Teaching English as a Second Language

Dilemmas and Solutions

By Desmond V. Rice

Recently, as I was watching television coverage of the devastation to the California coastline caused by a winter storm, my mind was drawn to the similarities between this and the erosion taking place at the traditional American bulwarks of education. Where once only isolated schools had to meet the needs of non-English speakers, this is now becoming a critical need in many locations. In fact, according to the 1980 Census, more than 10 percent of Americans now speak a language other than English at home. This represents a population of more than 23 million persons, of which 43 percent are Spanish-speaking.

Adventist education is still ill prepared to face the "storm" looming on the horizon as the forces of multilingualism continue to erode the smug contentment of a monolinguistic society.[1] Thousands of immigrants are surging into the United States each year, from lands as diverse as El Salvador, Japan, Russia, and Cambodia. As educators we have been reluctant to face this reality. Large numbers of teachers in mainstream classrooms are evading the problem by pretending that it does not exist, or even by leaving the teaching ranks. Our system can ill afford to have its teachers embrace either of these alternatives.[2]

Even if they lack formal training to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), teachers in mainstream classrooms

can take a number of steps to help guarantee success for students with limited English proficiency. In dealing with such students, they should keep in mind these facts:

1. The teacher is a key factor in reaching either the non-English speaker or the child with limited English proficiency. Finnocchiaro points out that student motivation is generated by the teacher's enthusiasm, dedication, and love of the profession.[3]

2. Students who are thrust into a new language environment, which is so different from their own, face cultural and linguistic barriers that must be dealt with sensitively in order to preserve their sense of identity.

3. Learning a second language is significantly different from acquiring one's mother tongue.

4. No single approach to second language learning is appropriate for every student.

5. The environment in which the learning takes place can significantly affect the rate and quality of language acquisition.

Three Areas of Communicative Competence

When a person learns a second language, he or she does so to fulfill a perceived need. If the purpose is to develop communicative competence,[4] this requires a combination of grammatical, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence.

Grammatical Competence

The first side of the triad is acquiring word recognition skills, which form the building blocks of language. Students need to learn the appropriate inflections and word order to form sentences that accurately convey the messages they wish to communicate.

Teachers should be aware of some of the speech patterns they may encounter when working with individuals whose primary language is other than English. Utilizing the studies conducted by Donaldson, we will examine some of the specific problems seen in children who are attempting to learn English as their second language.[5]

Chinese/English. Chinese writing is usually read from left to right, but it may be written from top to bottom or from right to left. In Chinese, words have only one syllable, which gives Chinese speech a jerky sound. The English word *Avondale,* which has three syllables, might sound like three separate words to a Chinese student. Articles are used optionally in Chinese, and instead of using a form of the verb "to be," speakers of Chinese may preface their thought with a word or words to denote tense. Letters or letter

combinations they find difficult to pronounce are these: road = load, chat = set, you = jew, young = jung, curl = cul, Jello = yerro, mellow = meow, sip = zip. Combined with the tonal nature of Chinese, this means that the students will have difficulty adjusting to English speech patterns.

Filipino (Tagalog)/English. Tagalog is very much like English, read from left to right, with similar patterns of tense and *parts of speech. A Filipino student may* have little trouble learning to read or speak English, but experience difficulty with pronunciation and comprehension. Tagalog vowels are always pronounced the same, unlike English vowels, which have long and short forms. Letters or letter clusters difficult for Tagalog speakers to pronounce are as follows: th (voiced) as in them = dem, th (voiceless) think = tink, math = met, van = ban, jam = yam, fountain (schwa sound) = fountain (as in terrain).

Spanish/English. The vowels are usually pronounced the same way, but many variations occur with consonants or consonant clusters, and with word order. For example, adjectives follow the noun being described, and carry both gender and number. The auxiliary verb *do* is not used in questions. Letters or letter clusters difficult to pronounce include the following: hit = heat, bleak = blick, shiver = sheever, magic = mahic, Baja = baha, a = ah, *r* and *pr* are trilled or rolled, v = vote or bote, chick = cheek, chuck = shooka. In the United States, teachers of mainstream classes need to become more familiar with the Spanish alphabet in order to better understand the difficulties encountered by students for whom Spanish is the primary language for communication.

More than 10 percent of Americans now speak a language other than English at home.

