

Using A Telephone Directory To Teach English As A Second Language

By JASON B. ALTER

Where can you get, gratis, an up-to-date text, 604 pages in length, for students of English as a second language? Answer: Use the telephone directory.

Reference is to the December 1, 1969 issue of the Telephone Directory of the Hawaiian Telephone Company. If you plan ahead, you can collect a good number of copies of a given issue, before your neighbors dispose of them.

The phone book can be put to a variety of uses: (1) vocabulary; (2) structure; (3) language and culture; (5) reading; (4) information retrieval; (6) listening comprehension.

The cover alone has possibilities. Both forms, "telephone" and "phone" appear. Many other languages are less likely to resort to abbreviated forms.

The word "Oahu" can be used for pronunciation practice. Many students have a propensity for saying "Oafu."

As for the date, December 1, 1969, do you say December One, or December First, or December the First? Is it OK to write 1 Dec 69? What's the origin of the word "December"?

Next on the cover we find "Send your Aloha by phone." What does "aloha" mean here? Hello? Goodbye? Love? Your own interpretation?

For language and culture, we find on Page 5: "Give your party time to answer--about 12 rings--before you hang up." Can you imagine such patience in New York City?

One thing leads to another. Does the student know "hang up"? Does he know it in the noun form? (A good example of language change.) Does he know that "hang" has two past tenses, "hung" and "hanged"? Are there other verbs that similarly have two past tense forms? (Cf. "shine.")

American names cause grief for foreign students. There are two persons named J.H. Jones. How can you keep up with the Joneses if you can't identify them? Would any teacher have his class pronounce "Joneses" in three syllables?

For pronunciation work you can also refer to Page 5 wherein distinctions are made as follows: (a) dial tone--a continuous "hum"; (b) ringing signal--a soft "burring" sound; (c) busy signal--a steady "buzz-buzz"; (d) voice recording signal--a high short "beep". Onomatopoeic perceptions vary from language to language. See how your students perceive the above four sounds.

How do you call another on a party line? Information on this is also listed. Does the student know the term "party line"? What does "party line" mean in a political context?

For information retrieval, the student can be asked to look up a certain name, recording the address and number. Spelling can also be checked in this way, as well as listening comprehension.

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The front of the directory has passages that can be used for reading practice. Such categories as these are treated, in "Hawaii Today": population, climate, agriculture and industry, transportation, education, etc.

The directory can function in any number of ways as a supplementary text. For semantics: "telephones that mean business." For insight into the labor movement: on Page One of the body of the directory, you find no fewer than 46 different numbers under AFL-CIO. Pages 172 - 175, with exhaustive listings for the State Government of Hawaii, say a lot about our state system.

More on listening comprehension: state a phone number, and have the class locate it. How many times do you have to repeat it before the students can manage?

For homework, students can be asked to call a theater, for example, to listen to the recorded message informing the caller as to the attraction's title, time of showing, etc.

For homonyms, the directory is rich. (This helps spelling, too.) WINN – See Also LAWRENCE, LORANCE, LORENZ: LEE – See also LEIGH, LI. How are the phone numbers themselves pronounced? Where does the stress go?

For vocabulary: where do you live? Compare the following possibilities: street, avenue, lane, highway, place, road, drive, boulevard, circle, loop, way, rise, walk. How are these abbreviated?

Life in the United States: on Page 480, you can find a family with two numbers listed. One is for the parents, and one for the teenagers.

Audio-visual aids: in the yellow pages you have pictures, captions, and commentary. "Quick as a wink!" What's the difference between "wink," "squint," and "blink"?

Semantics: "two moving reasons," whereby a pair of shoes represents an inducement to add an extension phone.

On the inside back cover you find a series of colored phones. Compare the color spectrum as perceived by various language backgrounds. Here too, the caption, "telephones to live with," contains a two-word verb worth teaching.

I have merely sketched the potential uses. You could have listen-and-repeat exercises of numbers and names. You could go into abbreviations of occupations. Let your fingers do the walking; and let your telephone directory do the talking, as you teach through it.

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