

TESOL CONVENTION REPORT

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Over a thousand teachers, administrators, researchers, curriculum specialists and publishers gathered in Los Angeles from March 4-9, 1975, for the ninth annual convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The convention program provided something for everyone concerned with language instruction. Those in attendance participated in workshops, listened to formal presentations of papers, reviewed the latest in ESL publications and met with colleagues from the U.S., Mexico and several foreign countries.

TESOL can no longer be considered a U.S. professional group. A quick look at the list of affiliate organizations shows members located in Canada, the Dominican Republic, Ireland, Mexico and Venezuela. In addition to these organized members, many individual members from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Micronesia, Europe and Latin America joined the convention activities. This year's convention program featured several new and welcome innovations to provide rewarding and educational experiences for our truly international membership.

One of these innovations was the special interest group meeting. Experts shared their experiences in informal panel discussions, rap sessions, and problem-solving groups with people interested in EFL in foreign countries, EFL for foreign students in the U.S., ESL for U.S. residents in general, ESL in bilingual education, ESL in adult education, Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD), and applied linguistics.

Several informal luncheons were planned in an effort to increase interaction among convention participants. Various dining areas of the hotel were designated for those interested in English teaching in connection

with early childhood, elementary, secondary, higher and adult education, support services such as guidance counselors and social workers, researchers, administrators, and supervisors, teacher trainers, students and parent-community groups.

Another addition to this year's agenda was a meeting of the national advisory council. Comprised of delegates selected from the organizational affiliates, the council nominated people for next year's election to the executive committee and made recommendations to the present executive committee.

Also new this year were half-hour teaching demonstrations presented by successful instructors. Growing out of the general membership's demand to share the latest pragmatic innovations and proven teaching techniques, each TESOL affiliate was asked to choose one of their members to demonstrate classroom programs, materials and/or approaches which had helped students learn English. Judging from the large numbers in attendance at these practical sessions, this innovation will become a permanent feature of future programs.

Two other minor innovations helped make this convention much more enjoyable for many: Each convention gathering was divided into smoking and non-smoking sections for the comfort of the participants. And, freeing those who wanted to listen without having to take copious notes, the Minute Tape Company (3640 So. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite No. 123; Los Angeles, CA 90034) recorded on cassettes all of the general and small-group sessions.

We would like to share our impressions derived from several presentations we attended and some of our evaluative observations made during the course of the

program. We realize that other participants attending different, or even the same sessions, may have reached other conclusions and developed varied interpretations.

For years, many structural linguists claimed that a sound ESL program rested upon a detailed contrastive analysis of the first and second languages under consideration. Transformational grammarians, who hold to the existence of a universal human grammar, deny the validity of such a claim. For the transformationalists, the first and second language differences are merely

Mr. Foley, an executive of the Hawaii Council of Teachers of English, represented Hawaii on the National Advisory Council; Mr. Gallagher presented a paper.

superficial, and not essential for ESL teaching (Newmark, 1971). At the convention, however, delegates referred to studies of errors by second language learners to determine if these errors, might be due to interference from the first language. (see Bailey, Madden and Krashen, 1974).

Structuralists hold that such interference is one of the major reasons which impede progress in Second Language acquisition. These errors can be predicted, the structuralists posit, through contrastive studies, and then drills can be devised to eliminate the mistakes.

However, research reported at the convention showed that these errors made by Second Language learners are not so much a result of interference from the first language, as they are developmental in nature. That is, the errors made are the same errors all language learners--both first and second, from different linguistic backgrounds--make as they progress towards complete language acquisition (see Dulay and Burt, 1973, 1974).

Some researchers label this stage of Second Language acquisition "interlanguage." For example, a student may generalize the past rule (or in this case, overgeneralize) and say 'goed' for 'went.' This error should not be

misinterpreted as interference, but rather reflects the learner's interim grammar, (i.e. interlanguage) or the learner's current psychological hypothesis about the target language.

Furthermore, studies in error analysis are showing that a learning hierarchy exists for the acquisition of certain features in English. Various measuring devices are included in the studies showing that the age and linguistic background of the learners seem to have little influence on changing the order of acquisition.

Studies in error analysis show the order of function word and inflection acquisition within the noun phrase in English to be: 1) plural, 2) article, and 3) possession. Within the verb phrase, the order is: 1) progressive, 2) copula, 3) auxiliary, 4) irregular past, and 5) third person -s. (see Krashen, in press)

This implies an order of acquisition which may run counter to many popular Second Language programs where materials are structured "to prevent errors."

Tests (Upshor 1966 and Mason 1971,) reported at the convention by Fathman, show that adults do require extensive meaningful exposure and formal instruction in the target language or dialect, while increasing evidence shows that students from 6-15 years of age do not require any formal, i.e. classroom, instruction--exposure is sufficient for them to learn a new language (see Fathman, 1974). Adults beyond age 15, usually demand grammatical explanations, perhaps gaining the security of knowing there are principled reasons for the linguistic phenomena they are being exposed to.

Included in another presentation were various theories to account for the presence of a foreign "accent." 1) accent is a result of a psychological habit on the part of the articulators, so that nerves and muscles (and perhaps neurological functions) of articulation progressively become rigid with age. Then, by the time a Second Language learner reaches a certain age or level of physical development, he is physiologically incapable of acquiring a Second Language native accent. 2) Some psychologists claim

accent may be a result of psychological habit formation, and 3) necessary underlying empathy with the second language community is lacking. Tarone reported that his studies show that increased empathy in language learners results in better pronunciation. Since Second Language learners normally retain an accent even after years of study and foreign residency, there is also another possibility that accent may be connected to psychological notions of selfhood.

In one session a panel from Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N.J., described their efforts to construct a new TOEFL examination. The present test has been in use for the past 15 years. ETS is anxious to work with educators in institutions in making changes and additions to the new TOEFL, which they hope to begin administering next year. They recommended in using the old test that each school or program should establish their own cut-offs and interpretations for TOEFL results.

TESOL now publishes a collection of the convention papers (the '74 collection is now available) so those who are interested in reviewing all of the ideas may purchase a copy of the collection or order the previously mentioned tape recordings.

In general the convention proved worthwhile: Many speakers were outstanding. The publishers' displays were extensive. And the opportunity to meet colleagues and discuss ideas was refreshingly stimulating.

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Next year the TESOL
CONVENTION will be held
in New York City.