Vietnamese/English. Unlike other Oriental languages, Vietnamese, which in some ways resembles Spanish, uses the Roman alphabet. As with Spanish, the adjective follows the noun, but unlike Spanish it has six voice tones. As a result, the student may be listening for subtle changes in intonation that the teacher may be unaware of expressing. Vietnamese has no plural endings. As in Chinese each word is one syllable, thereby giving the impression of jerky speech. Letters or letter clusters that may present difficulty include the following: chop = shop, leg = reg, take = stake, universe = ooniverse, baby = paby, think (unvoiced) = tink or sink, this (voiced) = zis, which = wish.

French/English. In French objects are either masculine or feminine and are designated as such, thus controlling the *article that is used. A different form of* French is used for writing than for conversation. Some letters or letter clusters that may present difficulty include the following: rat = wat, baron = bawon, yeast = east, the (voiced) = za, get = gay, got = go, trumpet = trumpay.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Having learned the grammatical and sound structures of language and what is termed as "proper" or "correct" English, students often have problems with the second side of the triad—sociolinguistic competence, or the way we use and manipulate language.[6] An example is the different registers of speech that students use for talking with teachers as opposed to chatting with their friends, or the patterns of expression used for written essays, contrasted with those for oral presentation. Some languages such as Hindi have one vocabulary for addressing individuals in authority and another for one's equals or those in a lower economic stratum. The classroom teacher must be aware of these difficulties so as not to create barriers to communication.

Strategic Competence

The third side of the triad is probably the most difficult to deal with, as it focuses on both verbal and nonverbal strategies used by teacher and student to compensate for breakdowns in communication. The teacher or student may sigh to relieve stress, or express sounds of futility to the other or to the class. This may be misinterpreted, leading to exasperation or hostility.

Verbal statements rarely occur alone. They usually accompany nonverbal expressions that further complicate an already difficult situation. Some very interesting studies have been conducted on nonverbal communication across cultures. These emphasize the fact that the teacher needs to learn about the cultural background of the student to facilitate effective communication.[7]

Effect of Attitudes

The attitude of second-language learners toward the new culture greatly affects the speed and efficiency of language acquisition. Likewise, the teacher's attitudes can have a positive or negative

effect on language acquisition. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do you consider your own language superior to others?
- Do you have a narrow view of the world or of other cultures because of your insular background?
- Have you traveled to other countries to gain an international perspective?
- Are you really interested in intellectual pursuits and the expansion of the mind through a knowledge of other languages?
- Do you look on those who are versatile in speaking other languages as snobbish?

A study conducted by Geno[8] in the United States revealed that several factors contributed to Americans' dealings with other cultures. I believe that these are also true of Canada and some of the countries of western Europe, South Africa, and the Pacific basin.

Even if they lack formal training to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), teachers in mainstream classrooms can take a number of steps to guarantee success for students with limited English proficiency.

Factors influencing attitudes include geographic mobility, popularization of other cultures, ethnic consciousness, the reinstatement of foreign language requirements, and the trend toward international education. Integrating the second-language learner into the mainstream classroom offers an excellent opportunity to break down the teacher's—and the other students'—cultural barriers. However, a teacher unconvinced of the value of the ESL student's cultural heritage or unwilling to actively pursue such understanding will, at best, be inept in establishing meaningful and lasting communication.

Ten Fundamentals for Teaching a Second Language

All teachers of a second language need to keep certain fundamentals in mind, regardless of the methodology they select for working with children in mainstream classrooms.[9]

1. As a general rule, use the second language in the classroom in conversation with students. Some experts feel that the teacher should never speak to the student in his or her first language. However, learning can often be accelerated if particularly difficult terms are explained in the student's first language.

2. Encourage the student to speak in the target language as much as possible. If the student needs to ask a question, urge him to ask questions in that language. Teachers should be very careful not to give the student the impression that his mother tongue or culture is in any way inferior to that of the target language.

3. Encourage the student to communicate in the target language. Students should do most of the talking in class. If they make mistakes, request them to repeat the correct response, once it is supplied. Be sure to do this in a way that enhances self-esteem. If the student rarely gets involved in learning and utilizing the new structures that are introduced by the teacher, and if his role is largely passive, then he may unfortunately experience what is known as the "excommunicative approach."[10]

4. Introduce one structure at a time, making sure that the student understands it before you move on to succeeding structures. Competing sources should be eliminated to allow time for consolidation of learning. This will maximize the learning and reinforcement of new information.

5. Provide opportunity for adequate drill and practice. Wherever possible this should include aural/oral/written avenues of communication.

6. Prepare lessons in advance for the benefit of the learner as well as yourself. This will help you to predict some of the difficulties that may arise. Consider specific strengths of each student that may be tapped, as well as ways to avoid likely pitfalls.

