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DISCOURSE STRUCTURE IN READING

by Ron Shook

With the emergence of psycholinguistic theories of reading such as those proposed by Frank Smith or Kenneth Goodman, scholars in ESL have come to realize that an ESL reading program which serves the advanced reader may have to be radically different from one which is geared to a beginning reader. Out of this realization have come a number of excellent suggestions for advanced ESL reader courses. Been (1973), for instance, suggests a two track program: one track more or less traditionally oriented for the reader who uses "mediated recognition" strategies and another track for the student who uses "immediate recognition" of meaning as his reading device. Another excellent suggestion has been made by Eskey (1973), who outlines a flexible but comprehensive program for an advanced ESL reading class. Both proposals are based on the theory that when a person is learning to read he must develop certain perceptual and cognitive habits, but when he is learning to read fast, or for meaning, the beginner habits are not only insufficient to the task, they may actually get in the way.

This paper will focus on the beginning ESL reader, and the anomolous position that our reading programs, and especially our reading exercises, put him in. It seems to me an important but much-overlooked fact that while we can divide native languge readers generally into beginning and advanced, we cannot do the same with ESL readers. At least, we cannot use the same criteria with ESL readers as we do with native readers, nor can we use the same sets of exercises. On the college level, a beginning ESL reader is already a proficient reader in his own language. As such, he will not be helped by exercises designed for beginning readers (and sometimes not too well at that), and made over for ESL purposes. This becomes significant when we recall that reading is not purely a word recognition game, or a phonic exercise, but a complex interweaving of perceptual and semantic processes,

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monitored by the reader's advance expectations of what is in store for him in any printed text. The skills a beginning reader needs to develop in order to be a good reader, the ESL reader already has.

I propose that ESL reading pedagogy, reading exercises in particular, hinder the ESL reader because they ignore the linguistic facts of life. The fact is that reading is an overlaid skill, a cognitive function and the ESL reader has long since developed those skills many reading exercises presume to be absent. The fact is that the ESL reader is unsophisticated in English but not linguistically unsophisticated (A beginning reader may have a well developed grammar, but is still a long way from linguistic sophistication (see Hunt 1970; O'Hare 1973)). The fact is that the ESL reader has a *Weltanschauung* and conceptual store far ahead of what is expected of him in the exercises he is given. The fact is that the beginning ESL reader is not a beginner. Reading exercises tend to ignore these facts in a number of ways. I wish to examine three general patterns in reading exercises and show how they can do a disservice to the cognitively mature but English-naive reader. These patterns are: 1) profusion of detail as question fodder; 2) an oversimplified syntax; and 3) an artificial construction that violates the principles of civilized discourse.

READING AS THEORY AND CONTRACT

Before I begin a detailed examination of ESL reading exercises, I would like to construct a profile of an advanced reader. This may be a native English speaker reading English, a native Thai speaker reading Thai, a native German speaker reading German, and so on. This profile is not a balanced one. On the contrary, it will be built up of elements I wish to examine in the reading exercises, and will serve as a backdrop against which I want to conduct my examination.

A reader reads by outwitting the printed page. He plays what Goodman (1967) calls a "guessing game" with his text. That is, he attempts to guess, on the basis of as little information from the visual array as possible, what a certain word, sentence, or even paragraph might mean. He constructs a theory, then puts this theory to the test, sometimes making changes as he goes (for the best and most comprehensive discussion of this process, see Smith (1971)). He makes these guesses on the basis of his intuitive knowledge of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic constraints on his language. The English speaker knows, though probably not consciously, that the letters *st* will not be followed by *d* or *g* or *f* or *w*, but could easily followed by *r* or a vowel. Similarly, he will know that a sentence beginning, "The black . . . " will almmost certainly not be followed by *white*. These unconscious rules help him eliminate options and confine his guesses to viable alternatives. Thus the structure of natural language helps the reader in the task of "reduction of uncertainty" (Smith, 1971).

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In addition, the reader constructs meaning out of discourse by referring what occurs in the text to what he already knows about the world. Smith maintains that, "the brain—our prior knowledge of the world—contributes more information to reading than the visual symbols on the printed page." He gives as an example of the working of syntactic and pragmatic knowledge the sentence, "The captain ordered the mate to drop the an. . . " The mature reader could use a number of clues to finish that sentence. First, he could predict what letters would *not* occur after it, and from this make an educated guess as to what letters would occur. Second, he could note that the word *an. . .* is almost certainly a noun, and feed this datum into his lexical store. Third, he could ask himself what sorts of things mates are likely to drop at the command of the captain.

Actually, the mature reader almost never uses the first two strategies. He will normally have the word *anchor* in mind before he ever comes to it in the text. His prior knowledge, influenced by the setting, certainly nautical except in reading exercises, will have prepared him for the word, and he will need only the barest hint in order to be able to furnish the world from his own store. This means that he

may not even get the word from the printed page, but may get it from his own knowledge of the world and from the nature of the subject matter he is reading.

If reading is a theory building process, it is also a contractual one. As part of being a reader, our hypothetical person has developed a set of discourse postulates which lead him to expect certain things of the reader. Though the expectations vary from culture to culture, they always form a sort of contract between writer and reader; a set of assumptions about what the writer may and may not do in a discourse situation. These postulates have been given a number of names and forms: speech acts; conversational postulates; implicature; situation frames and a host of others, but they all amount to rules of procedure in sharing information.

On the simplest level, these rules assure mutual syntactic and semantic trust. A reader knows that even a writer who is attempting to cheat, deceive, and mislead him will have to be honest in some of the functions of discourse. Even a liar and a cheat must use verbs and nouns in his writing. Unless a man is insane or playing some outlandish prank, he does not say "calabash" when he means "Buick." He may try to weasel in a new definition of democracy, but one is aware that is still an abstraction.

On a more complex level, the reader and the writer share the knowledge that a piece of writing moves in certain predictable ways. A narration moves in time, a description moves in space. An analysis may move inductively or deductively, but once the pattern is set, it is followed. That the time sequence of a piece of narrative writing can be violated is true, but even this proceeds according to rules, and the reader must be let in on the secret. If the reader is not, because the writer is inept (or terribly avant garde), the result is confusion or nonsense.

Our sense of the contractual nature of a piece of writing is very strong, notwithstanding the fact that it is a very difficult concept to come to grips with and to get concrete about. It's most often discussed under the heading *Coherence* (cf. Winterowd, 1975) or *Form* (cf. Burke, 1953). I will discuss this concept in greater detail later, but for now let me merely remark that the writer who ignores the contractual nature of discourse because he is seeking other ends, such as the teaching of vocabulary, will cripple the reader's ability to abstract meaning from the text. Further, any piece of writing which goes beyond one sentence in length becomes a contract, so that a five line reading exercise is not exempt from the reader's expectations that it cohere.

A college level ESL student, then, comes to the study of the English language with a fully developed set of strategies for deciphering written material, both cognitive and linguistic. He is stripped of his linguistic skills by virtue of being a language learner, but he retains his cognitive and pragmatic expectations because he has no other choice. He cannot become a child again. Yet he is often given material that is childish.

THE MANIA FOR DETAIL

Detail is important to good writing, and therefore to good reading. It gives life, adds credibility, advances knowledge. However, for detail to work for the reader and not against him, it must advance rather than interrupt the flow of information. That is, it must have a reason for existing other than that it is a detail. There seem to be two psycholinguistic reasons for this. First, our capacity to deal with unintegrated information is extremely limited (cf. Miller and Isard, 1964). Any stray bit of information that is not part of the pattern must be held in short term memory, constantly recirculated, till a place can be found for it. Second, the evidence suggests that should that information be recalled, it will not necessarily be in the same form as originally presented by the writer (cf. Savin and Perchonock, 1965). The meaning may be the same, but the form may well be different (passives reported as actives, etc.). A superfluous detail will be simply dropped from the information store.

