me to let the students select their own books, but I had doubts: How would I monitor their comprehension? What if they wanted to read Harlequin Romances? Without the anchor of a common reading, wouldn't the usual classroom routines dissolve into chaos?

Rebecca Mlynarczyk teaches writing to ESL students at Hunter College, CUNY, and is a doctoral student in English Education at New York University. She is the co-author, with Steven Haber, of In Our Own Words: A Guide with Readings for Student Writers *(St. Martin's, 1991) and her research interests include the relationship between personal and academic writing and the role of written reflection in writing.*

Finally, in the fall of 1989, my frustration with the old way overcame my trepidation about the new. In the first class of the semester I explained to the students that they would be choosing their own books. I asked them to bring a book they would like to read to the next class, the only stipulations being that it should be "suitable for a college-level course and readily available in paperback."

I wondered what I would do if nobody brought a book, but I resisted the temptation to bring along a few of my own favorites. My optimism was justified. About half of the students brought books, most of them books I might have recommended myself.

At the beginning of the class, we talked about how readers go about choosing books to read for pleasure. Some students said they read the blurbs on the back; others looked for books that had been recommended by friends; still others said they paged through the book, reading excerpts.

The students then arranged their books on the chalk ledges for others to examine in order to make their selections. Students milled about, looking at the books and talking to each other. Many of them asked my advice. I tried to be helpful without dictating their choices. For example, two students whose initial essays indicated that their English language skills were quite limited were drawn to Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge;* I tried to steer them toward other possibilities.

I required that reading groups contain at least three students reading the same book. Groups of two are problematical because if one student is absent, there isn't a group at all. A few students were disappointed when they weren't able to form groups around their first choices. But by the end of the period, every student was part of a reading group. Some of the books chosen were *Animal Farm, Wuthering Heights, To Kill a Mockingbird, Growing Up,* and *Living, Loving, and Learning.* The students were responsible for buying the books in local bookstores, a valuable learning experience in itself.

Each group worked out a reading schedule, dividing the book into six parts. The students kept a weekly reading log in which they were asked to do three things: 1) note five words they were not familiar with, guess the meaning of the words from the context, and later check the meaning in a dictionary; 2) summarize their understanding of the part of the book assigned for the week; and 3) write freely about their personal responses emphasizing any connections between their reading and their own experience.

The groups met once a week in class for twenty to thirty minutes to talk about their reading. Usually these discussions were fairly unstructured: Students shared what they had written in the logs or brought up a question they had about the book. After the discussions I collected the logs, which I read and commented on but did not correct or evaluate.

While reading the students' first logs, I was distracted by errors in grammar and spelling but forced myself not to correct them. I wanted the students to express their honest reactions to the books, not to focus on mechanical correctness. As the semester progressed, I found it easier to ignore errors and respond to what the students were saying.

As it turned out, the logs were a pivotal feature of this approach to reading and writing, providing the kind of anchor that had previously been supplied by the common reading assignment. They served as a forum for students to work out their own understanding of the reading, they provided a focus for the small group discussions, and they helped me to stay in touch with the whole process. The central importance of the reading logs can be seen by looking closely at the experience of one student, whom I will call Carmen.

Somewhat to her surprise, Carmen—an eighteen-year-old freshman, born in Puerto Rico and educated in the public schools of New York City—found herself reading *Wuthering Heights.* Two of her friends wanted to read this novel and had persuaded her to join them. Carmen liked the idea of a romance but was put off by the difficulty of the book's language. I assured her that she could always switch groups later if she changed her mind.

In the first entry in her log, Carmen focused on the difficulty of the reading task and her own ambivalence about the book:

> 9-19-89
>
> The truth is that it took me a week to get thru the first five pages. Anyway the novel talks about a Romance, a selfish Romance. If I can't have you no-one will. . . . Personally I don't like the book. I pick this book, because I like Romantic paper back, but this is totally different to what I read. Is interesting, but the language it's to old for me. I honestly will like to read another book, because I feel that with this book I'm going to fall behind the class. I didn't want to give up this easy but it hasn't been easy for me to get thru the first chapters. Maybe after few more chapter I will understand more. I have admitt is getting interesting.

I responded to the first part of Carmen's log with the comment that although she was having trouble with the details, she seemed to have a clear understanding of the main idea. At the end I wrote, "I like the *honesty* of your comments."

The second week Carmen was still struggling and still thinking about switching books. But the other two women in the group encouraged her to stick with it. One of them explained, "I had a hard time with the language too, at first, but now I'm into the story and it's getting much easier." I remember watching the three of them, huddled together, collectively working out the meaning of a difficult paragraph.

In her log, Carmen expressed her frustration:

> 9-26-89
>
> The story is getting worsth everyday in every chapter. The book is getting harder every time. . . . I read many pages, but it was hard to understand most of the time. I'm still confuse and my mind wonders a lot when I read. I will prefer to read another book even if it will mean more work for me. What I understood during my readings was that the Protagonist is doing his best to get to know the love of his life, but she doesn't pay any attention to him. I wouldn't neighther. He has to understand that she is married.

However, she was also beginning to make connections between *Wuthering Heights* and her own life:

> If I will have someone falling in love with me like Mr. Heathcliff, I will be scared. He is very selfish but sweet at the same time. I will be like Nelly, confused.

I assured Carmen that she could join another group and she was making plans to do so, but she couldn't quite bring herself to give up on *Wuthering Heights*. By the fourth week she was deeply involved in the novel:

> 10-13-89
>
> Heathcliff has become someone that no-one recognizes. He is like this, because of Catherine. She made him feel has if her death was all his fault. Now her ghost and words are haunting him.

She expressed her personal opinion on the lovers' situation:

> Is interesting to see to lovers that can't life without each other killing themselves, because neither of them can't admit they

> made a mistake. Truth is they deserve to die without love, because they are to selfish. "If I can't love you I won't let anyone love you." What kind of love is that? . . . If you love someone you should always try to make it last, but if you can't you should also know when to let go.

After reading this log, I remarked to Carmen that she seemed to have gotten used to *Wuthering Heights*. She amazed me by replying that it was the best book she had ever read and that she had gone to the library to look up other books by Emily Brontë. She was disappointed that *Wuthering Heights* was her only novel.

What could account for such a transformation? One factor may have been that Carmen herself made the decision to continue with this book despite the difficulties it posed. If it had been an assigned text, she might have resisted the whole experience, perhaps not even bothering to read the book or mentally tuning out as the teacher explained the "correct" interpretation.

With student-directed reading groups, however, students are much more apt to do the reading since they know they will be discussing it with their peers. In addition, prepackaged teacher interpretations are not possible since no teacher can be present in five or six groups at the same time. Thus, the students assume a much more active role in making meaning from what they have read.

The opportunity for students to talk with one another is especially important for ESL students, many of whom have few other opportunities to speak English. The non-threatening atmosphere of small groups is conducive to language learning. As one student wrote on an anonymous end-of-semester evaluation: "Group discussions reduce the pressure of study; it helps me to study loosely and feel comfortable." Another student explained: "The thing I really liked was that . . . I could share a reading experience with other people in a sort of intimate way which I wouldn't have felt if everybody had read the same book."

Moreover, small group discussions give the students a chance to clarify their interpretations as they "share the meanings they have made and/or are making of a text and work toward an interpretive consensus" (Mayher, 1990, p. 240). At the end of the course one student wrote, "during our discussions we shared our views, and if there was something that one did not understand, the other member would explain to him." Occasionally, people change their minds, as another student explained, "Sometimes my favorite points and opinion were changed when I talked with my partner."

Even if students don't change their opinions, they benefit from being exposed to different views. In the words of one student, it was "very interesting to find new points of view about the same subject; ideas about how to focus on something; different ways to look at a subject; one book seen by five people (for example) is like five different books."

In addition to the increased dialogue between class members in small group discussions, a written dialogue between teacher and student occurs through the reading logs, and this may encourage students to develop new strategies as readers. For example, Carmen's log for the fifth week appeared to mark a more sophisticated approach to reading than had been revealed by her earlier logs. For the first time, Carmen remarked on the structure of the plot and speculated on Brontë's reasons for constructing the story as she had:

> 10-20-89
>
> History repeats itself in this book, between Linton and Cathy. There parents once were madly in love and now little by little they have fallen in love . . . . It seems that those two families will never be happy . . . . I wonder why she [Brontë] had to make this book to tragic. I think it would off been better if Cathy and Linton will live for ever like there love.

As she continued reading and responding each week, Carmen, like most of the other students, seemed to develop an increased ability to express complex ideas in writing. Without the fear of being graded or criticized, many students began to find their own voices. As one student put it, "I was glad to do the reading log, because it gave me the confidence to think that my ideas were as good as any."

In the reading log, students were encouraged to make connections between their own lives and what they were reading, the kind of "transaction between the reader and the text" that Louise Rosenblatt (1983, p. 35) feels is so important. One student expressed appreciation for the chance to react to the book in a personal way, "I really got alot out of writing in the log. . . . I re-lived what I was reading in the book."

The writing also helped the students work out their understanding of the books. Carmen told me that she used the reading log to cope with the difficulties of *Wuthering Heights*. "I understood the book better, because I was able to interchange logs with the others in my group. When there were parts that I didn't understand, I went back to my previous log."

Of course, reading logs are not intended to replace essays and other more formal types of writing. But my experience indicates that if students are first given a chance to explore their ideas informally with the emphasis on communication rather than correctness, the more formal writing that is done later will be superior as a result. For example, in another course I taught in the fall of 1990, students selected books related to life history. They talked every week with group members and did a great deal of informal writing. At the end of the semester, when they were asked to write a research paper on a question of interest to them that had emerged from their reading, they were able to write with a sense of authority. I was struck by how much better these research papers were than ones I had assigned in previous classes, which were not preceded by small group discussion and informal writing.

Carmen's last reading log was a moving reflection of the way she was applying ideas from her reading to her own life. For me, it was also evidence of the validity of the belief that, given the chance, students will be able to work out their own complex meanings from the books they read:

> 10-27-89
>
> I hope that when I die I will be united with those that I love .... If there is life after this I hope we will find each other again and I hope we won't be stranger.
>
> I don't know what will I do if I ever lose someone special for me. I know I will be just like Heathcliff waiting for my day to come to be united again. Love is something it doesn't happen to often and it also makes miracles happen. So why can't we find each other in a after life. Why not. This is been one of my best Romantic Novels. She made it seem so realistic and truthful that's why I founded so interesting.

Like everything else in life, student-centered reading groups are not perfect. While most students saw the small-group discussions as a valuable learning experience, a few felt that they were a waste of time. In subsequent courses, I have involved the students in discussions about how learning takes place. For example, one way of heightening students' awareness of the learning possibilities inherent in small group discussions is to ask a group of volunteers to discuss a particular topic while the rest of the class observes. Afterward, the class analyzes the discussion, focusing on the learning that occurred and how the discussion could have been improved. Most students can benefit from this type of modeling of productive class discussion.

The overwhelming majority of students in both classes that participated in this experiment were pleased to have more control over their learning. On an anonymous end-of-semester evaluation, 30 students said they liked choosing their own books; one wrote about the advantages of both approaches without stating a preference; only two said they would have preferred the teacher to choose the course reading material. I felt that, all in all, students made outstanding progress in writing, a judgment supported by their superior performance on the final examination—a holistically scored essay exam graded by anonymous readers.

My own feelings about giving up some of my authority in the classroom were complex. Letting students choose their own books proved to be more complicated, from a teacher's point of view, than assigning a common reading. It made advance planning more difficult and required patience and understanding as the students learned to interact with one another. I also noted a change in the dynamics of the classroom. It became harder for me to get the class's attention when I wanted to. The students weren't rude or out of control; they were just involved in talking to each other. Yet these occasional frustrations were outweighed by benefits that soon became apparent. As I gave up some of my control, I was also invigorated by the students' intense involvement in their learning.

There are many ways of allowing students more choice in what they read and write. Since the initial experiment described in this article, I have tried a variety of other ways of encouraging students to make their own choices. These recent experiences reinforce a student comment at the end of that first semester: "Making our own decisions was the best thing that happened in this class."

REFERENCES

Donaldson, M. (1978). *Children's minds.* New York: Norton.

Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work.* Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Mayher, J. (1990). *Uncommon sense: Theoretical practice in language education.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Moffett, J. (1982). Writing, inner speech and meditation. *College English, 44,* 231-246.

Rosenblatt, L. (1983). *Literature as exploration.* New York: Modern Language Association.

Walworth, M. (1990). Interactive teaching of reading: A model. In J. K. Peyton (Ed.), *Students and teachers writing together* (pp. 35-47). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Sally Mettler

THE DISCREDITED SPEAKER: LISTENER REACTIONS TO ESL DISCOURSE

There is an observable phenomenon in the interaction between native and non-native speakers of English: the elusive but powerful distractor, consternation. Consternation is a reactive state of mind. In its extreme form, it is shock plus fear; more commonly, it is a disconcerting jolt followed by feelings of apprehension. In the context of communication, consternation is intrapersonal—internal—but it shows itself interpersonally in non-verbal forms: quizzical looks, gaze avoidance, even laughter, and in verbal forms: irritable requests for repetition, inappropriate responses, abrupt or dismissive rejoinders. It is potential in all interaction, but it seems to thrive in the struggle of native and non-native speakers to communicate with each other in satisfying ways.