7. Utilize peer teaching as much as possible to reinforce skills. Peers are often adept in bringing about communication and helping the second language learner discover the subtleties of the target language.

8. Give liberal doses of encouragement and positive feedback, especially in the early stages of learning. Unlike learning one's mother tongue, second language learning requires conscious effort to master the structure of the new mode of communication. Learning a new language goes far beyond the surface formalities of grapho-phonemics, syntax, and semantics. The whole culture comes as part of the package. Understanding the

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How we deal with language in our schools often indicates to pupils our view of their culture. To teach students to be sensitive to other cultures, we must recognize and accept the languages or dialects spoken in their homes or communities.

Through our attitudes, materials, and interactions, we will assist students to maintain and extend their identification with and pride in their mother culture and, by extension, in other cultures with which they come in contact.

Developing multicultural awareness and sensitivity can be an exciting journey of discovery for both teacher and student. The articles in this issue of the JOURNAL offer some ideas to help you embark upon this journey with your students. □

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[1] David S. Hoopes and Margaret D. Pusch, "Definition of Terms," in *Multicultural Education: A Cross Cultural Training Approach,* Margaret Pusch ed. (Yarmouth, Vt.: Intercultural Press, 1979), p. 3.

[2] In the majority culture in North America, acceptable behavior in an elevator requires that the passengers face the front of the elevator, where possible, and look at the door or the floor indicator. One may discuss the floor, the building, or the weather with strangers in the elevator although this is discouraged. Raising personal subjects is unacceptable.

The working unit of time differs from culture to culture. "The working unit for the Euro-American is the five-minute block. An individual can typically be two or three minutes late to a meeting without apologizing. After five minutes, however, a short apology is expected. Being 15 minutes late, representing three units of time, requires a lengthy, sincere apology, or perhaps a phone call in advance." —Richard W. Brislin, et al., *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 272.

[3] Hoopes and Pusch, p. 4.

[4] General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1976), pp. 26, 27.

[5] Carl George, "Challenges Facing Adventists," *Adventist Review* (January 5, 1989), pp. 17-19.

[6] See *Harvest 90; 125th Annual Statistical Report—1987,* compiled by the General Conference of SDA Office of Archives and Statistics, Washington, D. C.

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riculum. The questions listed below suggest ways to determine whether students are becoming more culturally aware:

1. Are students "multiculturally literate"? Do they show in conversation that they understand the main characteristics of their own heritage as well as the heritage of others?

2. Do students from various cultures express feelings of self-worth? Do they participate fully in the life of the classroom and school? Do they make disparaging statements about themselves or their peers that reflect poor self esteem? Are students ashamed of or uninformed about their own cultural backgrounds?

3. Do students demonstrate openness and tolerance for persons from other groups and cultures? Are they inclusive in their choice of friends? Do they try to make persons of other cultural groups feel comfortable in the classroom or on the playing field?

4. Do students stereotype or generalize? Can they distinguish between myths and factual information? Do they identify cultural bias and distortions?

5. Are students able to work cooperatively with others of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups in performing a variety of tasks? Do they share their faith with others in the larger society who come from different backgrounds?

The tested curriculum in this case consists of information primarily gathered through observation, as opposed to standardized written tests. The answers can be used to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Adventist education approaches a new millennium in a time of unprecedented social and cultural change. What better legacy could it give to rising generations of students than the ability to understand the many diverse cultures that constitute a rapidly shrinking world? The curriculum in Adventist schools must be continuously examined to ensure that every student becomes multiculturally sensitive and literate. With students prepared in this way, "how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world"![6] □

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[2] Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), p. 269.

[3] Paul S. Brantley, Benjamin Bandiola, E. Stanley Chace, Charles Felton, and Eloy Martinez, "Position Statement on Human Relations," adopted by the North American Division Curriculum Committee (Washington, D. C.: North American Division Office of Education, 1985).

[4] California State Department of Education, *Guide for Multicultural Education Content and Context* (Sacramento, Calif., 1976), pp. 6, 8.

[5] *Education,* p. 269.

[6] Ibid., p. 271.

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customs attached to the second language helps the student to comprehend the nuances of particular words and phrases.

9. Ensure parental education. This does not mean that the teacher of a mainstream classroom must spend time outside of school hours to teach the target language to the parents of the student. It does mean that the parents should be informed of the complexities inherent in second language learning, so their expectations will be realistic and achievable. Visiting the parents in their home environment can be helpful if the teacher seeks to make the parents comfortable about the visit, and does not convey a demeaning attitude.