I have the distinct impression that much detail is added to ESL reading exercises because something is needed to ask questions about. Consider the following sentences, from a typical reading exercise:

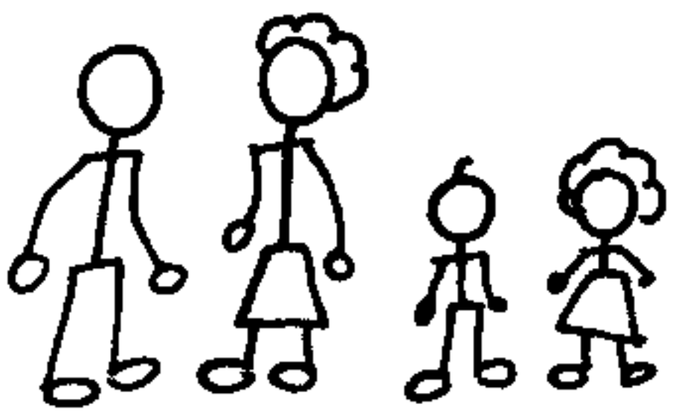
> Bob was sitting on the bank fishing. A pail for the fish he was not catching was at his left side.

(continued on page 15)

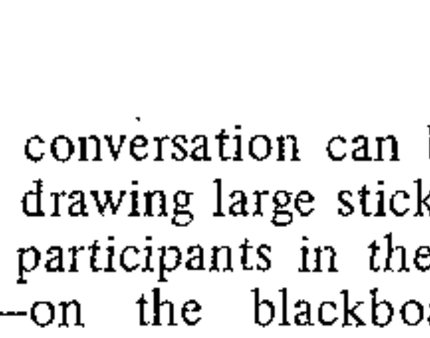
THE USE OF STICK FIGURES IN THE TESL CLASSROOM

by Alice C. Pack

Any teacher can learn to draw simple stick figures for illustrating many grammatical points in English, making the teaching more effective. These illustrations should be kept simple with circles and lines indicating the characters and action. A boy and a girl may be represented as shown below with facial figures such as eyes, mouth, etc. optional. Men and women are drawn the same as boys and girls only the figures are large (particularly when used together).



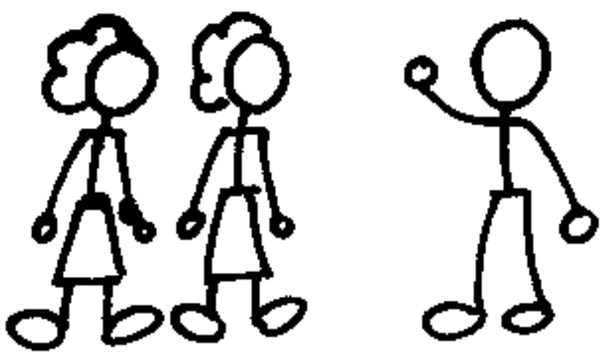
Dialogues and conversation can be simply demonstrated by drawing large stick figures--representing the participants in the dialogue or conversation--on the blackboard. The instructor can stand on the side of the character speaking as the dialogue is illustrated. (If more than two speakers are involved, a simple pointer may be used to distinguish the speaker.
Example:



Good morning, John.
How are you?

Good morning, Mary.
I'm fine, thank you.
How are you?

Fine , thank you.

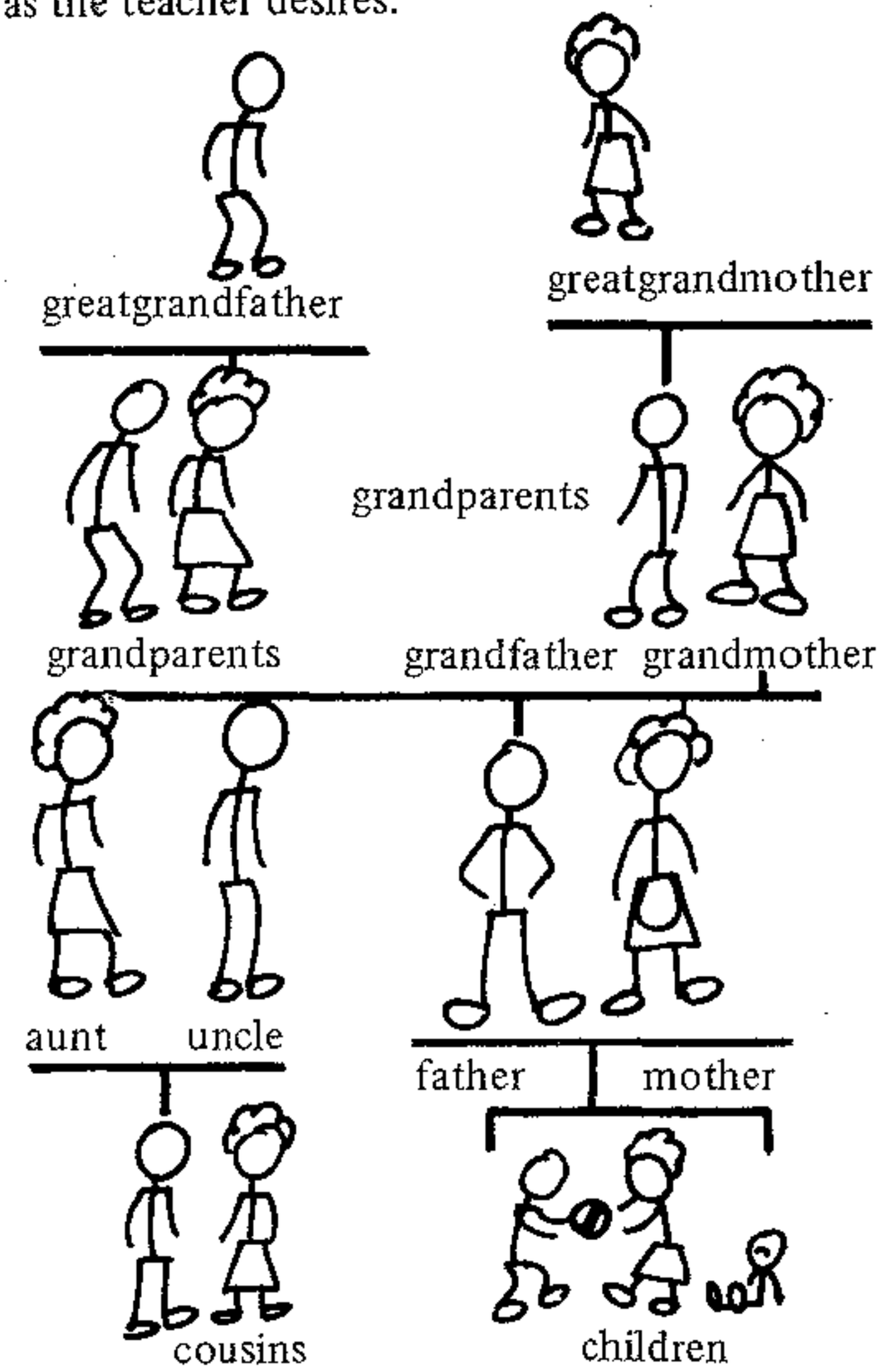


Good morning, John.
This is my friend, Jane.