Senders of messages get feedback, whether or not they solicit it, and the nature of that feedback, positive or negative, influences further production. Aronowitz (1987) pointed out that the most formidable task facing the second-language learner in the target culture is the need to face the evaluative "*mentalité* of the interlocutor class." Mainstream speakers are indeed a class exerting pressure on ESL students pursuing academic careers or competing in the job market, where they face evaluation of the language they produce.

To explore listener reaction to ESL discourse, it is first necessary to note some significant points in communication theory. First, the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a message is symbiotic. In communication, output depends on input; participants work together to negotiate shared meaning. When Malinowski (1923) and Firth (1969) connected language with the situation in which it occurs, they created a framework for the notion of "communicative

---

Sally Mettler is Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY. She specializes in teaching principles of communication and English phonology.

competence" later developed by Hymes (1964), which excludes the possibility that speakers can operate independent of their hearers.

Secondly, underlining the importance of the hearer's point of view, Goffman (1959) observed that the individual "intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be impressed in some way by him" (p.2). If the individual's expression, verbal or non-verbal, is perceived as distorted, the receiver may regard it as a *stigma*, "an attribute that is deeply discrediting," and which reduces the sender "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" who is potentially "discreditable" or actually "discredited" (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). By including the illiterate among the stigmatized, Goffman extended his theory of stigma to anyone whose communication skills are perceived as deficient. Speakers whose utterances are found incomprehensible, unacceptable, or irritating are thus potentially discreditable.

Thirdly, research in second language acquisition is consistent with communication theory in establishing a connection between the individual's way of talking and the listener's perception of that speech (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles & Bourhis, 1976; Simard, Taylor, & Giles, 1976). Surveying the research on native reactions to non-native communication in a variety of languages, including Spanish, French, German, Russian, and English, Ludwig (1982) developed categories that continue to be useful: *comprehensibility*, the degree to which the interlocutor can decode what is said; *acceptability*, the degree to which a given interlanguage, the learner's developing version of the language, violates target language norms; and *irritation*, the degree to which the actual sound of a message intrudes on the listener's attention to it. Irritation ranges from a bare awareness of a communicative trait, such as hesitancy or stuttering, to preoccupation with the trait and loss of the message itself. In the case of non-native speakers, irritation results from the speaker's erroneous use of the language versus a native hearer's expectations (Piazza, 1980).[†]

Because of the complexity of listener reaction, in which such variables as comprehensibility, acceptability and irritation may come together to produce consternation and speaker discreditation, I applied a qualitative methodology to seek answers to the following questions:

[†] *In research with implications for the present study, listeners made negative judgments on the success and ability of Spanish-accented ESL speakers (Arthur, Farrar, & Bradford, 1974; Ryan, Carranza, & Moffie, 1977; Ryan & Carranza, 1975; Sebastian and Ryan, 1978; Rey, 1977). In Puerto Rico, Fayer and Krasinski (1985) found that listeners judged the intelligibility of college students using English in Puerto Rico relative to listener perceptions of preceding speakers. If the preceding speaker was judged proficient, the next speaker might be seen as less intelligible.*

1. How does a speaker's interlanguage affect the listener's ability to receive and decode the speaker's message?
2. What strategies do listeners employ to decode and interpret the non-native speaker's message?
3. How does the oral English of the non-native speaker prompt the listeners to disclose their attitudes toward the speaker?

The Study

The study was designed to elicit listeners' candid reactions to speakers in a situation where people could communicate with each other about a speaker, of an undisclosed identity, who would not hear them (see Mettler, 1989). Participants were divided into two groups, speakers and listeners. Three speakers were audiotaped as they talked about personal problems they had previously encountered in a speech of self-disclosure. Five groups of listeners (five in each group) were videotaped as they listened to a speaker's problem, analyzed it, and proposed solutions.

The speakers, Humberto, Benito, and Ricardo (not their real names), were in their early twenties, native speakers of Caribbean Spanish, and graduates of New York City high schools. All were enrolled in sections of Speech 100, Fundamentals of Oral Communication (for non-native speakers), which I taught. Although not expert users of English, they could use English readily to express a wide variety of messages. They produced English fluently, but inaccurately, in a style familiar to the local ear.

The listeners were in a section of Speech 104, Interpersonal and Group Communication. The class was heterogeneous: 60% women, 40% men; ranging in age from 18 to 58, with most in their twenties; of various ethnicities. This class was representative of the diversity of the City University and the urban population in which ESL students need to compete and survive.

Each group listened to one speaker. Groups A and C listened to Humberto, who was torn between remaining in the U.S. and returning to Puerto Rico. Group B listened to Benito, who was intent upon advancing in his studies although distracted by his lucrative job as a chef. Groups D and E listened to Ricardo, who was in conflict over his desire to remain totally Puerto Rican and his need to acculturate.

Listeners were asked 1) to listen silently to the speaker's tape and summarize it in writing; 2) to discuss the speaker's problem and its probable causes, and 3) to recommend solutions to the speaker's problem.

The results were analyzed in two parts. The first was an analysis of the listeners' written summaries of the speaker's narrative. Listeners were credited with either complete, partial, or zero representation of the points in the narrative. The summaries were also examined for disclosure of listener attitudes, including comments on the speaker's use of English.

The second part was an analysis of the videotapes. Because overlap, cross-talk, and side conversations among group members were important, I analyzed the data using a participant-column format with columns of equal width for the speaker and the five discussants. This system made it possible to show where clusters of talk occurred, where responses were widely spaced, and where silences fell.

Broadly, the listeners' comments focused on what the speakers said or on the way the speaker spoke, his identity, or his group affiliations. The listeners' comments were labeled *text-generated* if they indicated that the listeners were discussing the speaker's utterance, his *text*. Their comments were labeled *context-generated* if they were attitudinal in nature. Text-generated responses showed comprehension through restatements or paraphrases or non-comprehension through gaps and miscues cited in the listeners' comments. The context-generated responses showed the listeners' evaluation of the speaker's use of English, individual identity, and group affiliation. These were classified favorable, unfavorable, or neutral.

The analysis of the videotapes consisted of frequency counts of both text-generated and context-generated responses, followed by a descriptive analysis of the entire taped discussion, with abundant examples of categorized comments.

Results

In reviewing the videotapes, I could distinguish patterns of group response to the task. Group A, with three prospective social workers among its members, was totally oriented toward the speaker's oral text (as I had expected all the listeners in all five groups to be), relying solely on the tape and their collaborative comprehension of it. Group B, all white, similar in age, class and ethnicity and graduates of local high schools, also attended to the speaker's text but more on the basis of the stereotypes and common knowledge it evoked and the emotions it aroused than with regard to its content. Group C was dropped from the study because of internal language-comprehension problems. Group D, which included two young, male bilinguals from the same country as the speaker and one young woman who had immigrated much earlier from Hong Kong, as well as two native speakers, expended little time or energy on analyzing the speaker's stated problem. They received the message as a catalyst for the release of feelings, attitudes, associations, experiences, and knowledge related tangentially to the speaker. Group E was the most disparate in background, least cohesive as a group, and, therefore, most reserved of the groups. Appearing to attend more to the text than to the context, but actually demonstrating an aversion to listening to the tape, this group stayed away from both careful scrutiny of the speaker's words and from disclosure of deep-seated attitudes.

Group A began its discussion apparently understanding the speaker, based on the written summaries. Their discussion resulted in 173 indicators of comprehension as opposed to 86 non-comprehension indicators. However, as they restated and paraphrased the speaker's remarks, the members also made many unfavorable comments on the speaker's use of English: 39 unfavorable judgments (0 favorable, 2 neutral), despite a generally favorable view of the speaker as an individual and ethnic group member.

The discontinuity between comprehension and an unfavorable evaluation of the speaker's use of English was shown by one member as she moved from 90% comprehension (in the written summary), through a correct paraphrase ("I thought the main problem of the speaker was whether to stay here or go back to Puerto Rico."), to her ultimate judgment. Toward the end of the discussion, she told the group that she couldn't think about *how* Humberto feels because "you can't understand *what* he's saying!" She said this in spite of the fact that she had held the group to the text for authentication and had displayed the most complete comprehension of the speaker's utterances.

Group B, the most homogeneous, also apparently understood the speaker (55 comprehension indicators and 17 non-comprehension indicators). However, Group B made 34 negative judgments on the speaker's use of English (0 favorable, 0 neutral); 22 negative judgments on the speaker as an individual (5 favorable, 7 neutral); 16 negative judgments on the speaker as an ethnic group member (2 favorable, 0 neutral).

Indeed, at Benito's very first words, the group began spluttering and laughing and even expressed mockery:

Ben: ...My knowledges of the English language was limited// Three years ago/	**Dennis:**	**I'd say it still is!**
I left my country/ the Dominican Republic//I	**Marcia:**	**(to Dennis) That's not nice!**
came to the United State'...	**Peggy:**	**Sounds like Luis!**
	Dennis:	**Peggy/ shut up! (echoing) repooblic/ (laughter)**

This initial outburst, totally spontaneous and possibly due in part to the impact of an unexpectedly accented voice, set the tone for the ensuing discussion: They frequently and without inhibition, although not without awareness and some evidence of guilt, disclosed their attitudes toward Benito:

Dennis:	**That was funny/when we heard the accent/all five of us went hysterical laughing!**
Missy:	**I know//We're gonna look like real crumbs/**
Dennis:	**I know//**

Peggy, after hearing only a few words from Benito, likened him to Luis, a member of the class (from Puerto Rico) who was not a participant here. She thus established the "typicality" of Benito's interlanguage. Dennis went on to mimic the speaker's pronunciation of Republic, echoing it as "repooblic," which implied derogation of Benito's pronunciation even before the narrative had been fully heard. They mitigated their negative evaluation later, but as reflected in the frequency counts, continued to express it.

Group D, with two same-language bilingual members and two native speakers, had a heavily context-based discussion (152 context-generated responses vs. 63 text-generated responses). They had difficulty understanding (37 non-comprehension to 26 comprehension). The bilingual listeners made considerable use of background knowledge and experience in the comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of the speaker's discourse. The group made 48 negative judgments on the speaker's use of English and was heavily negative of him as an individual and as a group member.

Group D's initial responses to Ricardo combined uneasy comprehension, mild sarcasm and ongoing giggling, to produce a climate in which the speaker was tacitly discredited.

Ric: ...I gonna go out
to the school and not
to stay here// I gonna
to going out from here//
and I going to San Juan/
live with my uncle// He's
a very good person/ very
eh pedajo- peda-
pedagogical person//
(tape off)

Ray: Pedago--
Carol: What is it?
peda-ja--?
Ray: I can't
underst--
pedagogico
is what
he's trying
to say//

Carol: (laughing) What's that?
What's that?
Steve: I said philosophical/ that
can't be philosophical/ right?
Ray: It sounded like philosophical/
right? *pedagogico*/
Carol: (laughing) So what does
that mean?
Ray: It's a Spanish word for
almost/ like/ philosophical//
He's an intelligent person//
Carol: oh/ I see// oh/ o.k.//
I got the whole story
mixed up! (laughs)

Responses to the speaker's problems were keyed, in Goffman's (1959) terms, not to the message *given* to the listeners, but to the image *given off* to them. Especially interesting were the ambivalent reactions of the same-language bilinguals (Ray and Steve). For various reasons, the group responded to Ricardo first as a group member, before evaluating his message.

Ric: ...I can write English/
can speak/not very well/but I
can make a conversation wid
any—with any*body*/
and try to understand/...

Ray: I really do/
I feel sorry
for him// He's
very confused/
you can relate
to him// This is a
sad story you see
every time/ every
time every time
you go to Puerto
Rico/ Reggie/
down there

Ricardo's voice spoke to Ray of "the sad story you see every time " in Puerto Rico, causing him to articulate his own sense of distance and proximity vis-à-vis Puerto Rico:

Ray: That's why I hate to go to
Puerto Rico// When I go/
When I go over there/
to go to my friends from
school/ they all-- their wives
are pregnant/ there's like a
row of kids waiting there/
(mock-whining) "Dad-dy"/
It's sad/ it really is//
Carol: (laughing) Yeah/
Ray: And we just go over there/
y'know/ pair of brand new
sneakers/ brand new jeans/
a rented car/ and they're like/
"Where did you get that?"/
y'know// Sad//

Group D's responses hinted at the ambivalent reception immigrants may face from their compatriots.