10. Be aware of the nonverbal com-

munication occurring between native speakers—including yourself—and the ESL students. Negative nonverbal communication can cause irreparable damage. For example, your words may tell the student that you care about him or her, but your actions subtly hinder learning, especially if your requests violate cultural prohibitions in the child's primary language.

Conclusion

Teachers must take the time to gain the necessary knowledge to meet the needs of ESL students who are mainstreamed in their classes. If teachers are flexible and empathetic, helping students learn a new language can be an exhilarating and rewarding experience for everyone concerned. □

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[1] S. I. Hayakawa, "Why English Should Be Our Official Language," *The Executive Educator*, IX (January 1987), pp. 36, 29. In *Education Digest* (May 1987), pp. 36, 37.

[2] While principles of a second language learning apply in a variety of cultures, we will focus attention in this article on English as a second language.

[3] Mary Finnocchiaro, "Motivation: Its Crucial Role in Language Learning." Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Detroit, Michigan, March 3-8, 1981). In *TESOL '81*.

[4] Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, "A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence," in *The Construct Validation of Tests of Communicative Competence*, 1981. Includes proceedings of a colloquium at TESOL (Boston, Mass., February 27-28, 1979).

[5] Judy P. Donaldson, *Transcultural Picture Word List: for Teaching English to Children From Any of 21 Language Backgrounds* (Holmes Beach, Fla.: Learning Publications, Inc., 1980).

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[9] Wilga Rivers, *Communicating Naturally in a Second Language: Theory and Practice in Classroom Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Muriel Troike-Saville, *Foundations for Teaching English as a Second Language: Theory and Method for Multicultural Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976); Audrey L. Wright, "Initial Techniques in Teaching English as a Second Language," in Kenneth Croft, ed., *Readings on English as a Second Language for Teachers and Teacher-Trainees* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1972).

[10] George Yule, "The Excommunicative Approach (and How to Avoid It)," *Minnesota TESOL Journal*, 4 (Fall 1984), pp. 23-42.

FIELD EXPERIENCE: A HANDS ON APPROACH TO MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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dents), planned and sponsored by Maranatha Flights International, a Christian "peace corps." Students (except for those on K.P.) and staff (usually four or five) worked together doing design and construction on the project each morning from 7:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. After a two-hour lunch and siesta, classes were held from 1:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. This work-study program operated on a five-day week.

Regular classes were offered in conversational Spanish (three sections), Latin American cultural perspectives, Panamanian history, religion, mathematics, physics, wood framing, masonry, plumbing, and electrical wiring. In addition, a number of students did special course work under independent study. All were required to register for 12 credits; most took 16. Only three of the total group could not work out a program totally applicable to their degree goal.

Weekends provided opportunity for travel and social interaction in Panamanian society. About two dozen regular students from the school were on campus and worked together as a part of the team. A few "sat in" on some classes. The study schedule precluded extensive social activity during the week, but in keeping with what seems to be "standard practice," most students were careful not to allow their studies to interfere with their "education."

In Retrospect

Of the 51 students who participated in the Panama "experiment," not one has suggested that he or she wishes he had not gone. Most have said that it was the best educational experience of their lives. Of course, with time, less pleasant experiences dim.

From a teacher's point of view, the experience was uniquely rewarding. Believe it or not—they're all still my friends. Interested in role modeling? There is no better opportunity. But be advised—there can be no facade. There is no place to hide!

But where in such a program is the educational aspect? Where are the humanities? What part taught the social sciences? Was it the visit to the rodeo, the local church, the banana plantation? Do the humanities encompass learning to live in a dormitory (nicknamed "la hotel de cucarachas") with three-inch cockroaches? Or is there a social science involved in attending to a plugged-up "john" that mountain students have stood on and continued to use, though nonfunctional, to the point of becoming a "barnyard mound"—because they were determined to do their very best to please and to adapt to the new ways?

In retrospect, several facets of the Panama project stand out:

1. Students learned the culture by living in it.
2. Students struggled for the survival of their own group society and learned to "make it work" by living cooperatively with their peers (both U.S. and foreign).
3. Students learned the value of innovation and adaptation, both on the job and socially, to achieve a common goal.

In Conclusion

At a certain point in the development of most normal students they are adventurous, flexible, sufficiently mature, and anxious to "do something". This is the opportune time to "plug-in" to international work-study.

The Maranatha experience has changed the lives of many students. It deserves wider implementation. If we are really concerned about role models for students, shouldn't we do more than just "tell" them? Shouldn't we "show" them? Better yet, we can send, or even take them, as we share together marvelous opportunities for fellowship and cultural awareness. □

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