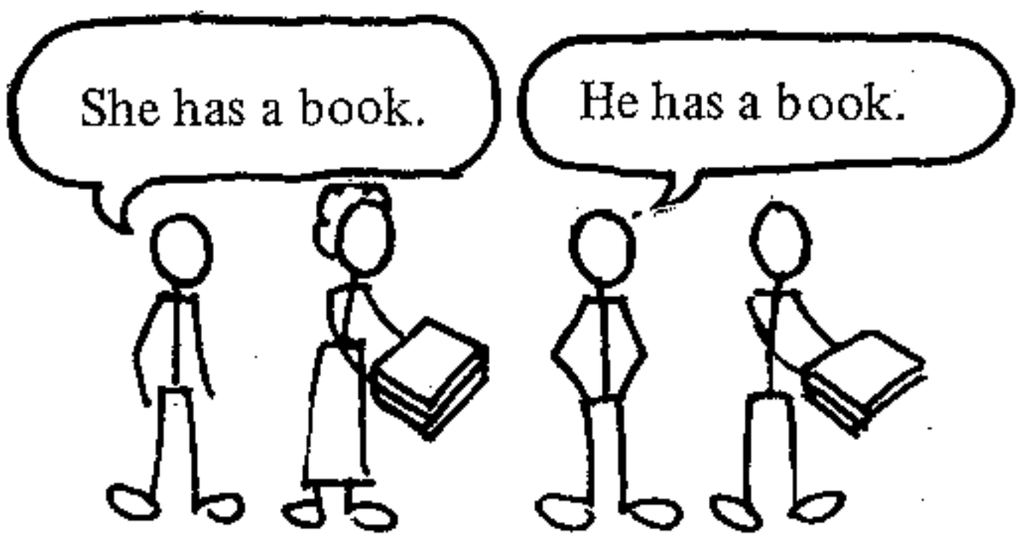
How do you do Jane.
I'm happy to know you.

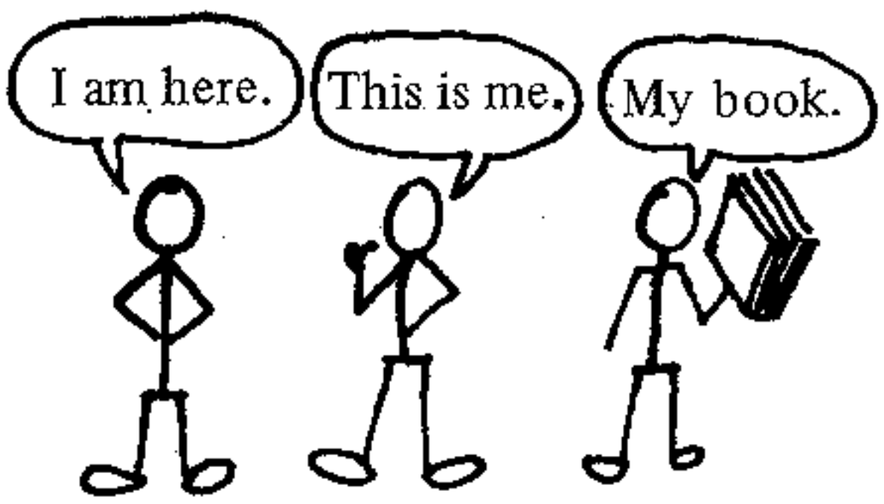
Thank you.
I'm glad to know you too.

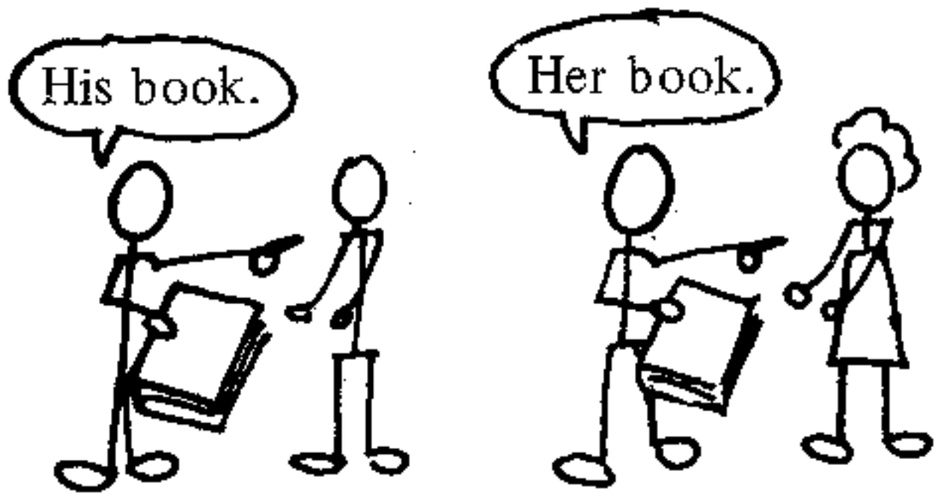
The vocabulary of family relationships can be shown advantageously with stick figures. The diagrams can be as simple or as complex as the teacher desires.

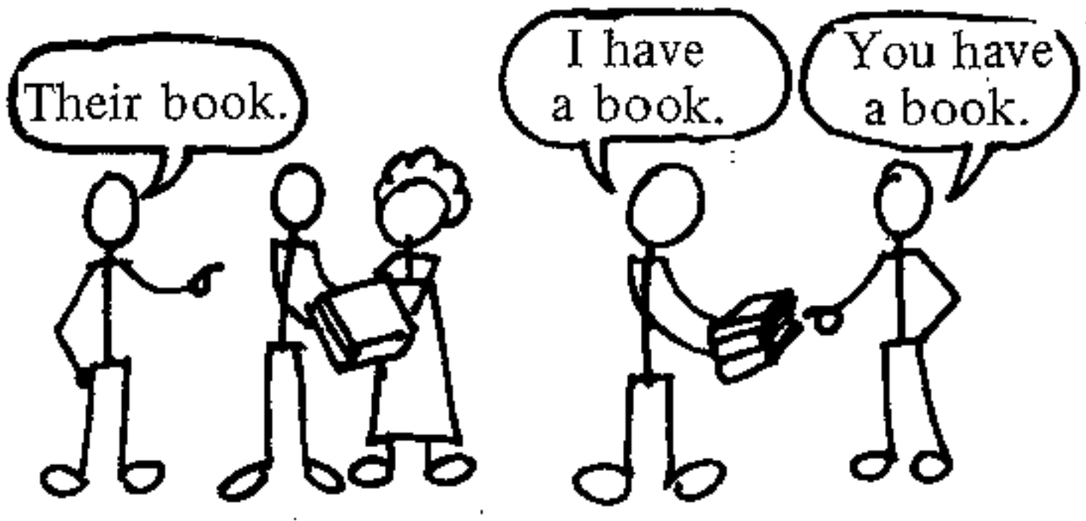


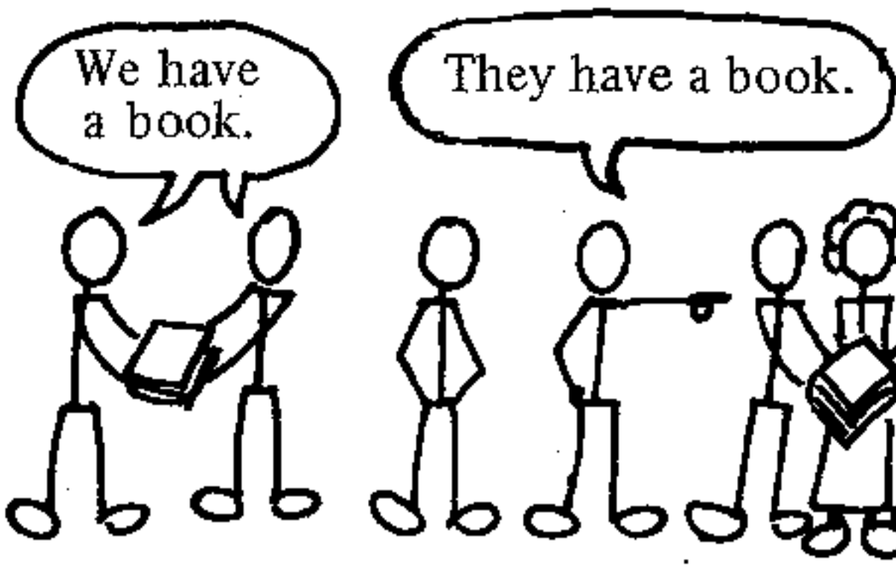
Although European languages make pronoun feminine-masculine distinctions, Polynesian (and most Asian) languages do not. Stick figures can help students picture these distinctions as they practice the forms orally. Most students are familiar with the balloon issuing from a mouth to indicate the speaker so this can be used to indicate the speaker as he refers to other figures. The words may either be inserted in the balloons or printed below with just an empty balloon indicating the
the speaker.