Ray: There's nothing left over there/
There's nothing left over there//
I've been going over there since I
left in '78/and in '78 it was
getting bad/and when I went about
six or eight months ago/I tripped
over just for a weekend/to kinda
see how my friends were doing/=
Steve: Um hum/

Ray: =everything was *bad*//The best thing
you could do was go to school/if
you had the money//
Steve: Well/it's not—you said—
To me/you make it sound like
it's totally their fault//
You know/like the people down
there/I don't think it's/
y'know/*all* their fault/
Ray: It's not really their fault/
Steve: Y'know/'cause we've never
been independent/we've never
stood on our own feet//
Ray: (laughter)
Steve: I'm sayin' "we"/*they*/'cause
I'm not accepted down there
as it is//I've never been
there/O.K./but—
Ray: But/uh/I dunno/I've been
there/I grew up there/

The least emotional reactors, Group E, generated a like number of comprehension and non-comprehension indicators (32 vs. 36), but were unambiguously unfavorable in judging Ricardo's use of English.

Derek: (reading) "State and describe
the speaker's problems"/
I think/well—
Annie: Communicating/
Derek: Yeah, that's his main problem/
the language gap// He wasn't
able to deal with that/ really//
um/ it caused problems

This exchange brought out the difference between the speaker's idea of his problem (how to make a life in an alien culture) and the listeners' idea of his "main problem" ("communicating" and "the language gap").

Conclusions and Implications

The results of the study show that listener comprehension involves not only the text but also evaluation of the speaker's way of talking and the speaker himself. It is striking that the unfavorable evaluation of a speaker's discourse is not necessarily matched by the listener's actual ability to decode. In each of the groups, unfavorable pronouncements on the speaker's English were made by *successful* decoders, as well as those who had difficulty. None of the successful decoders judged the speakers' English adequate, even though the speakers were apparently comprehensible to them.

Using the listeners' own words as evidence, we could see that comprehensibility was not separate from acceptability or "irritatingness." The listeners' *sense* of comprehension was directly linked to their judgments on the acceptability of the oral language they had heard.

The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. The speakers' oral English occasionally impinged on, but did not block, the process of decoding. This finding was supported by the listeners' written summaries and by the analysis of the videotapes, showing that comprehension indicators occurred in greater or like proportion to non-comprehension indicators.
2. Collaboration was an effective strategy for decoding and interpreting the speakers' texts. Restatements and paraphrases by some listeners helped to clarify the gaps and miscues experienced by others.
3. Despite the demonstrated ability of the listeners to decode the speakers' messages, all groups disclosed negative attitudes toward the speakers' use of English. Three (B, D, and E) out of four groups were negative about the speaker as an individual and as a group member.

Conclusions can be drawn from the findings:

1. Whether or not the listeners could restate or paraphrase the speaker's utterances, they often expressed the *feeling* that they had not understood him. The inference to be drawn is that listeners need to overcome a tendency to negatively evaluate problematic speakers in order to comfortably comprehend their speech and move into the interpretation and response phases of interpersonal communication. This takes effort, and effort requires motivation. Motivation will be present when there is a need to acquire information or accomplish a task, as when a student struggles to comprehend a professor, but without the need, listeners may be reluctant to make the effort.
2. Ideally, hearers undertake to share with speakers the responsibility for constructing meaningful communication. In

> reality, however, the burden of communicative responsibility may fall unevenly on interactors and most heavily on non-native speakers who may lack prestige in the target culture. To communicate effectively across status boundaries, ESL speakers need to produce language that is readily amenable to social use.

The major implication of this study is the need to think again about the goals and priorities of ESL teaching. In the interests of our students, we might want first to recognize the power of oral language in human interaction and the impact that its effective or ineffective use has on the prospects of learners. Then we might begin debating whether the answer lies in allocating time to speech or in accelerating the integration of ESL students into the mainstream curriculum. The debate will be productive if it establishes the priority of oral communication skills for the learner. If it leads the ESL teacher to act not only as an instructor in language but also an informant on the explicit and implicit demands of the target culture, students may ultimately face the larger community with realistic preparation and brighter prospects.

REFERENCES

Aronowitz, S. (1987, March). Keynote address at the Eighth Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Arthur, R., Farrar, D., & Bradford, G. (1974). Evaluation reactions of college students to dialect differences in the English of Mexican-Americans. *Language and Speech 17,* 255-270.

Fayer, J. M., & Krasinski, E. (1985, April). Intelligibility of the speech of Puerto Rican ESL students. Paper presented at the 20th Annual TESOL Conference, New York.

Firth, J. R. (1969). Personality and language in society. In J. R. Firth, *Papers in linguistics, 1934-1951,* 177-189. London: Oxford University Press.

Giles, H., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1976) Methodological issues in dialect perception: a social psychological perspective. *Anthropological Linguistics 19,* 294-304.

Giles, H., & Powesland P. F., (1975) *Speech style and social evaluation.* London: Academic Press.

Giles, H. & Smith, P. M., (1979) Accommodation theory: optimal levels of convergence. In H. Giles and R. N. St. Clair (Eds.), *Language and social psychology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1964). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hymes, D. H. (1982). Introduction: Toward ethnographies of communication. In J. J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *The ethnography of communication* [Special Issue. *American Anthropologist 66:(6)*, part 2], 1-34. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.

Ludwig, J. (1982). Native-speaker judgements of second-language learners' efforts at communication: A review. *Modern Language Journal 66:*, 274-283.

Malinowski, B. (1923). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards (Eds.),*The meaning of meaning (pp. 296-336)*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Mettler, S. (1989). The reactions of listeners to the discourse of non-native speakers of English. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Piazza, L. (1980). French tolerance for grammatical errors made by Americans. *Modern Language Journal 64*, 422-427.

Rey, A. (1977). Accent and employability: Language attitudes. *Language Science 47*, 7-13.

Ryan E., & Carranza, M. A. (1975). Evaluative reactions of adolescents toward speakers of standard English and Mexican-American accented English. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 31*, 855-863.

Ryan, E., Carranza, M.A., & Moffie, R. (1977). Reactions toward varying degrees of accentedness in the speech of Spanish-English bilinguals. *Language and Speech 20*, 267-273.

Sebastian, R. J., & Ryan, E. B., (1985). Speech cues and social evaluation: Markers of ethnicity, social class and age. In H. Giles & R. N. St. Clair (Eds.), *Recent advances in language, communication, and social psychology* (pp. 112-143). London: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Simard, L., Taylor, D. M., & Giles, H. (1976). Attribution processes and interpersonal communication in a bilingual setting. *Language and Speech 18*, 374-387.

ISSUES IN ESL: PUTTING ESL IN ITS PLACE

This is the first column in a series dealing with concerns of ESL professionals. In the following pages, Jack Gantzer considers where ESL programs belong, and several ESL faculty respond. We also invite your responses as well as suggestions for future topics, by letter or through the new TESL-L Electronic Network (see page 28). The next column will deal with the issue of full acadeaic credit for ESL courses.

Putting ESL in Its Place

Jack Gantzer, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

While ESL has had a place in urban higher education for nearly a quarter of a century, its precise placement within the Academy is undefined. In the early days, ESL grew up where it could, survived as best it could and, in many cases, flourished. However, where courses or programs reside varies greatly from institution to institution.

Where a program is housed affects the power faculty have in institutional decision-making and how others in the college view that discipline. It also affects how the Academy sees and values the instruction and research undertaken. It is now time to reconsider these chance decisions. If ESL is to develop and flourish as a serious academic discipline, we must begin to define ourselves not only in terms of appropriate theory and pedagogy but also in terms of our place within the Academy's schools, divisions, and departments. To this end, I will present some of the advantages and disadvantages of some of the placements of ESL.

ESL in Its Own Department

My belief is that establishing ESL as a separate academic department provides the most benefits to students, faculty, and the development of our discipline. Students benefit because they are taught by faculty interested and trained in the education of ESL students. Thus, they have a better chance of having their special needs met and of gaining full academic credit for their efforts.

Faculty benefit because they are recognized as professionals and are evaluated in terms of their discipline, not that of another no matter how well established it is. They have greater potential flexibility and independence in curriculum development. They are self-governing and guaranteed representation in institutional governance.

The discipline of ESL also benefits. Departmental status legitimates ESL through institutional recognition. A department has the autonomy to develop its own theory and philosophy, to collaborate with other faculties as an equal, to develop partnerships within the Academy and to educate colleagues in other departments.

The only disadvantage I see to placing ESL in its own department is in the isolation such an arrangement presents. Students may be isolated from mainstream students, at least initially; faculty newly placed in a new department might be left to struggle to define their place within the institution, often isolated and lacking experience in governance. They would be new players in academic turf wars where the spoils have already been divided and are closely guarded. However, I think the benefits greatly offset these minor disadvantages.

ESL Outside the Departmental Structure

This placement allows for flexibility in program offerings because courses are not usually subject to college-wide faculty review. However, this also encourages the view that these courses are pre-college instruction. In such programs, faculty are not usually offered tenure-bearing lines and are often paid less than faculty working within the established academic structure. While students are often given more time to learn English and not required to maintain a high academic average, they are also isolated from the academic institution. This choice continues to foster the myth that ESL is not "real" academic work and does not enhance ESL as a serious academic discipline.

ESL Housed in Several Departments

When ESL courses are offered in several established academic departments, students experience a range of perspectives on language and language learning. ESL faculty serving as coordinators in each department gain individual, but limited, power. Such a placement allows for greater contact between faculty who teach reading, writing, and speech to native speakers and those who teach ESL students. And since much of our current theory, rightly or wrongly, is borrowed from L1 theory, such contact allows for more rapid borrowing.

However, students' academic experiences are less comprehensive and less integrative. Students often receive mixed messages about content and terminology and are evaluated in terms of differing criteria.

The effects on faculty are more devastating. ESL faculty members are prevented from achieving strength and often find themselves in the position of squabbling among themselves over academic territory. In such a split situation, they have little chance for attaining representation in institutional governance. Such fragmentation of instruction also continues the idea that ESL is a stepchild to more traditional disciplines.

ESL Housed in a Single Department

Housing ESL within a single department, whether it be English, Modern Languages, Basic Skills, or another, gives students a better chance for comprehensive language instruction and fosters the idea that ESL faculty are discipline-related professionals. However, it also leads to the marginalization of ESL faculty, and it often defines ESL faculty and ESL itself in terms of the parent department whether that be English, modern languages or remediation. This arrangement does not provide a coherent framework for the development of ESL as an academic discipline.

ESL Within an English Department

Here, students often have the *feeling* of being part of the mainstream and therefore closer to their academic goals. However, too early in their academic careers, they may be held to standards devised for native speakers. As for the ESL faculty, they are, in this arrangement, part of a large and powerful group; they can easily collaborate with instructors of native speakers and need not be overly concerned where ESL ends and English begins. However, they are often marginalized within a structure consisting of an ESL coordinator and numerous adjunct faculty; their research is often less valued than literary research; and they are seldom seen as capable of representing English department interests. There also is a chance that traditional English faculty will be recruited to teach ESL courses when the need arises. This diminishes ESL as a discipline.

Being part of a powerful department helps to legitimize ESL; however, in an English department, ESL is usually seen as even less important than English composition and thus has little chance of being seen as an independent academic discipline.

ESL Within a Modern Language Department

While this choice may seem logical, it is in such a situation that the disparity between ESL and modern languages is most apparent. Students benefit from the comprehensive language instruction afforded by the department. However, how credits are awarded for ESL and for learning another language may be quite different. If the courses are not seen as having equal academic merit (compare ESL courses and French, Spanish, or Russian courses), then the discipline and the faculty would not be looked upon equally. Such a situation does not appear to support ESL research, practice, or the development of ESL as a discipline. Moreover, the likelihood is great that any language teacher will be seen as capable of teaching ESL courses.

ESL Within a Basic Skills or Developmental Department

This placement affords great benefits for students since they are usually afforded more support services including labs and counselors and often receive more hours of instruction per week than students in programs housed within other academic departments. Faculty also benefit since teaching and applied research are valued. They also have daily contact with faculty who teach native speakers, greater flexibility in course design and often teach smaller classes.

However, this classification encourages others to see ESL students as remedial; as such, they are often barred from content courses. Similarly, faculty are often not respected as equals by faculty in more traditional disciplines. Their research may be seen as less than academic and they are often excluded from institutional decision-making.

This placement encourages the view that ESL is a service, not a discipline, and thereby limits its scope. ESL becomes defined as remediation and helps to foster beliefs that not knowing the English language and not being able to do academic work are synonymous, that students who don't read, write, and speak English, also lack the cognitive abilities required for college work. Such a situation defines ESL as outside the Academy proper.

While my preference among these choices is quite clear, I feel that a discussion of the issues among ourselves is important. I look forward to your responses to my comments.

RESPONSES

Richard Seltzer, Glendale Community College, California

I agree with all the points made concerning the placement of credit-bearing ESL instruction within a postsecondary academic institution. As the coordinator of a credit ESL department currently operating within the Language Arts Division of a California community college, I find this article of high interest. Our department is in the midst of a petition process which seeks to establish ESL as a separate academic discipline. (At our college, divisions may represent one or more disciplines.) California law now recognizes ESL as a distinct academic discipline and has established minimum qualifications based on TESOL-supported recommendations for the the hiring of ESL teachers at the community college. Therefore, we have the legislation in place which guarantees the distinctness of ESL as a discipline.

