

# Opaque Transparencies for the Overhead Projector

by Mark W. Seng

That wonderful overhead projector offers a versatility that allows language teachers to project far more than the usual "transparencies." Hundreds of items we use each day project clear, sharp, easily recognizable silhouettes which capture the attention of language students while providing a change-of-pace procedure from ordinary language lessons.

Free plastic "silverware," usually discarded after use, provides an especially good example and some food for thought. For example, name the fork, knife, and spoon as you place each one on the projector stage. Then, illustrate some typically troublesome problems. The plural of spoon and fork come easily enough, but when you place an additional knife on the stage, you have *knives*. For practicing prepositions, you can place the knife *across* the fork, *above* the fork, *below* the fork, *next to* the fork, *on top of* the fork, *to the left* or *right* of it, or *between* the fork and the spoon. If you are teaching comparatives, you can show that the knife is *longer than* the spoon, which is *shorter than* the fork or the knife.

The possibilities are limited only by your imagination. Point out an end of one item which is pointed. Comment that the fork has more than one *tooth*; it has *teeth*. Break one off to illustrate a fork with a broken tooth. Some parts of these utensils have interesting names. For example, there is the *neck* of the spoon, the *bowl*, and the *handle*. Our culture determines a certain arrangement of these items which is correct or right. Some items are placed at the left or right of others. Going back to comparatives, you can note that the neck of the spoon is narrower than the handle.

You can even illustrate some appropriate verbs for each item. The knife can be shown to *carve* a steak-shaped piece of paper (previously cut but now overlapped slightly.

As you cut, move the knife along the separation to divide the already cut pieces.) You can *stick* the fork into some children's putty (or *insert* it if preferred). The spoon will *contain* or hold an imaginary liquid. If you are fortunate to get a clear plastic spoon, you can actually hold or carry some colored water or gelatin that will be projected realistically on the screen.

Demonstrate these concepts yourself the first time. Next time ask a student to operate the projector for this activity, so you are free to walk among the class--where the action is. The mood of the group will change as they watch a peer call upon friends, asking them to respond to the various relationships or concepts being demonstrated.

Once the class has become familiar with the procedure, you can vary the activity in still another way. Divide the class into pairs

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Mark W. Seng, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, where he serves as coordinator of adult education. He teaches courses in media in language teaching, learning theories, and inexpensive media.

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of students who will then work together. Many advantages accrue from dividing the large class into small groups. Working with only one other person removes the fear of making mistakes before the entire class--a very important factor. Now, each student spends half of the class time either listening to or giving directions in the language. The small group activity again frees the teacher to move about, observing, monitoring and helping.

Besides plastic silverware, many other objects serve well as opaque "transparencies"

when placed on the projector stage. For example, a pocket comb not only projects a sharp picture, but can also be used to demonstrate a broken tooth next to good teeth. An ordinary pencil can be given a broken point. An eraser can remove a line drawn on a piece of plastic. The tip of a ballpoint pen can be moved in or out, with the action observable by students seated at the back of the room. Paper clips and opened or closed safety pins also project well. Zip or unzip an ordinary zipper while projecting the action. Coins project as discs illustrating *larger than, smaller than, the largest, the smallest*. Smaller coins will disappear if placed on top of larger ones.

Projected images of rubber bands stretch to illustrate *larger or longer, and smaller or shorter*. They *snap and break*. Medicinal pills are recognizable by their elongated shape.

Nuts and bolts can be recognized. You can *screw* the bolt into the nut. Staples, slide frames, and steak knives also work just fine. Go outside to get a leaf and a twig with or without a bug, all of which project well to illustrate both names and other ideas. One of my favorite opaque "transparencies" is a jigsaw puzzle of the United States. The U.S. map enables one to teach many concepts from the names of the states to prepositional relationships. Texas is *between* Oklahoma and Mexico. It is *next to* Louisiana, *bigger than* Nevada, etc.

Hold a bendable straw and form it while saying the appropriate verbs. You are *bending* it. It is *bent*. It is *broken*—if you failed to get the right kind. A belt buckle can be *buckled* or *unbuckled*. A key will reveal itself by its characteristic shape, as

will a fingernail clipper or a toothbrush. In contrast to a regular stick of gum, Dentyne is easily recognized. Paint brushes and clips (paper, bulldog, or alligator) are also easily identified when projected.

The silhouettes of paper punches and clothespins are both identifiable and interesting as are those of nails, screws, washers, pliers (placed gently), screwdrivers, or even electrical plugs, which can be inserted into sockets of extension cords.

Place your own hand on the projector stage. Then, point out fingers, thumbs and rings. The list of possibilities goes on and on. Tongue depressors or light bulbs (pick the smaller ones for high intensity lamps) work fine. Best of all, challenge your students to find objects they think will project. Or, ask them to cut some ordinary paper to make silhouettes.

Paper can be cut into shapes which will project as intense black silhouettes. At a negligible cost and without fancy equipment, you can create whatever image you want in a few minutes. Animals, birds, geometric shapes and people can all be produced and provide an illustration of what you want. When you are finished with these paper transparencies, store them conveniently in a manila folder. These opaque transparencies will serve you well for many years to come.

*Ed. Note: This is the first in a series of articles written for the TESL Reporter by Professor Seng on how to use the overhead projector in unusual but effective ways. He welcomes suggestions from readers regarding ideas they have found successful in the classroom.*