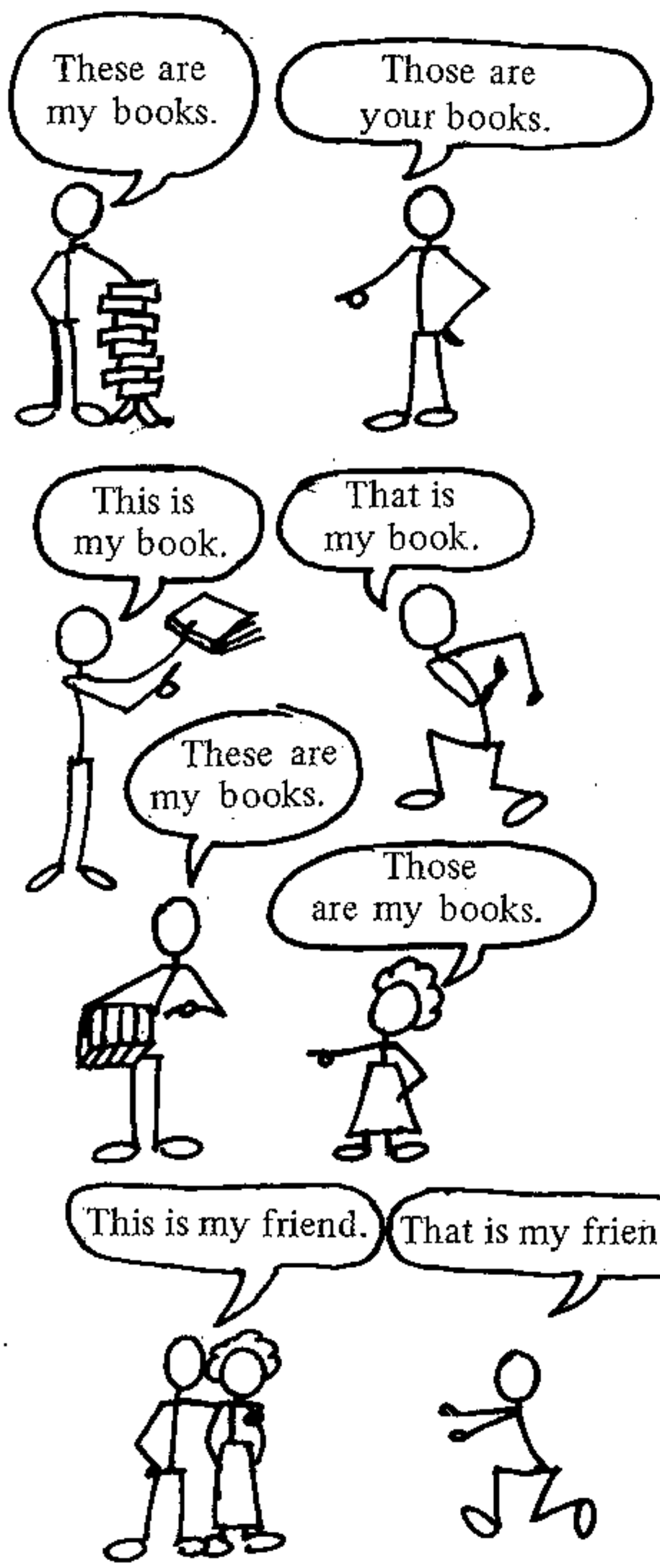


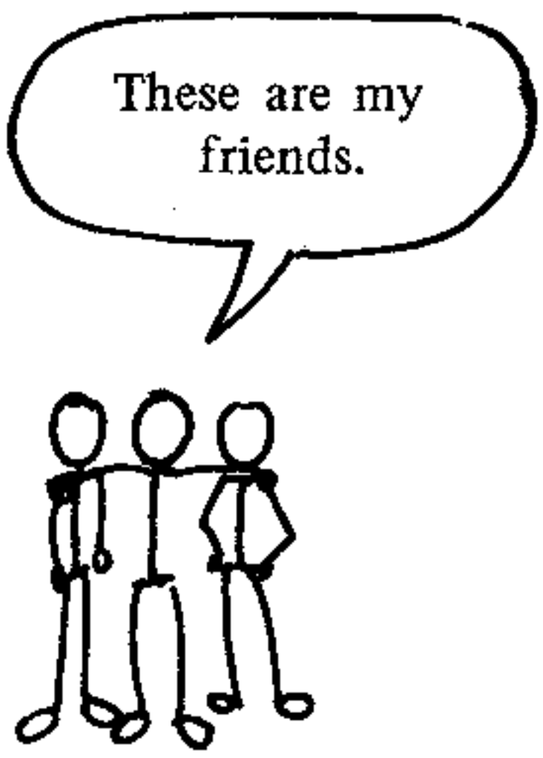


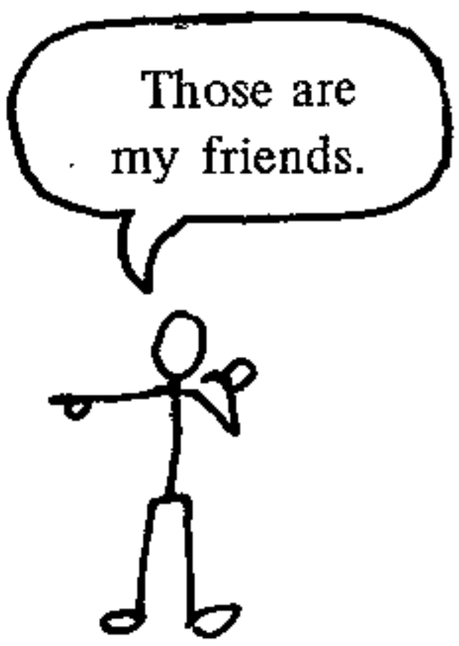




This and that with the plurals these and those (relative to position) are also demonstrable with stick figures.





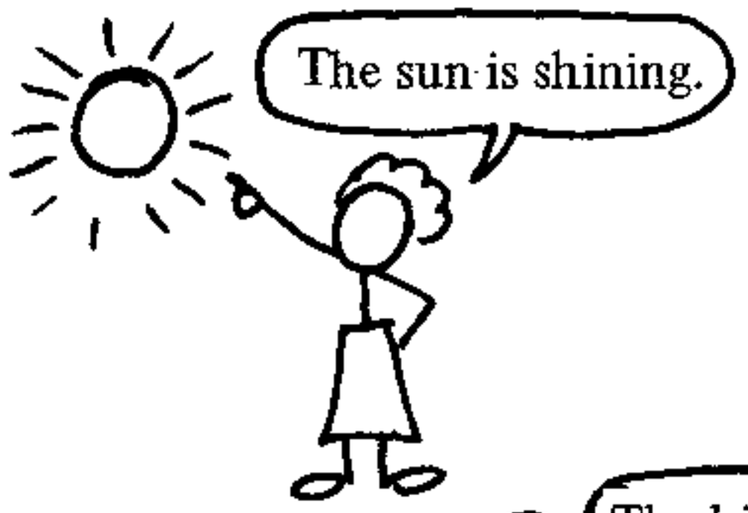


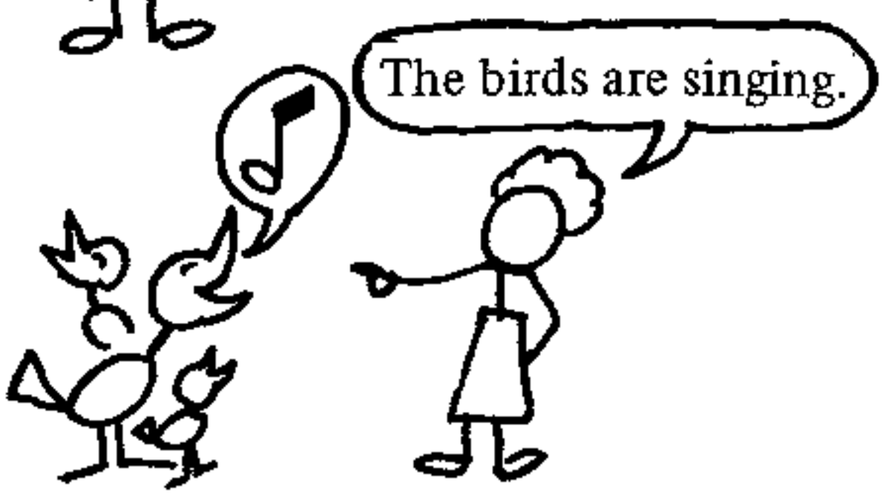
He is running.