I believe that the specific academic or political structure under which an ESL program operates should respond to the size of the student population and specific local managerial needs. At our college, an ESL department of reasonable size could function quite well in a multi-disciplinary division such as Language Arts. However, because ESL now has the second largest program on campus (with a total faculty of 45 and a student population of over 2200), attempting to operate as anything other than a full division has become unmanageable. Division status will give the chair more direct access to resources on behalf of the population we serve.

Mutual collegial respect with other Language Arts Division faculty led to almost unanimous support for this decision. Therefore, once an ESL faculty was granted its due, professional recognition followed.

Anita Wenden, York College, CUNY

Underlying the concern about where to locate an ESL program in a college's organizational structure is the more basic question of how ESL is to be classified or identified. Is it developmental? Have ESL students not fully developed their language skills, especially in reading and writing? Or are they more accurately viewed as learning *another* language as are students who learn French, Spanish, and other modern languages? Or are ESL students another category of English student acquiring the requisite skills to participate in college level English classes?

Three arguments can be made for placing an ESL program in a Foreign or Modern Language Department: First of all, as an ESL program helps students acquire the language skills requisite for participating in college classes, especially college level English classes, it is, in effect, helping students learn another language—the special academic mission of a modern language department. Second, completing well-planned and well-implemented ESL classes can be at least as academically rigorous as gaining credit for learning a foreign language or attending a regular English class. Students deserve proper college credit for their efforts. This may be more likely to happen if ESL students are located in a modern language department, where students get regular college credit for learning other languages. Thirdly, having acquired the level of proficiency required to become a part of the regular college level English classes, students should also be considered as having fulfilled a college's foreign language requirement. Certifying that students have met these requirements is, again, the work of a foreign language department.

Diane Tedick, Second Languages and Cultures Education,
University of Minnesota

Jack Gantzer provides a strong argument to support his contention that ESL should be established as a separate academic department. Most of us involved with ESL would be hard-pressed to disagree with his preference in a general sense. However, when considering a specific institution, other placements for ESL may prove to be just as, or even more, beneficial. For example, some large institutions such as the University of Minnesota and Ohio State University have graduate programs that focus on preparing teachers and researchers in second language education. I can see many benefits in housing ESL within programs such as these. Graduate students in the education program could serve as ESL instructors providing them with both financial support and with a context for the theoretical topics addressed in seminars. The ESL classes would provide an excellent research forum for faculty and students; and the faculty would benefit from shared research interests. In addition, having one department instead of two economically benefits the institution.

In my opinion, in any given institution, the obvious surface characteristics, the nature of its participants, and its underlying dynamics must be considered for determining the best possible placement for ESL in that institution. I agree with Gantzer that what is important is a discussion of the issues, and I encourage us all to take these factors into account as we continue the discussion.

Sarah Benesch, College of Staten Island, CUNY

Where in a college or university can ESL faculty get tenure promotion and academic freedom? Where can ESL students get the language training they need with the fewest obstacles? At my college, the English Department fulfills these criteria. My position as a tenured faculty member of a large and powerful department benefits me professionally and it benefits the ESL students I represent. Here are some of the professional benefits:

1. I teach a range of ESL and non-ESL courses offered by the English Department including linguistics courses and graduate courses in composition;
2. I propose and teach advanced ESL courses offering full academic credit;
3. I teach paired courses with faculty in other departments who view me as an academic colleague, not as a remedial assistant.

The greatest benefit for ESL students is that they fulfill English requirements in a single department whose faculty they get to know from their first day at the college; there is no delay in their interaction with English Department faculty. ESL concerns are integrated into English Department offerings causing fewer obstacles toward graduation.

TESL-L: An Electronic Network for Teachers of English as a Second Language

It's possible for you to respond to this issue, *Putting ESL in Its Place,* electronically, through the **TESL-L Electronic Network**. Send your response (c/o Ellen Block, Issues Editor) electronically to Craig Dicker, CLDLC@CUNYVM.BITNET or Anthea Tillyer, ATICC@CUNYVM.BITNET. The responses will be compiled and edited and highlights published in the next issue of *College ESL.*

Even if you don't want to respond to this issue, you might want to get on this international network anyway. If you are already on-line and wish to join TESL-L, send an electronic message to either Craig Dicker or Anthea Tillyer.

If you are not on-line and wish to be, either contact your school computer center coordinator, or write to Craig Dicker, (Box 66, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, or c/o *College ESL,* Office of Academic Affairs, 535 East 80, New York, NY 10021, for complete instructions.

Donald E. Sampson
James F. Gregory

A TECHNOLOGICAL PRIMROSE PATH? ESL STUDENTS AND COMPUTER-ASSISTED WRITING PROGRAMS

The popularity of self-instructional programs designed for the personal computer is easily understandable. The computer is available twenty-four hours a day. It gives virtually immediate feedback. Most significantly perhaps, the machine is infinitely patient. In the most neutral of terms, it will offer suggestions, present probing questions, and make corrections, and it will perform these tasks repeatedly with no hint of fatigue or exasperation.

Given these advantages, many students are using the computer to enhance skill acquisition. It is particularly easy to see why students in ego-threatening situations —for example, English as a Second Language (ESL) students or persons with disabilities that affect language acquisition—might use the computer. The computer is becoming used more frequently at all educational levels and is often incorporated in student coursework in all areas of instruction.

The literature reflects the increased application of computers in the classroom setting. A recent article by Pennington (1990) describes the use of computer based word processing programs in teaching writing to ESL students. Pennington concludes that the use of word processing is justified because it enhances the creative revision process for these students. This view is consistent with the findings of Bernhardt, Edwards, and Wojahn (1990), who found that first drafts produced by subjects using word processors were of overall lower quality than those produced by pen and paper. Revised drafts, however, tended to be of better quality among those using word processing. This finding suggests that the use of the word processor

---

Donald E. Sampson and James F. Gregory are Associate Professors, School of Education and Human Services, St. John's University. Their interests include computer applications in special education and rehabilitation settings and reading/writing skill development in linguistically-different populations.

may foster a tendency to write rougher first drafts and to depend on further revisions for enhancement of quality.

The market is currently obliging both individuals and instructors with new programs generally labeled "style checkers." One example of "computer-assisted writing" (CAW) programs is RightWriter, published by RightSoft, Inc. (1987a & 1987b). RightWriter is one qualitatively representative example of the new CAW programs (Lewis & Lewis, 1987; Nelson, 1987).

RightWriter analyzes text along three axes. First, there is a mark-up copy in which stylistic comments and suggestions are inserted into the printout of the essay. Next comes a *Summary* section, with four numerical indexes. The first is the *Readability Index*. Based on the well-known Flesch-Kincaid formula (see RightWriter, 1987b), this is a gauge of the general level of reading required to comprehend the document. The range for good business writing suggested in the program manual runs from the sixth-grade to the tenth-grade levels. The next is the *Strength Index*, an estimate of the overall "strength of delivery" (RightWriter, 1987b, p. 5-4). The range of scores runs from 0.0 (very weak) to 1.0 (very strong). Reports and technical papers should receive marks above 0.50, whereas business letters and manuals should get marks above 0.80 to be considered strong writing. The index itself is a composite of subscores on ten different parameters, such as active voice, short sentences, use of common words, avoidance of slang. The third major part of the Summary is the *Descriptive Index*, a measure of restraint exercised in using adjectives and adverbs. The fourth score, the *Jargon Index*, represents an estimate of the writer's use or overuse of insider terms. There is also an appendix to the Summary, called *Sentence Structure Recommendations*, which provides specific suggestions for modifying the text, based upon repeated patterns such as starting sentences too often with the same part of speech. The third and last major section of the analysis is the *Words to Review* list, a compilation of words flagged because they do not appear in the program's internal dictionary (perhaps because the specific word is rarely used or because it is misspelled).

While we see the potential benefits of such materials, we also see possible pitfalls. This CAW route may be especially hazardous to students lacking basic writing skills. To illustrate the possible negative interactions between student writing and CAW (here, RightWriter) in practice, we provide the following scenario. The writing samples used below are original drafts produced by ESL students enrolled in a business school's composition course. All subsequent revisions (based on RightWriter feedback) were done by the present authors.

Let's focus on four individuals in Ms. Smith's ESL composition class. All four are generally computer literate, and they share a desire to improve their writing skills. They are even willing to work on their own outside of class.

A friend shows Student A his copy of the new style checker, RightWriter. Not sure if it is applicable to his situation, Mr. A checks the manual and finds that RightWriter is recommended for those ESL students who possess basic English writing skills. After several years of studying English, A is confident that he is past the basic stage. Mr. A also notes that RightWriter is said to be "an excellent tool for teaching the concepts of good business writing in high schools, colleges, and professional development seminars" (RightWriter, 1987b, p. viii-ix). Mr. A is convinced of the applicability of this new tool for his situation and feels comfortable with submitting his class compositions for computer based critique. He is confident that he understands what the comments and numbers in the program mean, and he eagerly inputs his essay for analysis. The first draft of his essay is as follows:

> Tomorrow it's gonna be Sunday and I want to make many things. I want to go to the city. I like to see the show. Windows, also. I like to see all the people walking around on the streets. I will go to the bookstores and I will see the magazines. I'm gonna eat anywhere, maybe, pizza pay or hamburgers, I don't know. Today I had to go to the school, had to cleaning up the house, I had to wash my cloths, today I had a busy day but tomorrow is another day.

With a few simple commands Student A instructs the machine to analyze his style, and he receives the following printout:

```
   Tomorrow it's gonna be Sunday and I want to make many
^<<* 6. COLLOQUIAL:  gonna  *>>
things.  I want to go to the city.  I like to see the show.  Windows,
also.  I like to see all the people walking around on the streets.  I
will go to the bookstores and I will see the magazines.  I'm gonna
eat anywhere, maybe,
   <<* 6. COLLOQUIAL:  gonna  *>>^
pizza pay or hamburgers, I don't know.  Today I had to go to the
school, had to cleaning up the house, I had to wash my cloths,
today I had a busy day but tomorrow is another day.
```

```
^<<* 17. LONG SENTENCE:  31 WORDS  *>>
^<<* 31. COMPLEX SENTENCE  *>>

<<** SUMMARY **>>
  OVERALL CRITIQUE FOR :  esltext
  READABILITY INDEX:  4.43
  Readers need a   4th grade level of education to understand.
        Total Number of Words in Document:  94
        Total Number of Words within Sentences:  94
        Total Number of Sentences:  8
        Total Number of Syllables:  123
  STRENGTH INDEX:  0.75
  The strength of delivery is good, but can be improved.
  DESCRIPTIVE INDEX:  0.59
  The use of adjectives and adverbs is within the normal range.
  JARGON INDEX:  0.00
  SENTENCE STRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS:
                          15. No Recommendations.
<< WORDS TO REVIEW >>
  Review the following list for negative words (N), colloquial words
  (C), jargon (J), misspellings (?), misused words (?).
              GONNA (C)  2
<< END OF WORDS TO REVIEW LIST >>
```

Glancing over the comments in the text, A sees that he can change "gonna" (which was also mentioned in the Words to Review list) to "going to." Likewise, he can address the final two comments by breaking up the last sentence into several smaller units. As he looks over the SUMMARY section, A is gratified to see that there are no Sentence Structure Recommendations and, further, that both the Descriptive Index and the Jargon Index are within the normal ranges. While he would like to see a higher Readability score, his primary concern lies with the Strength Index. He wants to develop a strong writing style. His hope is that changes already made will give him a higher Strength Index.

Mr. A enters the changes into his document and gets the following printout from RightWriter:

> Tomorrow it's going to be Sunday and I want to make many things. I want to go to the city. I like to see the show. Windows, also. I like to see all the people walking around on the streets. I will go to the bookstores and I will see the magazines. I'm going to eat anywhere, maybe, pizza pay or hamburgers, I don't know. Today I had to go to the school, had to cleaning up the house. I had

> to wash my cloths. Today I had a busy day but tomorrow is another day.

```
<<** SUMMARY **>>

OVERALL CRITIQUE FOR: esltext
READABILITY INDEX: 3.52
Readers need a  4th grade level of education to understand.
     Total Number of Words in Document: 96
     Total Number of Words within Sentences: 96
     Total Number of Sentences: 10
     Total Number of Syllables: 125
STRENGTH INDEX: 0.93
The writing has a strong style.
DESCRIPTIVE INDEX: 0.61
The use of Adjectives and adverbs is within the normal range.
Jargon Index: 0.00
SENTENCE STRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS:
                         15. No Recommendations.
THERE ARE NO WORDS TO REVIEW FOR THIS DOCUMENT.
```

Despite the low Readability score, A is thrilled to find that there are no recommendations for any changes, and more critically he has pushed his Strength Index to an extremely respectable 0.93! THIS PROGRAM REALLY WORKS!!

With great excitement he shows the program to Student B. That night Ms. B types in the first draft of her composition to be reviewed by RightWriter. After several revisions she determines that there are no further recommendations to be followed. And the composition receives a stratospheric Strength Index of 0.96!!

The final draft reads:

> I have more experience than younger. I'm 80's and I am week in physical. In 80 years I have confidence. I need in 80's the company, because I can't walk. When I work, I gets tired in 80 years. Work is too hard to do in 80 years.

RightWriter then is used by two other ESL classmates. In each case the initial drafts receive a Strength Index of 0.86. Therefore, the final two people opt to leave well enough alone and—except for fixing up some noted spelling errors—do not make the minor revisions that were suggested. Student C's highly rated original composition reads:

> Tommorrow will Sunday. I get up at 8:00 (eight oclock) in the morning and take shower. Also I wears mi suit, my sister in law is cooking the breakfast she likes to cook. All family are ready for church, in my family everybody are Evangelics. For that, we went to church. Our church is big—some people are from, Purto Rico, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, there are American people too, also there are Columbian people - but everybody speak Spanish; for the church is Spanish.

Students D develops the following work:

> This is Carmine's Studio. Carmine is a very famus scultor who always make womans sculptures. This year he is going to finish his most important job, because it's makeing his wife sculpture which one is very beautiful. I've to say this: Carmine loves his wife and his job, those things bring to him very happening time and turn his life on. Today he wake up at 5:30 AM to keep ap whit his job. After 10:00 o'clock he has to call his parents up to keep in touch whit them. On his tables he has two sculptures one is from his wife and the another one is an old sculpture, that one is from a model. Tomorrow he is going to see an art show in Grenwich Village. He likes to see the work off the others artists.

These four individuals will be in for a shock when they hand in their finished masterpieces to Ms. Smith and receive her subsequent evaluations. The analyses from RightWriter notwithstanding, these essays cannot be considered examples of good or strong writing in English.

What went wrong here? First, and most critically, there is evidently a disagreement between RightWriter's interpretation of what constitutes "a basic level of English skills" (RightWriter, 1987b, p. ix) and the understanding of that term by these four students. Clearly, RightWriter intends a much more stringent use of the term.

Research by Collins (1989) may add clarification. To evaluate the efficacy of style checking programs, Collins compared the output of three text analyzers with the recommendations made by trained and experienced teachers of writing. Subjects were at grade levels 8 and 13. Collins found that the percentage of times that the programs and the teachers identified the same errors ranged from a high of 32% to a low of 2%. A large majority of the consistency came from identification of spelling errors. When these errors were not considered, the consistency levels between style checking programs and teachers fell to a high of 6% and a low of 2%. Additionally, Collins found that there were a great number of potential errors identified by the computer programs that teachers did not see as a problem. Collins states that "the programs are inaccurate nearly every time non-errors are flagged" (p. 34).

The pupils in our scenario also erred in focusing too narrowly on numerical ratings and, in particular perhaps, in zeroing in so much on the Strength Index. This measure may be especially counter-productive for many ESL individuals and others with limited English proficiency. The Strength Index heavily favors simple, active sentences. While such "kernel-like" structures may serve to punch up the vigor of a document, the fact remains that good writers can use complex sentences and the passive voice when needed. If anything, our present students might well need practice in such operations as subordination and passivization.

In sum, the inability of a program to realistically judge the semantic and syntactic acceptability of many ESL writers' sentences, combined with its penchant to play into and even reward the students' *de facto* limitations, might easily yield an inflated estimate of these students' writing skills.

Conclusion

When used correctly, the new breed of CAW programs may be of real value to the general public, as well as to students. However, when these programs are used by persons who lack certain basic English skills, problems arise.

At first glance, style checkers may offer students the chance to work on their writing skills in English with autonomy. This hope, however, may not be realized in practice. As the above illustration shows, CAWs may well increase the need for the teacher to oversee the students' efforts. The role of the composition instructor may not be eliminated by these innovations, as much as it may be modified. The exact nature of these new teacher responsibilities is poorly understood to date and will likely alter as the CAW programs evolve. These changes in the instructor's responsibilities are surely worthy of rigorous and continuing research. While this research is underway, we feel that it is incumbent on composition teachers to become familiar with the specifics of these programs so that they may better monitor their use by their students.

In addition, students may receive conflicting feedback from computer style checking programs and the ESL teacher. Based on research previously cited by Collins (1989) and the current status of software technology, it would generally be better for the student to follow the suggestions of the ESL teacher over those of the computer program. Keeping in mind changing technology and the increasing use of artificial intelligence, this suggestion may change as computers are programmed to deal with complexities of written language.

Further, writers of style checking programs would be advised to use the experiences of ESL and other teachers of English to further enhance the effectiveness of their programs to meet the needs of persons with limited abilities in written English. The current warnings of style checking programs regarding the requirement for "basic writing skills" are nebulous and easily misinterpreted. Perhaps a stronger working relationship between teachers and program developers will eventually allow style checking programs to provide feedback more consistent with that of skilled teachers of English and, in particular, those teaching ESL.

The computer age is here to stay. Many students are computer comfortable and may want to use CAW programs. It would be rash for the composition instructor to proscribe their use. More critically, it may be disastrous for that teacher to simply ignore their use by the class participants. To do so may be tantamount to leading these students down the "Technological Primrose Path."

Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Anne Palumbo for providing writing samples from her ESL students for use in this article.

REFERENCES

Bernhardt, S. A., Edwards, P., & Wojahn, P. (1990). Teaching college composition with computers: A time observation study. *Written Communication, 6,* 108-133.

Collins, J. L. (1989). Computerized text analysis and the teaching of writing. In G. E. Hawisher, & C. L. Selfe (Eds.). *Critical perspectives on computer and composition instruction.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Lewis, B., & Lewis, R. (1987, June). Do style checkers work? *PC World, 5,* 247-252.

Nelson, R. (1987, August). Let's hear it for CAW. *Personal Computing, 11,* 49-52.

Pennington, M. C. (1990). An evaluation of word processing for ESL writers. *University of Hawaii Working Papers in ESL, 19,* 1, 77-113.

Right Writer Version 2.1 (computer program). (1987a). RightSoft, Inc.

Right Writer Version 2.1 User's Manual. (1987b). RightSoft, Inc.

College ESL Vol. 1, No. 2 December 1991

Mary K. Ruetten

READING PROBLEMATICAL ESL PLACEMENT ESSAYS

Holistic evaluation of writing samples for placement purposes is widely accepted in both native speaker English programs and ESL programs. Edward White (1985) notes that holistic scoring is well-suited for placement because the goals of the testing are straightforward: "A placement test has the narrow aim of fitting students into a known curriculum." In a given situation, "it is relatively easy to define what is required for placement" (p.62). Furthermore, White has found that when the procedures involved in holistic testing are "observed with sensitivity and care, high reliability of scoring has been achieved" (pp.23-24; see also Carlson and Bridgeman, 1986; Homberg, 1984; Katz, 1988). Yet anyone who has participated in either holistic training or in the actual scoring of placement essays knows that inevitably readers disagree, sometimes strongly, on the scores for some essays. Most essays are scored with little discrepancy—as high as 95% consistency has been reported (White, 1985, p. 27)—but a few essays cause disagreement, even argument, among readers. While all programs have procedures for resolving discrepant scores, these particular, problematical essays present some intriguing questions: Why do readers react so differently to these essays? Do these essays have particular features that cause differing reactions? If so, what might they be?

To investigate these questions, I analyzed a group of essays that I judged to be potentially problematical. I used a set of ESL

Mary K. Ruetten is Associate Professor of English at the University of New Orleans, where she is chair of the Freshman English Program and past Coordinator of the ESL Program. She is co-author of Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar for ESL Students *and was a Fulbright Lecturer in EFL in Côte d'Ivoire in 1990-1991. Her research interests include proficiency testing, writing program administration, and whole language approaches to teaching writing.*

placement essays† to which two readers of each essay had responded differently enough to require the attention of a third reader, whose reading and scoring resolved the initial discrepancy. The set of essays included 12 of the 98 essays written in one semester and 5 of the 47 essays written in the following semester, 17 essays in all. I wanted to know why these particular essays caused such different reader reactions. I approached my analysis from the perspective of reader expectation, for a look at recent research shows that the expectation with which a reader approaches a text powerfully affects the reading.

In a study of freshman English placement essays, Loren Barritt, Patricia Stock and Francella Clark (1986) found that readers developed a sense of the average, the expected, the typical placement essay after reading a number of essays written by entering freshman in a placement test environment. When expectations for the typical essay were met, the writer went unnoticed; the written comments they made in response to those essays were about the text. But when readers' expectations for a typical essay were not met, they found themselves characterizing the writer and her needs. When they did not perceive a typical freshman placement essay, consistency between evaluators began to erode.

Sarah Warshauer Freedman (1984) found that in scoring essays believed to be written by students but that were actually written by professional writers, readers disagreed strongly with each other, giving the professional essays the whole range of possible scores, and often low ones. Freedman found the professional writers used a familiar tone, struggled to accept the assigned topic, and showed evidence of wide experience in the world. These characteristics violated the role that the readers expected of student writers and "attracted attention, enough attention to jar the raters" (p. 339) into giving overall low holistic scores. In both of these studies, the readers had certain expectations of the text and when those expectations were not met, the consistency of their scoring dropped.

---

†*These were essays written during the 1988/89 fall and spring testing periods for placing students into the ESL Program at the University of New Orleans. In our pre-freshman English ESL program at the University of New Orleans, we determine students' placement in our five-level program (three intensive levels, two nonintensive levels) with scores from the Michigan Test of Aural Comprehension, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, and a fifty-minute, holistically scored writing sample. For the writing sample, students are directed to write an essay on a given topic that is broad enough to be accessible to people from different backgrounds and of different English proficiency levels. The essays are read and scored by two readers whose scores, if appropriately close on our program's scoring scale, will be averaged to constitute the essay score. If the two scores are outside the acceptable range on the scoring guide, the essay is read by a third reader. The two closest scores of the three are used to determine the final score on the essay.*

Just as readers have certain expectations of placement essays written by native speakers, so too do readers have expectations of placement essays written by ESL students. In fact, a program's curriculum and scoring guide attempt to make those expectations explicit, as do the sample papers used in training and scoring sessions. In an ongoing ESL program, a collective sense of expectation develops for each level of the program, based on shared experiences. These factors merge to help each reader create and re-create the ideal placement essay for each level of a program each time an essay is read.

Expectations for ESL placement essays, however, differ from expectations for essays written by native speakers. The greatest difference lies in the coalescence of rhetorical and grammatical features. In their study of holistic scoring of essays written by native speakers, Freedman and Calfee (1983) demonstrated that development and organization had the greatest positive effect on raters. If the content of an essay was clear and developed, the grammar and mechanics tended to go unnoticed by the raters. For ESL placement essays, however, readers use grammatical features as well as rhetorical features to make their decisions. Homberg (1984) noted that raters used the concepts of error, relativization (use of relative clauses), and syntactic complexity to help determine holistic scores for essays. Breland and Jones (1982) showed that, for a subgroup of Hispanic writers for whom English was not their best language, subject-verb agreement and range of vocabulary correlated with the holistic scores their essays received but that, for non-ESL writers in that study, the discourse features of development and organization were relatively more important.

Carlson and Bridgeman (1986) point out there is likely to be greater disparity in control of rhetorical features and grammatical features in an ESL essay than in an essay written by a native speaker:

> For native speakers, organizational skills usually parallel mechanical skills, and it is unusual to find a highly organized essay written by a student with very poor grammatical skills. With students for whom English is a second language, it would not be unreasonable to expect a greater disparity between organizational skills and mechanical competence in English. (p. 144)

Thus, raters of ESL essays not only expect to focus on both language and rhetorical features in their scoring, but they also expect a possible discrepancy in control of these features.

In this study, then, I wanted to know if the 17 problematical ESL placement essays fulfilled our expectations, if they were typical placement essays. And if they were not, what aspects of the essays made them atypical? Of the 17 essays, I judged 5 to be typical placement essays. The writers had approached and developed the topic in typical or expected ways (giving explanations, examples, reasons, and description where appropriate). The length of the essays was average (approximately 150 words for the elementary level, 250 for the intermediate level, 300 for the advanced level), and the coalescence of rhetorical and grammatical proficiency fell within the expectations of our program's guidelines, allowing for appropriate placement at different levels. In short, I could discern nothing unusual about them and could only conclude that one of the readers, for whatever reason, was inaccurate in her initial scoring.

The other 12 essays were unusual in various ways. Two were very short (about half the normal length) but showed good control of syntax and rhetoric. One essay was physically hard to read; its difficult handwriting, scratched-out sections, and light pencil required the reader to concentrate intensely in order to engage herself with the writer. In these three cases, I concluded that length and legibility may have caused the inconsistent scoring.