She is singing.

The use of the present continuous tense (be + -ing) for present action can be indicated with stick figure drawings.

Examples:

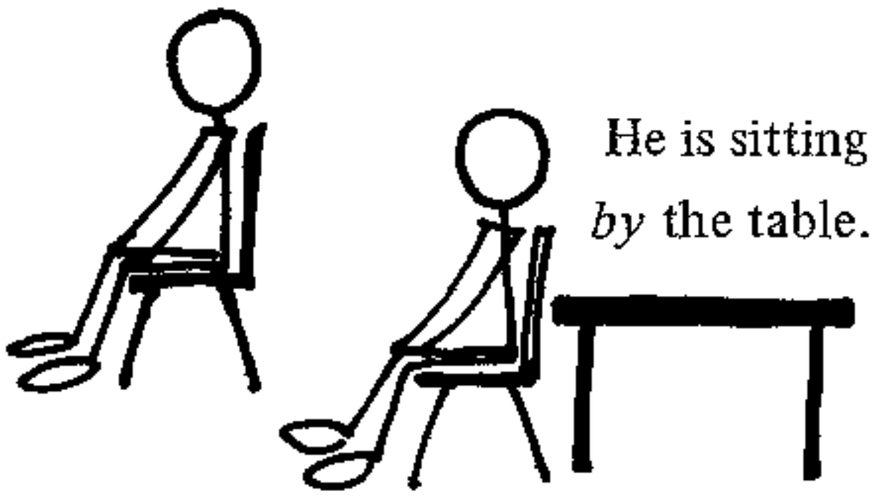




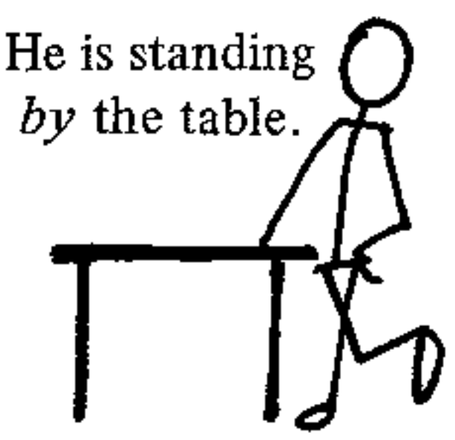
Prepositions of place, motion, and time can be clearly indicated (and practiced orally) with the use of stick figures.

Example:

He is sitting *in* the chair.

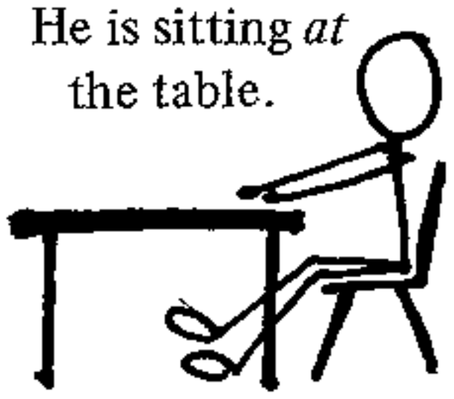


He is sitting *by* the table.



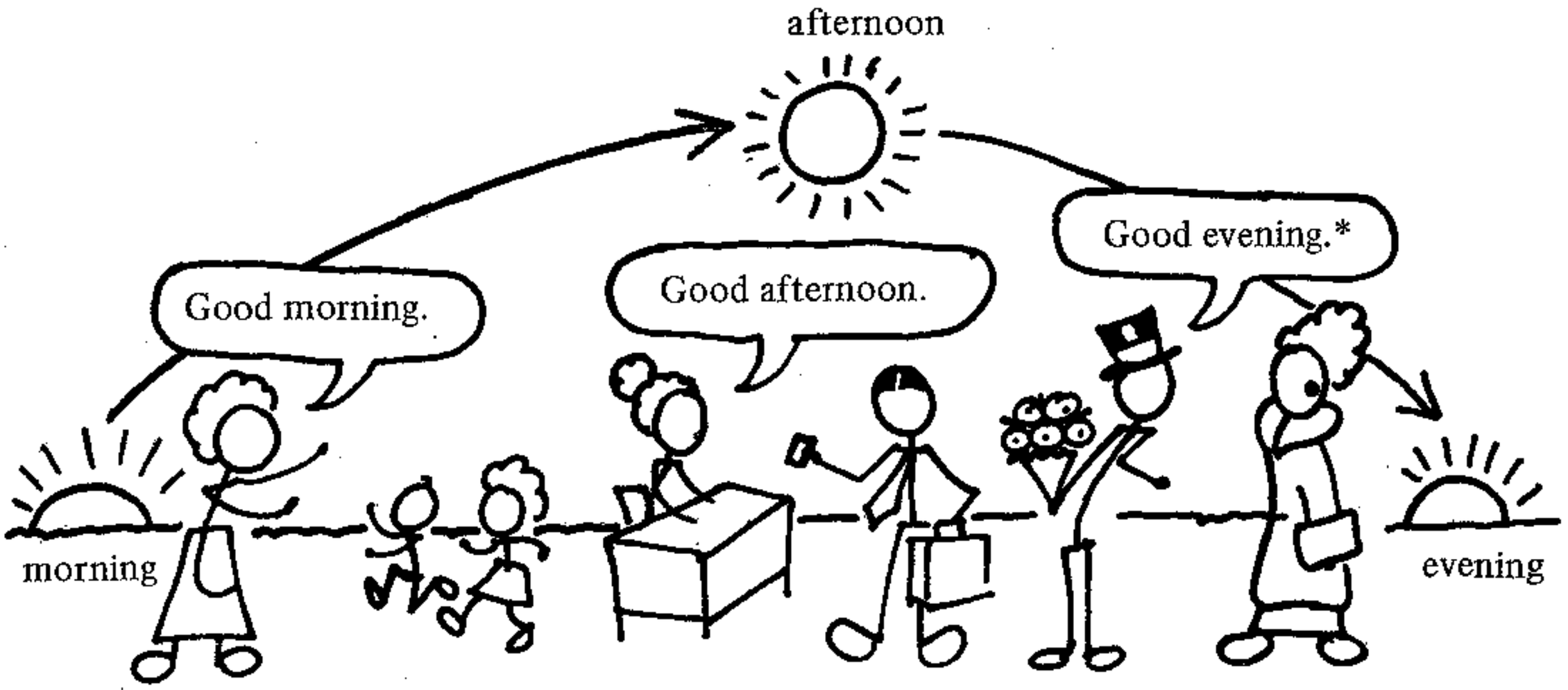
He is standing *by* the table.

He is sitting *at* the table.



He is standing *on* the table.

Greetings in relation to the time of day can be indicated (and practiced as the leader indicates the time of day) with stick figures.



**Not "goodnight," which indicates goodbye.*

Stick figures are often more effective than photographs or elaborate pictures as there are few or no distractors and students can focus more readily on the relationships indicated. So pick up some chalk and have fun!