The remaining nine essays showed a more interesting inconsistency. In each case, the essays indicated a greater than normal disparity between control of rhetorical features (such as focus, awareness of audience, development, organization, coherence) and grammatical features (such as sentence structure, the verb/tense system, the noun system, articles, and prepositions). These nine essays fell into two groups. The first group consisted of five essays that demonstrated superior control of rhetorical over grammatical features. (See appendix A for an example.) The second group contained four essays that showed greater grammatical fluency than rhetorical control. (See Appendix B for an example.) I believe that the unusual discrepancy between control of these two aspects of the essays produced atypical or unbalanced placement essays, creating difficulty in scoring.

The first group, those with greater rhetorical control, indicated writers who were generally aware of their audience and themselves as writers, who had a sense of organization, and who used development and detail to support their generalizations. Despite this rhetorical control, this group did not show a corresponding control of grammatical elements but lacked control of some basic grammatical features such as word forms and syntax. For example, one essay in this group, written on the importance of the newspaper, presents a writer who is confident and aware of the larger world. In his essay, he asserts that the editorial section and the financial section are important parts of the paper to get the views of the newspaper staff and information about interest rates, inflation, and the financial world. This stance not only places him as a man of the world, but it is one with which his educated, middle-class audience would agree.

The organization of the essay indicates a larger plan: the process a reader might use in reading a newspaper. The writer first advocates a superficial look at the pictures ("which can arouse your curiosity and give a good idea of what the paper contains"), then moves to a discussion of the more important sections (editorial and money) and lastly surveys the less important parts (entertainment). In addition, the writer shows rhetorical awareness by using transitions that connect his ideas and guide the reader ("with just a glance"; "because of this"; "beside the important sections of the paper"; "as we can see") and by using parallel structures ("It is usually presented to show you what has happened in the world, in the country, in your state, and in your city") that are both stylistically effective and relate what he is saying to the larger world.

An analysis of the rhetorical aspects of the essay reveals a relatively sophisticated writer. A look at the grammatical aspects, however, indicates a writer whose control varies widely. Sentence structure, use of tense, word choice, and mechanics generally indicate a writer whose control of grammar is commensurate with his control of rhetoric. However, in the very first paragraph, the writer makes several basic word form and morphological errors ("a good source of informations"; "what the paper contents") that are not typical of writers at this level, errors that indicate a much lower level of proficiency. This discrepancy between the superior rhetorical control and the lack of control of basic grammatical features made this an atypical, unbalanced placement essay and perhaps contributed to the problem in scoring.

While none of the other essays in this group was as consistently sophisticated as the previous example, they all demonstrated unusually good development and detail with a lack of commensurate control of grammar. In an essay on the importance of learning English, one writer states his point and then develops it with an example and effective details:

> It is not easy to travel when you speak one language, your native language. All international airports, the only language they communicate is English. The flight numbers the time of flight is written English. Everytime you try to check the time you see pm and am. You don't know what it is. The only think you understand is the numbers. When you get in the airplane, you have to talk like a deaf.

Rather than simply saying that a person needs English to travel, the writer puts us in the airport and the airplane so that we feel the problem. This writer is also aware of the rhetorical effectiveness of the attention-getting opener for his essay, beginning "English! How important it is through the world." While the whole essay is not well-organized, parts of it shine. Yet the essay has an array of syntax errors, short simple sentences, missing words, word form errors, and agreement errors, not commensurate with the effectiveness of the development. In this case, as with the other unbalanced essays in this group, the discrepancy between control of rhetorical and grammatical features may have made this essay difficult to score.

The second group of atypical essays consisted of those demonstrating better grammatical control than rhetorical control. One essay in this group, about a favorite holiday, is an example. The writer is in control of tense and verb forms, moving fairly easily between present and past tenses and using modals accurately ("they couldn't handle this kind of living"; "they had to work for him"). The syntax is consistently strong, with a variety of subordinate clauses, and the spelling is consistently accurate. Finally, the essay is quite long (approximately 300 words), with a good deal of development.

Yet, rhetorically, the essay is weak. The writer demonstrates a naive rhetorical stance vis-à-vis the audience and fails to control the shape of the essay. The writer begins by denigrating the holidays of a different ethnic group. This rhetorical stance indicates a writer unaware of the social context in which she is writing, the academic community, which values an objective, or reasoned, logical approach to a topic rather than a private and personal reaction. Furthermore, the writer is unaware of her particular audience, ESL teachers who are going to score the placement essays, for we know that ESL teachers usually pride themselves on approaching all ethnic groups with individuality and fairness. Most of the essay is a digression about that ethnic group's holidays and a recounting of the history of her own holiday, without developing how the holiday is currently practiced, the intention that she states for the essay. Thus, while the writer controls tenses, syntax, spelling, and mechanics, the paper shows a writer lacking in rhetorical sophistication and control.

Another writer in this group, writing on the importance of the newspaper, is perhaps more typical of many of our entering ESL students. He has what we in our program call fluency. This includes good control of sentence structure and word choice, and more importantly, mastery of idioms, articles, and prepositions: "One thing I have to mention is that the newspaper is entertaining. If you are bored, well, go ahead and grab the newspaper and read it all." While he has a degree of fluency with the language, he is unfamiliar with the rhetoric of academic writing. He does not have a clear sense of essay form, listing ideas rather than focusing on one and developing it. His essay contains three major topics—the many things to learn from reading a newspaper, who can benefit from it, and the advantages of reading a newspaper—none of which are developed. He has, presumably because of his fluency in the spoken language, what rhetorically we might call voice. But he is not aware of audience and does not assume a rhetorical stance in relation to it. He talks in his own seemingly naive, personal voice. Thus, while this writer may seem strong in at least one rhetorical feature—voice—he lacks rhetorical awareness. His strength in his writing is accurate, idiomatic language. This ease with the language coupled with a lack of awareness of rhetorical principles creates an essay with abnormal disparity between rhetorical and grammatical control, causing difficulty in scoring.

The majority of these problematical essays, then, defy our expectations in some way. For, as Barritt and his colleagues (1986) note, the reading of an essay is an act of re-creation, the reader "working mentally with each student writer to compose a placement essay" (p. 320). I suggest the readers of these nine atypical essays did the same. I suspect that they interacted more actively than normal with the writers to create a balanced text.

In the essays that were rhetorically strong, the writer often presented himself as a person aware of his place in the world and as a writer who knew the requirements of academic writing. As the reader began to create this image of the writer, she had to puzzle over, justify, or ignore the basic grammatical errors in the essay. Ultimately, this discrepancy was incorporated into her total picture of the writer and resolved, but not before a complex writer, student, and person had taken shape in her mind. In the essays that were grammatically strong, essentially the same process occurred. As the writer emerged as a person in control of language but not of the context in which he was writing or of the essay form and its requirements, the reader needed to create a writer who fit this combination. Again, the reader attempted to balance this discrepancy, creating a writer, perhaps based on previous writers she had known, who fit this combination. In both cases, I suspect that the readers' more intense interaction with the writer created very different readings of the text and hence inconsistent scores.

This reminds us again of "the reader's role in developing the meaning of the text" (White, 1985, p. 93). Many students fulfill our expectations in their writing and, in a sense, hide behind the text. "By deliberately producing an unremarkable five-paragraph essay, often flat and uninteresting, a student assures herself of safety and makes it possible for raters to achieve a measure of consistency in their judgments" (Barritt et al., 1986, p. 323). Some student writing, however, frustrates our expectations, causing us as readers to play a more active role in creating the text, more obviously making reading an act of interpretation. It is no wonder then that we disagree on the scoring of some few placement essays, for we find in them not typical essays but writers like other writers we have taught, whose writing is not easily characterized, whose problems we have grappled with, whose stories have become part of our own.

In this situation, when readers more actively interact with the text and begin to characterize the writer, inconsistent holistic scoring can occur. This inconsistent scoring, while in the short term resolved by a third reader, can lead to problems in the placement and teaching of students who write unbalanced essays. These students may be placed too high or too low in the ESL program if the readers are swayed by either the greater control of grammar or the greater control of rhetoric. In classes with more typical writers, these students may be faced with material they already control while not spending enough time on material that addresses their particular needs.

While the conclusions of this study can only be tentative, they do suggest some responses that could give more informed holistic readings and more satisfactory placement and teaching of students. First, teachers and administrators need to become aware that expectation and interpretation play significant roles in the holistic reading process, that some papers will not meet our expectations, and that readers will actively interpret the text. Some student papers may demonstrate an imbalance in the control of rhetoric and grammar and this imbalance may give rise to different readings. Once aware, teachers and administrators need to agree on an approach to reading unbalanced papers that does not give undue weight to either grammar or rhetoric. This approach needs to be included in the scoring guidelines and discussed in training sessions. Then, changes might follow in placement and curriculum. For example, students could be grouped according to their rhetorical/grammatical strengths and weaknesses, and the curriculum could be modified to fit the needs of the different groups. In small programs with less flexibility, teachers could attend to the weaknesses of students on an indivdual basis. The first step is for teachers and administrators to realize that some ESL placement essays defy our expectations, inviting readers to interact more strongly with the text, to imagine the writer, and to give a score that may deviate from the common standards agreed upon by the scoring group.

Appendix A

Usually a newspaper is a very good source of informations. It is usually presented to show you what has happened in the world, in the country, in your state and in your city. I personally, like to read the newspaper because of the variety of informations you get at a time. First, with just a glance, your curiosity can be aroused by the pictures that you can find all over the paper and the big titles that you can't miss. After doing this, we can have a good idea of what the paper contents. Something that is also very interesting to read is the editorial from the editor in chief or an important member of the staff, the article will usually be about an important topic and will give you a good idea of what the staff thinks.

Another very important source of information for a lot of people is the classified section. This section is about things to buy and of course, things to sell. This is important for some people who can't afford to go through a real state agency if they want to buy or sell a house; this is a pretty good way to save money on a pretty high commission.

The money section is for a growing number of people, another very important source of information. Because of this, most of the newspapers have given to this section amore important role. We can't denied how the financial world has become important for our lives on a day-to-day basis. The stock market crashed last October and now everybody can see the effects of it; the interest rates are going up because of fear for inflation, and this is just an example of what is going to happen. Beside the important sections of the paper, we find the entertainment sections which is more fun to read because of the comics and the gossip about Hollywood or any V.I.P.

in the world. This is also a section where we can find the television programs and the crosswords games.

As we can see, because of all this information, from politic to television thru financial informations, the newspapers has become a very important tool in our life and as everybody knows that information is power it would be very sad not take advantage of it.

Appendix B

Things we can learn from Reading a news paper.

A newspaper is and has always being a great source of information as well as Entertainment and Relaxation.

In a newspaper you can find a variety of topics, from world's news to classified, sports and comics.

If you read a newspaper you could learn about what's going on around you with the news, or if you prefer go into the living section and see a good store sale or perhaps a local celebration. See what the score is on the baseball leagues or how the olympic Games are going.

A newspaper can help you a great deal on your reading and comprehension, It helps you get your ideas together as well as spreads and relaxes your mind.

If you take a newspaper and read it every day for 10 minutes you will do lots of good to your reading

with out a newspaper we would mist alot of important informations, orientations about things

So as I appointed before the newspaper is andhas always being a great source of information and a peculiar but good teacher for all of us.

I think that if we did not have a news paper things would be all the harder to understand and it will also take us more time to find out. Of course there would be other sources of information but some of them would give you that variety of of topics and would not help you improve your reading and comprehension as well as a newspaper can.

Acknowledgment

A version of this paper was originally given at the College Composition and Communication Conference in Seattle, WA, 1989.

REFERENCES

Barritt, L., Stock, P. L., & Clark, F. (1986). Researching practice: Evaluating assessment essays. *College Composition and Communication, 37,* 315-327.

Breland, H.M., & Jones, R. J. (1982). Perceptions of writing skill. (Research Report No. 82-47) Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Carlson, S., & Bridgeman, B. (1986). Testing ESL student writers. In K.L. Greenberg, H.S. Wiener, & R.A. Donovan (Eds.), *Writing assessment issues and strategies* (pp. 126-152). New York: Longman.

Freedman, S.W. (1984). The registers of student and professional expository writing: Influences on teachers' responses. In R. Beach & L. S. Bridwell (Eds.), *New directions in composition research* (pp. 334-347). New York: Guilford Press.

Freedman, S.W., & Calfee, R.C. (1983). Holistic assessment of writing: Experimental design and cognitive theory. In P. Mosenthal, L. Tamor, & S.A. Walmsley (Eds.), *Research on writing principles and methods* (pp. 75-98). New York: Longman.

Homberg, T.J. (1984). Holistic evaluation of ESL compositions: Can it be validated objectively? *TESOL Quarterly, 18,* 87-107.

Katz, A. (1988). Writing: The academic context. In P. Lowe, Jr. & C. W. Stansfield (Eds.), *Second language proficiency assessment, current issues* (pp. 178-201). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

White, E.M. (1985). *Teaching and assessing writing.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR TEACHERS

Joan Gregg, New York City Technical College, CUNY

The Hare Krishnas in India. Charles R. Brooks. Princeton University Press, 1989.

Brooks' research in this fascinating book is focused on the nature and extent of interactions between the foreign (Western) devotees of the Hindu god Krishna and the Indian residents and pilgrims of the pilgrimage town of Vrindaban, dedicated to this most popular of Hindu deities. Brooks makes the perspective of symbolic interaction accessible to the nonspecialist by providing frames for each chapter and a wealth of concrete details and examples of interaction. In addition, many of the points he raises in this ethnographic study, such as the nature of devotional movements as a source of egalitarianism in a hierarchical culture and the effect of pilgimages as a culture unifier, have universal import.

Brooks finds the foreign Krishna devotees—those orange-robed, mantra-chanting men and women who first appeared on the American scene as part of the counterculture of the 1960s—sincere in belief and punctilious in ritual practice, as well as expert in impression management. Apparently, although they have been a force for change, their presence has enhanced rather than disrupted the religious life of this sacred town and has proven to be an instrument of cultural continuity. This account of an immigration in reverse, and a successful one at that, offers provocative and informative reading to all students of multiculturalism.

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book. Maxine Hong Kingston. Alfred Knopf, 1989.

Once again, as in the *Woman Warrior* and *China Men,* this Asian-American writer explores the impact of American values on Chinese immigrant culture. The book's title, a reference to the Chinese classic

Journey to the West, in which Monkey and his companions travel to India for scrolls of wisdom, which turn out to be blank, suggests both the theme and the mixture of realism and surrealism that is a hallmark of Kingston's work.

Through the eyes and musing of Wittman Ah Sing, an American born Berkeley University student of the 1960s, the reader gains insight into the fundamental dynamic of Chinese tradition--the importance of community above individual--that strikes such a conterpoint to American life. Utilizing humor, Chinese myth, and internal monologue, Kingston takes the reader into the heart of Chinese-American life; such scenes as Whitman's introduction of his Caucasian girlfriend to his mother and aunts and his perceptions as a Chinese-American of a Mattel Toy sales conference are not only hilarious, but also both ethnically authentic and universally resonant. The power of Chinese women, pacifism, the impact of the 1960's counterculture, the question of ethnicity in American life and many other provocative issues are raised in this Chinese-American "hero's" journey to the West—a "must read" work.

⁂

Craig Dicker, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Lehman College, CUNY

Integrating Telecommunications into Education. Nancy Roberts, George Blakeslee, Maureen Brown, and Cecilia Lenk. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.

This book is ideal for the telecommunications neophyte for whom terms like "baud" and "parity" are foreign. A guide explaining how to get "on-line" and how to manipulate basic telecommunications commands and a resource section including the addresses of bulletin boards, commercial networks, and data bases provide newcomers with useful information. A comprehensive overview of existing classroom applications of telecommunications, including descriptions of projects in college composition programs, enthusiastically praises existing projects while largely overlooking many of their shortcomings and limitations.

Alexander J. Romiszowski and Johan A. de Hass. (1989) Computer mediated communication for instruction: Using e-mail as a seminar. *Educational Technology*, Oct., 1989, 7-15.

Sunil Hazari (1990). Using E-mail across computer networks. *Collegiate Microcomputer*, 6(3), 210-215.

Mary L. Crowley (1989). Organizing for electronic messaging in the schools. *The Computer Teacher*. 16(7), 23-27.

These articles introduce the basic concepts and terms of computer-mediated communications. (*Computer-mediated communication* refers to communication over phone lines using computers, such as E-mail, electronic bulletin boards, and data bases.) Romiszowski and de Hass discuss three ways of communicating electronically and their experiences using one of them. Hazari provides an overview of existing electronic networks. Crowley presents the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three forms of computer-mediated communication. Together, the articles paint a relatively balanced picture of the benefits and limitations of computer-mediated communications from the perspective of the educator.

Rena Upitis (1990). Real and contrived uses of electronic mail in elementary schools. *Computers Education* 15(1-3), 233-243.

Joyce Kinkead (1988). Wired: Computer networks in the English Classroom. *English Journal*, 77(7), 39-41.

Roxanne Starr Hiltz (1986). The "virtual classroom": Using computer-mediated communication for university teaching. *Journal of Communication*, 36, 95-104.

These articles discuss computer-mediated communications from the perspective of application. Upitis concisely outlines several uses for computer-mediated communications in classrooms and how they have been realized. Kinkead lists the ways electronic mail can be implemented within a writing curriculum. Hiltz discusses a project in which computer-mediated communications were used with different populations in different circumstances and how participants reacted to them. The three articles give the reader a feel for some of the applications of computer-mediated communications and some valuable suggestions on what to do and not to do when using them in a course.

* * *

Jean McConochie, Pace University

Foreign Affairs. Alison Lurie. Avon, 1985.

Cultural conflicts--based on, among other things, nationality, gender, and academic rank--fuel this delicious novel, which follows the parallel (and inevitably intersecting) sabbatical experiences of two American professors of English in London. As wickedly witty as David Lodge's *Small World* and *Changing Places*, this novel presents the world of a plain, middle-aged, unmarried, professionally successful woman, with exceptional finesse. (This one's for teachers although an adult second language student, a teacher in her own language, who is auditing my freshman ESL class, couldn't put it down.)

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant. Anne Tyler. Berkley Books, 1983.

To teachers looking for books for ESL students, consider this one. "Tyler country" is Baltimore; "Tyler families" are troubled--and immediately recognizable. In this novel, Pearl Tull, her three children, and her grandson present their versions of events in seventy-five years of family history, turning on the middle child's life-long effort to bring the family together. The individual versions are, as in real life, both complementary and contradictory. Freshman-level students enjoy the challenge of sorting it all out. (Jean McConochie would be glad to share classroom handouts with anyone who provides a self-addressed 8-1/2 x 11 envelope with sufficient postage for two ounces. Send to Prof. Jean McConochie, English Department, Pace University, New York, NY 10007.)

* * *

Doug Flahive, Colorado State University

Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change. Wendy Bishop. Southern Illinois University Press. 1990.

Bishop chronicles the stories of five experienced writing teachers who return to their jobs after having spent a summer as students in an innovative seminar designed to expose them to the latest theories and practices of their field. Before we follow the teachers back to their respective jobs, we are given an overview of the structure of the seminar, the expectations of the seminar leader, and a few personal details about the participants. Following life in the summer seminar, Bishop takes us to the specific settings where each of the teachers works. Conditions are less than optimal for putting theory into practice. Some of the teachers are a bit unsure about their abilities to adapt to the different roles that the new approaches dictate.

Although the specific focus in the book is on writing teachers, the stories of Susan, Rosalyn, Peg, Nick, and Julia reflect experiences, misgivings, and minor victories that are an intrinsic part of the self-learning process of teaching.

Literary Pragmatics. Ed. by Roger D. Sell. Routledge. 1991.

This collection of papers is the result of a symposium in 1988 whose focus was the various dimensions of literary pragmatics. Given such a vague concept, the result is an eclectic collection of essays. Some are outstanding. Others simply outline proposals for future research.

One of the best is by Richard Watts entitled "Cross-cultural problems in the perception of literature." His essay should raise a number of empirical questions in the minds of ESL teachers who use literary texts in their reading/writing classrooms, among them the following: How did my students first become introduced to literary texts? What attitudes do people in my students' native culture have toward literary texts? Do these attitudes carry over to literary texts written in English?

Call for Papers

The Journal of Second Language Writing *is now accepting articles on topics related to the study and teaching of writing in a second language. The editors encourage theoretically grounded reports of research, and discussions of central issues in second and foreign language writing and writing instruction at all levels of proficiency. Areas of interest include personal characteristics and attitudes of L2 writers, L2 writers' composing processes, features of L2 writers' texts, readers' responses to L2 writing, assessment/evaluation of L2 writing, contexts (cultural, social, political, situational) for L2 writing, and any other topic clearly relevant to L2 writing and/or writing instruction.*

For guidelines, write to Ilona Leki, Journal of Second Language Writing, *Department of English, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-0430, or call (615) 974-7080/5401.*

Ann Raimes

ERRORS: WINDOWS INTO THE MIND

> Imagine a classroom. The teacher tells the students to take out paper and pencil to write a paragraph. Johnny waves his hand and calls out "I ain't got no pencil." "No, no Johnny," the teacher admonishes. "I don't have a pencil, he doesn't have a pencil, we don't have any pencils, they don't have any pencils." Johnny interrupts in disgust, "Ain't nobody got no pencils?" (adapted from Brown, 1987, p. 31).

This is a familiar classroom scene: the student attending to communication, to saying something for a purpose; the teacher attending not to what is said but to whether it is grammatically correct. We all know that error correction in the middle of a conversation is intrusive. It cuts across real communication; it negates the point the speaker wants to make.

Communicative speech is not the best situation for us to help students correct their errors in English. Writing provides a more appropriate setting. The nature of writing is such that we produce a visible record of what we say. We can write our ideas, then look at them, reflect, monitor, make changes, add, delete, edit. Peter Elbow (1985) has said that writing is "the ideal medium for getting it wrong" (p. 286). It's also the ideal situation to learn to get it right. When language students write, they have time on their side: time to test hypotheses, to take risks, to make errors, and then to correct them.

When looking at a piece of writing, teachers have to respond to grammatical errors as well as to rhetoric (content and organization). In the 1960s, we had an avoidance policy on error. Based on behavioral principles and audiolingual habit-formation theories, we asked students to perform tasks that they were 98% certain to get right. We gave neat drills: repetition, substitution, and so on. We assigned controlled compositions that we didn't even have to read, just had to check whether the underlined words had been correctly

---

Ann Raimes has taught writing to ESL students at Hunter College, CUNY, for 20 years.

changed from, say, the present to the past tense. When we did let our students graduate to actual composing, we tried to address everything all at once: content, organization, style, syntax, mechanics, grammar, and spelling. Since the 1970s, though, errors have been regarded not so much as serious flaws in learning, to be avoided or corrected immediately, but as evidence of language acquisition that provides valuable feedback to both students and teachers (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

The focus on communicative approaches that began in the late 70s has led us to pay more attention to the purpose of language, to the message a speaker or writer intends to get across (Savignon, 1983). We let students not only speak more freely but also write more freely, and we don't necessarily correct everything they produce. They fill pages with their freewriting, journals, and multiple drafts. The question remains for teachers, though: If we don't deal with errors, will they become fossilized, that is, permanently engraved in the learner's language repertoire? Or will someone suspect we don't recognize the errors? Will we be perceived as lazy, not doing our job? None of these are desirable outcomes and add to the teacher's concerns about how to handle errors.

Since a teacher's response on a student's paper is potentially an influential text in a writing class (Raimes, 1988), we need to examine our practices carefully. Research on teacher response to writing provides help on the issues of where to write comments on students' papers, whether to correct or indicate the location of errors, and, most important of all, how necessary it is to assign a follow-up activity to the given feedback. On the issue of whether it is best to write comments at the end of an essay, in the margins, or between the lines, studies by Stiff (1967) and Bata (1972) have found that where we put comments has no effect on the writing of college freshmen. If we worry about whether to correct errors or simply indicate their locations, it is probably better to do the latter, not only because it's less time consuming, but also because, as Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) have found, indication of errors improves accuracy just as much as correction. In addition, according to Cohen and Cavalcanti's (1990) research, students report only "making a mental note" (p. 169) of teachers' comments, which is tantamount to saying that they glance briefly at a paper a teacher spent half an hour marking and then they put it away.

There's another reason not to spend a long time on correction. Vivian Zamel (1985) has shown us how teachers can significantly misread students' intentions and rewrite sentences according to the "ideal texts" that they hold in their heads (p. 81). To make certain that the students' ideas are being communicated accurately, it is essential to put the burden of rewriting and editing back on the students.

Just as important as the corrections the teacher writes on the students' papers are the tasks assigned after the papers are returned to the students. Lees (1988) proposes seven modes of commenting on students' papers: correcting, emoting (such as "Nice!" or "I'm bored here"), describing, suggesting, questioning, reminding, and assigning. While the first three put the burden on the teacher, the next three try to shift the burden to the student. Only assigning, "creating another assignment based on what a student has written," provides a way to "discover how much of that burden the student has taken" (Lees, 1988, p. 266).

Some second language research studies stress frequent opportunities for writing and rewriting as an important tool for improving both content and accuracy. Fathman and Whalley (1990), in their study of types of written feedback and its effects on revision, conclude, "All students, irrespective of the kind of feedback they received from the teacher, improved the content of their compositions when they rewrote them" (p. 187). In a study of students' drafts in a City University of New York classroom (Raimes, 1988, March), I found that the number of errors students made per T-unit decreased by 20% on a second draft, even when the teacher's response included no explicit correction of errors.

While recognizing that addressing content is important, we need to recognize also that we cannot ignore grammar errors and hope that they will disappear eventually. They might disappear if our students could have many years of intensive communicative practice with the language. But the reality with many of the immigrant students in college classrooms today is that they have to improve the accuracy of their written English in one or two semesters to write term papers, compete with native speakers with advanced courses, and enter graduate school or the job market with no disadvantage. So what can we do in place of correcting errors? How can we shift the burden of error correction to the students? The following six strategies address the problem.