BOOK REVIEW

LISTENING DICTATION (Understanding English Sentence Structure) **Price $4.95**

By Joan Morley **The University of Michigan Press** **138 pages / Clothbound**

LISTENING DICTATION is the latest addition to the ESL textbook series from the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan. This textbook is coordinated with the basic text of the Michigan ESL series, *English Sentence Structure* (by Robert Krohn), but may be used independently.

Its thirty-two lessons may be used with accompanying tapes (purchased separately), or the dictation sections may be read by a classroom teacher.

Lessons are organized in two sections, one stressing the parts of the sentence under study and the other stressing the meaning and grammatical relationships of the whole sentence.

Students develop skill in attentively listening to the intricate grammatical details of spoken English sentences. Such regular phenomena as contractions, vowel reduction, consonant assimilations etc. are treated in an efficient and pleasant presentation, not found in other books of this type.

ESL students at the intermediate and advanced levels should profit from the use of this well organized textbook. The book provides a much needed reinforcement to the grammar patterns studied in ESL speaking and grammar classes. I highly recommend it, and have ordered it for use in our English Language Institute.

By William Gallagher

BACHELOR'S PROGRAM IN

By John Udarbe

One cannot fully appreciate the total impact of a project such as the American Samoa Bachelor Degree Program unless a vicarious transfer is made to a South Pacific island. Here the place of employment is the Department of Education, the language of instruction is foreign, institutions of higher learning are limited, and time, money, distance and personal circumstances become insurmountable barriers toward advanced education. The desire for completing a baccalaureate degree is constantly being frustrated. Such were the conditions many teachers found themselves in while performing their services in American Samoa. The situation, however, acted as a catalyst to bring about a request in August 1975, from the Department of Education to the Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus for an in-country bachelor degree program. The university responded after an initial investigation, with a plan to provide three academic majors in combination with a strong English core. The majors represented the fields of business, mathematics and social science.

A group of the members pose outside the classroom.

Putting the American Samoa Program into operation introduced a three-fold procedure. Teacher participants, first of all, were guided through carefully selected reading assignments prepared in syllabus form by members of the BYU–Hawaii faculty. Assignments were handled by correspondence and close contact was maintained throughout this phase. The second step called for BYU–Hawaii faculty to be in-country, offering concentrated workshop-type sessions. During this time participants engaged in activities within their respective groups, received individual attention and had the opportunity to have

At right, Dr. Udarbe and Puka Pasi have a conference.

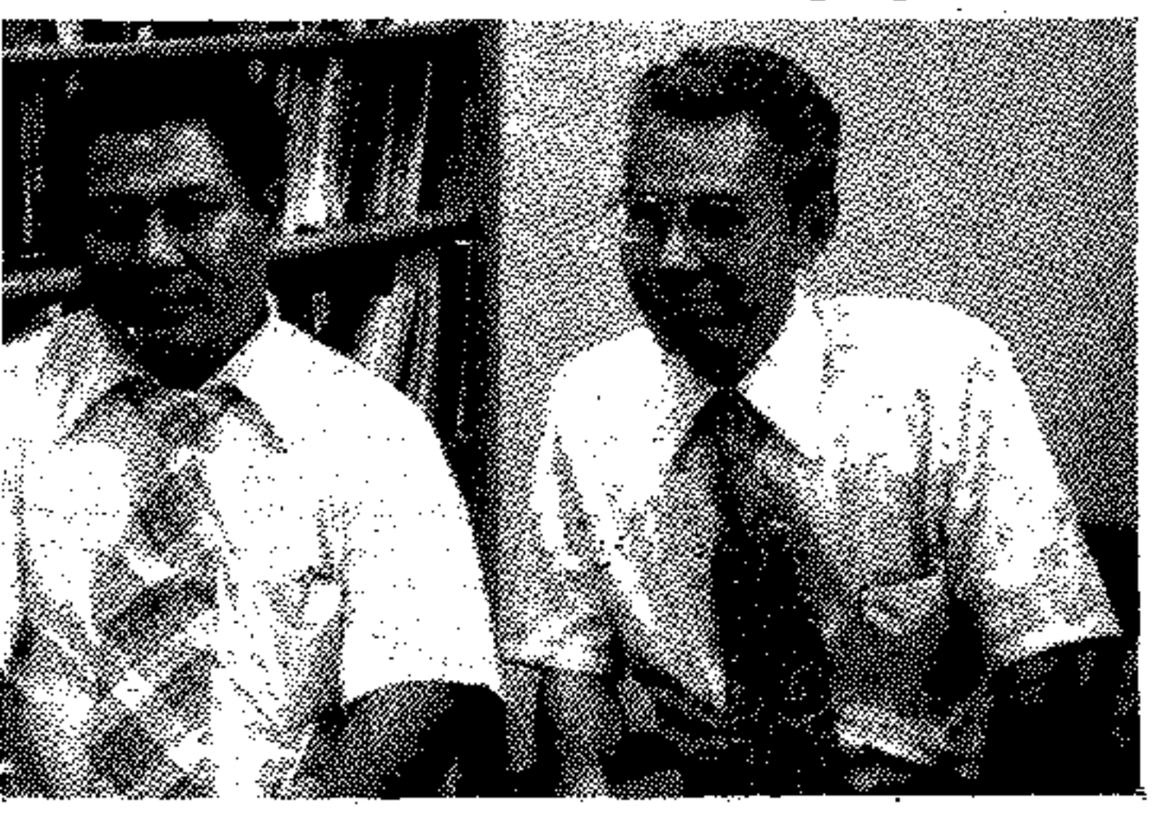
Below: Robert Goodwin, Sili A

AMERICAN SAMOA

professors visit their classrooms. The total experience was then synthesized in the third and final step when theory was related to classroom practice. Evaluation also occupied an important part of this last phase. The overall operation became a learning laboratory with problems and solutions given concerted attention. For example, when professors were not on-site, an in-country support team strengthened the program (Department of Education personnel voluntarily assisted).

Many personal sacrifices were made during the American Samoa Bachelor Degree Prog-

tuatasi, and John Udarbe plan the program.



ram. Teacher participants often found themselves at the end of a teaching day beginning all over an exhaustive schedule leading into the late night hours. Weekends, holidays and even summer vacations were almost totally occupied in filling assignments, completing projects and meeting deadlines. Families were also affected. One teacher remarked, "My children rarely see me because I go to the library to study. Everyone has had more responsibility for the home duties."

Program participants registered strong positive attitudes both in comments and in an evaluative survey. One teacher observed, "All of us are working tremendously hard but there has come to the group a greater closeness. We encourage each other. If one is discouraged or falling behind on assignments, we are there to push him on and give the needed encouragement." In the survey, designed to elicit the response of participants on how effective the various program activities were in increasing teacher proficiency, eighty-one per cent felt that the different aspects of the program were very effective to extremely effective in gaining greater proficiency in subject matter areas; seventy-seven per cent indicated a better understanding of English*; seventy-six per cent believed they were better prepared in the use of newer teaching methods; seventy-four per cent expressed a desire for continued professional growth; seventy-one per cent had a better appreciation of how their particular subject related to careers; and sixty-eight per cent signified greater skill in developing classroom materials. The survey included a section of open-ended statements requesting participants to list new proficiencies. Responses most often made were: "more confidence in myself to teach a particular subject," "greater ability to communicate through speaking and writing," "sharper skills in reading and listening," "better student response in classroom discussions," and "higher scores on examinations." Over-whelmingly, the response was for more time and the request was to "keep the program going." *(continued on page 14)*

*Since the survey was taken, two-thirds of the participants completing classes have taken two intensive English classes--one in reading and one in writing

RESEARCH ON SEQUENCING

by Jack Wigfield

The question of sequencing materials continues to concern many of us. Research which bears on this problem is being done in Canada by G. Richard Tucker and Alison d' Anglejan.

Tucker and d'Anglejan have looked at complex sentences, that is sentences whose surface structures are quite different from their underlying structures. They took their sentences from Carol Chomsky's research, sentences like:

(1) John promised to go.
(2) John promised Henry to go.

Chomsky's pre-eight year old subjects had no trouble identifying the subject and *promised* but when they were asked who went in sentence (2), they replied, "Henry." Children over eight responded that in (2) John promised and John went.[1]

Tucker and d'Anglejan found that beginning adult ESL students responded the same as native speaking children under eight and advanced ESL students responded the same as those over eight.

> This suggested that the degree of linguistic complexity inherent in the sentence is indeed a critical factor in determining the order of acquisition of certain grammatical features and that this factor operates in both native language and second language learning.[2]

Let me now give you an example of how this research can apply to the way we sequence material. For the past year Alemany Adult Center has been experimenting with a different kind of class, one feature of which is to give students unlimited access to the teacher on an individual basis for help with problems. One problem which is common and which came up recently concerns sentences like:

(3) If I were you, I would go.

This is the so-called contrary-to-fact conditional.

The two students who asked about this most recently were intermediate students, one high and one low intermediate. The textbooks they were using are generally accepted texts for that level of proficiency. While both students had successfully completed their assigned workbook sentences, only the high intermediate student really understood what he was doing and even he probably couldn't have used it in a conversation. It should also be noted that both these students were college bound, so we are dealing with cognitive processes in language which have little if anything to do with intelligence.

Now let's look at the deep and surface structures of (3). The *if* clause has a deep negation. In reality or the truth is *I am not you.* That negation does not appear on the surface.

The main clause is often taught as containing a deep negative as well and indeed it often does:

(4)"If I had the wings of an angel,
over these prison walls I would
fly."

But in our example (3), whether "I" goes or not depends on the context of the situation. For example:

A	B
1. I'm going. Are you?	1: This is a great party.
2: I can't decide.	2: Great? It's rotten. Who's giving it?
1: If I were you, I'd go.	1: Me. If I were you, I'd go.

But if the main clause does contain a negative in its deep structure, that negative doesn't occur in the surface structure.

The time of the deep structure is not-past, but the surface structure has past forms, *were* and *would go.*

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1. Chomsky, Carol, *The Acquisition of Syntax in Children from 5 to 10.* Cambridge, Mass., The M.I.T. Press, 1969.
2. d'Anglejan, Alison and G. Richard Tucker, "The Acquisition of Complex English Structures by Adult Learners," paper presented at the National TESOL Convention, 1976.

And while Old English had past and not-past subjunctive forms which were used in sentences like this, the not-past subjunctive disappeared and the past, homophonous with the past indicative *were,* replaced it to indicate not-past with all persons and numbers. Therefore, "If I were. . ." rather than *"If I was. . ."

Taking all this into consideration, certainly these two students and others like them have trouble with sentences like this for precisely the reason Tucker and d'Anglejan have suggested.

Furthermore, interesting things seem to be going on with the conditionals in English. Collecting data on conditionals from the Watergate testimony for ESL students in Stanford University's AESOP program a few years ago, we found many "correct" forms but also a number of "mistakes" by educated native speakers. Consider this exchange between Senator Byrd and Archibald Cox:

Senator: If you were overruled [by Mr. Richardson], would you resign?
Cox: If it were a matter of the slightest importance, yes. . . but if I thought it was a matter of the conduct of the investigation. . . well, I would either resign or find some public recourse.

Didn't Mr. Cox mean:

If it is a matter of the slightest importance, yes,. . . but if I thought it wás a matter of the conduct of the investigation. . . well, I would either resign or find some public recourse.

How much stronger and more "correct" this Mr. Cox sounds; more like the published reports of his behavior during the investigation.

Watergate provided an abundant collection of conditionals, but there are more recent examples. Take this RCA ad from *The New Yorker* for May 31, 1976. A woman, clutching her portable TV in the laundromat, says:

(5) If I miss my soap operas, I'd be miserable.

This is a questionable example because advertisers exploit divided usage to get attention (". . .like a cigarette should.") but how many will see "I miss. . .I'd be" as unusual?

Try this one from an impeccable source, an art critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle:*

(6) "If you had your choice," I said, "which object or sort of object would you have picked to bring here to San Francisco to own?"

Since the interviewee had recently come from China and he hadn't been given a choice, didn't the interviewer mean, "If you had had your choice. . ."

Native speakers seem to be reacting to the contrary-to-fact conditional as it has developed historically as a cognitively difficult task. They are being asked to use a tense form usually reserved for some sort of time indication to serve an additional function.

Consider another example of cognitive processes in interpreting language:

(7) This is the cat that ate the rat that lived in the house that Jack built.
(8) My big new built-in battery failed.
(9) The man the woman loved spoke French.
(10) The man the woman the teacher taught loved spoke French.

Sentences (7)–(10) illustrate different types of embedding. Sentences (7)–(9) are easily interpreted, but when subjects are asked to interpret (10), they either ask to have it repeated, laugh, or reject it as not English. (9) and (10) are centrally embedded, but while central embedding of one sentence (9) is acceptable, central embedding of two or more sentences is a cognitively difficult task.

In another recent study, Tucker and d'Anglejan looked at the ability of bilinguals to solve problems in deductive reasoning. They found that greater familiarity with the language of the problems is not sufficient to produce a significant difference in the level of performance.[3]

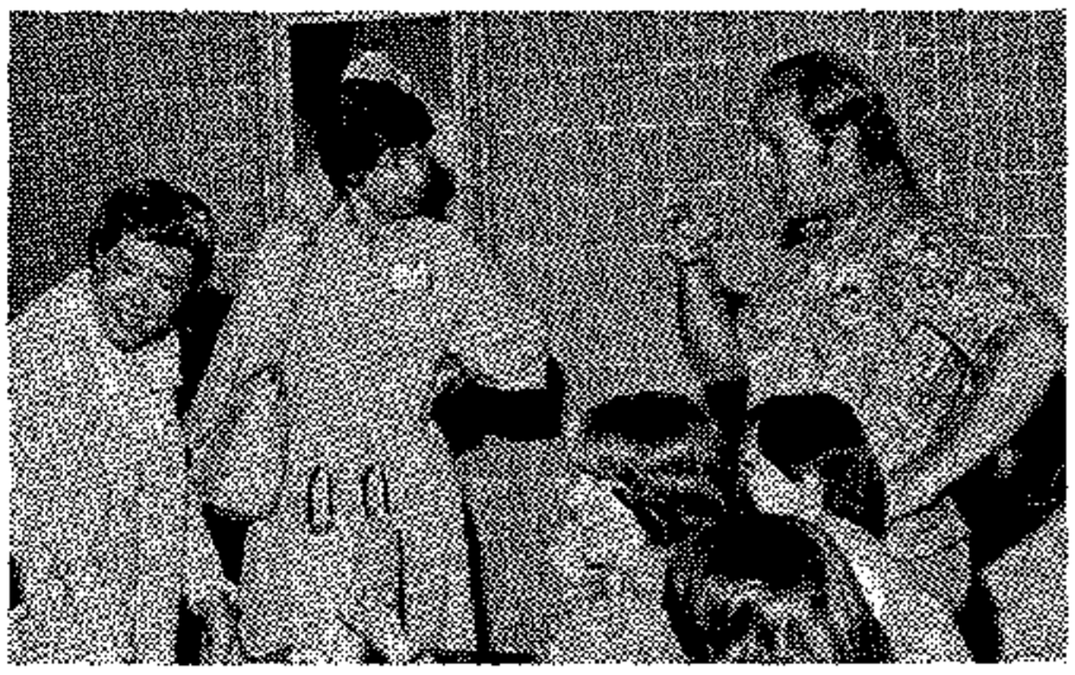
All this seems to indicate that we are asking too much of ESL students in the early and even later intermediate stages when we give them work in contrary-to-fact conditionals. This type of conditional represents a highly complex structure which, in addition, seems cognitively difficult to process. This combination may also account for divided usage among educated native speakers.