First, whatever system we choose for marking errors in writing, we have to let our students know what that system is. Students frequently have no idea what *frag* or *awk* means, no idea why there is a question mark above a word, no idea what *agr* means, and certainly no idea why a paper earns a "B" rather than an "A." There's no point in spending time searching for the perfect system of marking errors in student writing. There isn't one. The one thing above all that will help any marking system is if our students understand it. So if we want to comment only on ideas in a first draft and save comments on accuracy until a later draft, our students should be told that. Otherwise they may assume everything uncorrected in the first draft is accurate, and they can drop their critical stance. It is useful to write out (for ourselves as well as for our students) what our policy on response is, what symbols and abbreviations we intend to use, and particularly what we expect students to do with their drafts and our comments when they receive them.

Second, we should relate our comments to the task we assign. Writing theorists distinguish between two aspects of writing: "composition" and "transcription" (Smith, 1982, p. 19), or "creating" and "criticizing" (Elbow, 1981, p. 7). If we give our students the opportunity first to express their ideas in English and then to scrutinize what they have written in order to make changes, then we should give ourselves the same two-stage response. When our students are, as Smith (1982) says, being "authors" (p.20) and composing, then we'll respond with guidance and constructive comments; when they are being "secretaries" (p. 20), looking at transcription and focusing on accuracy of presentation, then we, too, can turn our attention to that.

I usually try to separate these concerns by telling students they will write two drafts of an essay. I comment on the ideas and organization on the first reading, but I usually don't write on the student's paper at this point. Rather, I write on a separate sheet, or use adhesive, removable notes to write comments on and stick them next to the relevant passages. However, to take advantage of adult learners' concerns for grammatical accuracy, I often pick up a recurring type of error. Then, I refer students to a grammar handbook, or write an explanation, or arrange a one-on-one conference. But I make it clear that I don't necessarily expect them to correct or even reproduce the structure in the next draft. Any work on grammar at this point is separate from and parallel to the draft they are working on. But once students have rewritten the drafts, I indicate grammatical errors. I do this on their papers, usually by underlining, and I expect the students to correct those errors, either by rewriting the whole piece or by deleting the errors and writing in their corrections.

After making the system clear to students and separating our response to ideas, meaning, and content from our response to accuracy, it is time to turn to accuracy. Once students have taken on the role of "critic" and "secretary" rather than author, if we don't actually correct every error we come across, what should we do?

The third strategy is not necessarily to tackle every error, every time, but to establish priorities. When we look at a student's paper that has a lot of errors is it, we might decide to indicate only what Burt and Kiparsky (1972) call "global errors," the errors that impede our comprehension, such as sentence derailments or faulty subordination. "As a result, elementary and secondary school students have to wear a uniform is a good idea." Such sense-hampering errors cause readers more problems than so-called "local errors," things like missing *-s* or *-ed* inflections, or a wrong article. In the next sentence, "Many people who attends private schools don't come from rich families, "the *-s* ending on *attend* is a local error, and not one that causes a reader serious problems. An alternative to the global-local priority is to indicate the location of types of errors that we have already discussed in class and ask the students to correct them. A teacher might correct other errors, or let them go, or make a list of error types as they occur, so that a grammar syllabus is created.

The fourth strategy is to look for and point out strengths as well as weaknesses, to give students the chance to perceive a correct model in their own use of language. Let's consider how a teacher might mark the following passage, written by Yolanda in a college-level developmental ESL class.

> The way Colombian teenagers act and behave differ a lot from teenagers in the United States. In my country, young people is very respectful with the elderly. We are taught from a very early age to respect our elders. Young people in the United States, on the other hand, is very cold and independent. They don't worry about other people. They don't mind if an old woman is tired or need help; they just live their lives.

Typically, a teacher would correct or indicate the four verb errors. But how many main verbs are there? Eleven. So the student got four wrong and seven right. Why not point out the correct verbs, perhaps with a check mark above each, and ask the student to look at them and use them as models to fix the others?

We are so attuned to errors and so involved in ferreting them out that we tend to neglect to praise our students when they take a risk and try but get it wrong. Students are more likely to take risks if they see that risk-taking is noted and encouraged. So we should be on the lookout not only for what is correct but also for good attempts. Some teachers would approach the following sentence, for example, as a sentence with errors, underlining or deleting various parts and expecting the student to correct the sentence. "People who immigrate to America, not only because they envy the plenty of substances that they can gain, but also want to melt into society and become a genuine American in the United States." But when a student in my class, Sam, wrote this, I commented: "You've done really well to try the *not only... but also* structure. It fits well here. But make sure that the two parts are parallel (ask me to explain this). Check, too, for your main subject + verb structure." When he wrote his next draft, he tried again: "It's not good for parents or children to speak only their own language, not only because it makes them lose a lot of chances to practice and learn English, but also because it makes them get the bad habit of always counting on their native people," and he added a little note to me: "How is it this time?"

The fifth strategy is to help students find ways to develop critical reading responses. One of the best strategies I've found for showing students how readers react to errors is to model the reading process for them, explaining the expectations that English-speaking readers have. I build this around the core of an English sentence, the subject + verb. If a student wrote a passage like the following, I wouldn't correct it on the student's paper. "My uncle's daughter who was going to a private school. She had to wear a uniform no matter what the weather was." If I did try to correct this, I'd have to decide whether to cross out *who* or to cross out the period and insert commas around the *who* clause, making the whole passage into one sentence. Instead, I'd write on the board: *My uncle's daughter*, then pause and ask students what they expect next. Any reader familiar with English texts will expect that to be the subject and will expect a verb. But then comes the *who* clause, and we are left waiting for the verb, with the sentence not completed. The students discuss how to make the sentence fit the reader's expectations of an independent clause consisting of a subject plus a verb. At the same time, in line with the idea of praising risk-taking, I would point out the sophisticated use of *no matter what*. With such an approach, the students begin to see an error as something that intervenes in the writer-reader relationship, something that goes against the reader's expectations, rather than a failure to live up to some abstract set of linguistic rules.

Once we have modeled the process of reading as a way to help students see what readers expect, students can be introduced to the next step in critical reading of their own work: proofreading strategies. Teachers may tell students to check their work carefully, without giving any real guidelines as to how to do that. I ask my students to practice the following four techniques:

1. The students read their papers aloud to other students. They may hesitate when a sentence doesn't seem to work, or they may read correctly what they have written incorrectly.

2. Another student reads the paper aloud. This new reader may pause when a sentence is problematic.

3. The students take a sheet of paper, cover up everything on the page except the first sentence, put their pencil point on one word at a time, and say the sentence aloud, word by word. They try to pick out the core subject + verb of the sentence.

4. The students read their last sentences first and so on, backwards through the paper, sentence by sentence. This is another way of preventing the reading eye from leaping ahead for the content; it focuses attention on sentence-level accuracy.

By practicing these four techniques, students learn to read their own writing with a critical eye.

The sixth and final strategy focuses on the sources of students' errors. To raise our students' consciousness about grammatical accuracy, we need to find ways to make error linguistically interesting and intellectually engaging. In my classes we discuss where errors come from and why students make errors. When I underline an error in a second draft, I often ask the student to correct the error and to explain where the error came from and what type of error it is. Some illustrations follow.

Françoise wrote "She gave me six advices," and after I underlined *advices*, she corrected it and explained it like this: "*Advice* is a countable noun in French and it's for this reason I made the error." We discuss in class the phenomenon of transfer, or interference, from a native language, the fact that it occurs mostly at the early stages of language learning, and that research has found that less than 25% of grammatical errors in adults' speech is due to transfer (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 103).

A greater source of error is from the application of interlanguage rules; that is, learners make generalizations about rules within the target language, in this case, English. When Martine wrote "How can this creates a problem?" she corrected it by deleting the -*s* and wrote: "I used the wrong form after *can*. I was using an -*s* on a verb in the third person (English rule!)." However we interpret her comment —as an accusation, as a plea, or just as a groan—it alerts us to a problem that many language learners have: They intelligently apply what they think is a rule and feel frustrated when the application doesn't work. With Huey-Fen's sentence, "I did was the only one who didn't prepare gifts," a teacher's tendency would be to cross out *did* and assume the student was confused about the basic verb system. But then we hear from her: "In English we always say 'I do like you' to emphasize." After consultation she changed her sentence to "I actually was...." Imagine how confused she might be if a teacher misread her intention and just crossed out *did*.

Sometimes the rules the students are applying intelligently are ones we have just taught. In the sentence: "Chinese New Year always gives us fun and exciting," Hui-Min's explanation of the error was this: "I used wrong forms. After *gives us* have to follow nouns: *fun* and *excitement*. I thought *exciting* was a noun form because some verbs add the *-ing* form to become nouns. For example: he is getting used to living in New York. *Living* is a noun." I had just carefully reviewed the gerund form as subject and object. Here was a clear case of error arising from an intelligent application of rules taught in class, what some call teacher-induced error.

Instruction led to the error in this passage, too: "If the doctor did not tell this man about his illness; this man may feel he has not fulfilled his life with his family." Mary replaced the semicolon with a comma, saying that she had applied a rule that has just been taught. She had used the semicolon, she said, because "the period does not fit. Also the comma does not fit the words: *and, or, so, yet, but, nor, for.* The word *if* is not one of these words." Just that week, I had carefully taught the use of the comma with coordinating conjunctions,and Mary had meticulously applied what she saw as her new rule, that commas belonged exclusively with those seven coordinating conjunctions. Such generalizations signal creativity and active engagement with the new language.

Learners use a variety of communication strategies to help get their messages across. Bringing these to the learners' attention is as helpful to them as it is to teachers. The strategy of avoidance is seen in the following excerpt from a student's essay: "~~He is a~~ ~~lyer~~ ~~lier~~ ~~li~~ He doesn't tell the true." The student can't spell *liar* so replaces it with another structure, alas an incorrect one. Temasgen's sentences, "My brother's room is messy. On the contrary, my sister's room is tidy," show a memorized phrase, "on the contrary," misused in this context in place of "in contrast." And, "My reactions made them surprise" shows not just a slip, a careless omission of an inflection, but an error resulting from a language-learning strategy that we usually encourage, the use of a dictionary. Nabuko's explanation of her error went like this: "I looked up make in *Longman's Dictionary* and saw the idiom *to make someone + the simple form of the verb.*" She had, of course, seen examples like: "The pain made him cry out" and "How do you make this machine work?" So here we see not simply an error, but the application of a sophisticated linguistic hypothesis.

Asking students to tell us where they think their errors come from provides us with information about their first language transfer, their application of interlanguage rules, their interpretation of our teaching, and their use of communication strategies. It also gives us useful feedback on which errors our students can recognize and which ones they can't. Roseline wrote "Referring to the article that doctors should tell their patients the truth about their condition" and explained her error as "*Condition* should be plural because I am talking about patients. I made the error because I did not read it carefully." I knew then that I had to spend more time teaching her about sentence structure. Other times, though, students can immediately correct an error, recognizing it as a genuine mistake in performance. With the sentence "I met a old American couple," Youn changed *a* to *an* and explained: "I made the error because I was unconscious."

We can learn a lot about our students' errors if we give them the chance to make them, fix them, and discuss them. In that way, errors are no longer the enemy, but clear evidence of language learning, enlightening for students and teachers alike. Errors are, indeed, as Kroll and Schafer (1978) have said, "clues to inner processes, windows into the mind" (p. 243).

Acknowledgment

This is a revised version of an invited plenary session paper presented at the annual TESOL-Italy Convention in Rome, December, 1989.

REFERENCES

Bata, E.J. (1972). A study of the relative effectiveness of marking techniques on junior college freshman English composition. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Brown, H.D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching (2nd ed.)*.. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Burt, M.K., & Kiparsky, C. (1972). *The gooficon: A repair manual for English.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Cohen, A.D., & Cavalcanti, M. C. (1990). Feedback on composition: Teacher and student verbal reports. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 155-177). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. 1982. *Language 2.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Elbow, P. (1985). The shifting relationships between speech and writing. *College Composition and Communication 36,* 283-303.

Fathman, A., & Whalley, E. (1990). Teacher response to student writing: Focus on form versus content. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 178-190). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kroll, B., & Schafer, J. (1978). Error analysis and the teaching of composition. *College Composition and Communication,* 29, 243-248.

Lees, E.O. (1988). Evaluating student writing. In G. Tate & E.P.J. Corbett (Eds.), *The writing teacher's sourcebook (2nd ed.)* (pp. 263-267). New York: Oxford University Press.

Raimes, A. (1988). The texts for teaching writing. In B.K. Das (Ed.). *Materials for language learning and teaching* (pp. 41-58). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center.

Raimes, A. (1988, March). Responding to students' written errors: Looking at causes. Paper presented at the 22nd Annual TESOL Convention, Chicago.

Robb, T., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986). Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing quality. *TESOL Quarterly, 20,* 83-96.

Savignon, S. (1983). *Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Smith, F. (1982). *Writing and the writer.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stiff, R. (1967). The effect upon student composition of particular correction techniques. *Research in the Teaching of English,* 1, 54-75.

Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19,* 79-101.