3. "Solving Problems in Deductive Reasoning: A Study of the Performance of Adult Second Language Learners", mimeographed, 1975.

'YEAR OF COMPOSITION'

Composition is alive and well on Oahu, having received an additional boost from the recent "Year of Composition" workshop held at BYU--Hawaii Campus and co-sponsored by the Hawaii Council of Teachers of English, on Saturday, September 18.

The workshop was designed to accomplish two major objectives, which will continue to be the mainstays for future efforts. The two major goals were: 1) to give composition teachers at both university and high school levels the chance to associate with each other and learn from each other individually, and 2) to give teachers as a group a chance to see exactly what programs and offerings are available at other schools. During the day, many opportunities were provided for the participants to mingle with each other for discussions, both formal and informal. For many, this brainstorming opportunity was the highlight of the workshop.



The workshop attempted to include the whole range of the composition student's progress, from placement in the appropriate class, through both in-class and out-of-class teaching techniques, to evaluation devices used to test the student at the end.

Those making presentations came from five different high schools, three different colleges, and three different universities, so participants were exposed to a wide range of ideas and programs throughout the day.

"Variety" was one key word of the day. Concerning the placing of students in the proper class, some schools revealed careful testing procedures, while others went strictly by previous grades and experience. For instance, the University of Hawaii's new essay placement test for all incoming freshmen generates four class levels into which students are separated. BYU--Hawaii uses a similar entrance test, which also includes a reading and a listening test; however the students are only divided into three separate classes based on test results. Some uniform placement system seems to be either in use or desired by nearly every school.

The in-class teaching technique section was an exciting part of the workshop, as specific teaching devices were demonstrated. For instance, the college teachers learned how to paragraph writing using geometrical shapes, introductions using a common child's puzzle, outlining using an analytical grid, and logic using a series of deceptively simple anecdotes. One certain conclusion of the workshop, contrary to currently prevailing notions in some quarters, is that the classroom is not dead as an effective educational environment. Innovation, experimentation, and new ideas are readily available.

The highlight of the out-of-class demonstrations was a tour through the BYU--Hawaii language skills lab with its director, Alice Pack. Participants saw specific materials for all levels of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Sophisticated programs, such as the use of automated readers or computer-assisted programs, were demonstrated side by side with old standbys, such as tutorials and easy readers. The laboratory approach is one that seems to be gaining everywhere, primarily because it can be personalized to isolate each student's individual problem.

WORKSHOP

by Greg Larkin

Finally, during a section on exit tests, the participants were introduced to the BYU--Hawaii portfolio program, which is used in all required general education English classes. In this program, teachers exchange papers at the end of each semester, to check on the progress of other students and to have the progress of their own students also checked. This ensures that each student gets an objective and fair evaluation of his work and that no student can pass the course without attaining minimum proficiency standards. Few schools currently use such a structured exit system as the portfolio program, but in the face of the continued decline on national test averages, such a program is one very promising approach to achieving "quality control."

Although the workshop was favorably reviewed by almost everyone who attended, many had some reservations. These reservations are significant to anyone planning a similar workshop.

First, many people felt that too much was crammed into too little time. The pace was very rapid, making retention difficult and at times forcing a halt to much worthwhile discussion. Second, many who attended the workshop felt that the suggestions were not specific enough to apply to the individual teacher, and that therefore, although everyone got very "excited," little measurable improvement in teaching composition was gained. "More matter and less art" was a frequent request of those who attended.

Therefore, we plan to hold a second annual composition workshop this coming winter. The plans are being laid now for a two-day workshop, featuring guest participants from the mainland, the South Pacific, and Asia. We are planning to have a TESL section, featuring major names in TESL theory and practice. If you would like to help, especially if you have some specific teaching techniques to present, please contact Dr. Greg Larkin, Communications and Language Arts Division, BYU--Hawaii Campus, Laie HI 96762.

Cut here ↷

PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN THIS PORTION OF COUPON

CHECK ONE OR BOTH:

☐ *I am interested in attending the Second Annual Composition Workshop and having a pleasant summer vacation in the middle of winter as well. Please keep me posted as planning for this workshop proceeds.*

☐ *I have some ideas that I think might be worth including, and I'll send TESL Reporter a prospectus shortly.*

TESL REPORTER

A quarterly publication of the Communication and Language Arts Division of the Brigham Young University-Hawaii Campus

Editor . . . . . Alice C. Pack
Staff . . . . . William Gallagher
Greg Larkin
Ron Safsten

Articles relevant to teaching English as a Second Language may be submitted to the editor through Box 157 BYU–HC, Laie, Hawaii 96762.

SAMOA

(continued from p. 9)

There is an over used cliche in education which states, "Teachers should meet students were they are and take them to where they *ain't.*" The American Samoa Bachelor Degree Program has in a sense accomplished that–both geographically and academically. Participant American Samoa teachers have been able to continue residing in their Pacific locale, and have had the opportunity to advance toward a baccalaureate degree. (For many, this has been a life-time dream.) As one participant concluded, "I have been trying to finish my degree for years and had finally given up hope of ever doing so. If it had not been for this program, my desire would have never been realized."

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE

The Eighth Annual Conference on Applied Linguistics, sponsored by the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan, will be held on Friday, January 28 and Saturday, January 29, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

The concern of this year's conference is Reading and Language Acquisition. Featured speakers and their topics are: Wallace Chafe (University of California at Berkeley), "Comparisons between Oral and Written Discourse"; Roger Shuy (Georgetown University), "What Children's Functional Language Can Tell Us About Reading"; Allison d'Anglejan (Universite de Montreal), "Solving Problems in Deductive Reasoning: A Study of the Performance of Second Language Learners"; and Frank Smith (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), "Comprehension and Reading".

The opening session will begin at 8:00 p.m. Friday, with Professor Chafe speaking. Morning and afternoon sessions are scheduled for Saturday, with the afternoon being devoted to the topic of Reading Scientific and Technical English. This session will feature current work on the topic by Kenneth L. Pike, his students and colleagues.

For further information, write to: Joyce Zuck, Chairman, 1977 Applied Linguistics Conference, English Language Institute, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

FROM:

To: Dr. Greg Larkin
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Laie, Hawaii 96762

STAMP

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE IN READING

(continued from page 3)

There is a subtle use of an embedded negative in the second sentence that would make a good comprehension question, but it was not included. What was included was the question:

Where was the pail for the fish?

And the correct answer was, "At Bob's left side" with "At Bob's right side" as an incorrect alternative.

The location of the pail was completely unimportant to the advancement and meaning of the story. It would not have hurt the story at all - might have improved it - to have left the word "left" out altogether. A mature reader would realize this and exclude the detail from his information retention processes, since it adds a superfluous and complicating spatial dimension.

What such details do is encourage students to develop new reading strategies based on details as important fixation points. It encourages them to read backwards. Imagine the following sentences as part of a reading exercise:

> There was a hole about five feet from the tree. They buried the treasure in it.

The most neatly concrete and specific noun phrase in those sentences is "five feet," and so it is an ideal place to hang a question. So, we would not be surprised to see:

> About how far from the tree was the hole? a) three feet, b) five feet, c) eight feet, d) ten feet.

Again, the mature reader notes that "five feet" is a relational noun phrase, and exists to establish the position of the hole relative to the tree. That is, the distance, five feet, is important only in relation to the other two NP's *hole* and *tree*. Once this information has been extracted from the syntactic configuration it becomes part of the relationship and the notion of distance, especially any specific distance, would be very hard to recover.

Faced with the problem of recovering non-recoverable information, ESL students, who are not dummies, sometimes develop methods of working the exercises that are productive in terms of answers correct, but counterproductive in terms of learning to read English. Where the reader has both the text and the questions before him he sometimes reads the questions first, then searches the text for details to supply his answers. Since he is prepared for certain choices, those choices jump out at him. This is an especially effective method for timed exercises. Those students who haven't stumbled onto the backwards method cope by underlining details as they read, a form of digital subvocalization.

Please note that I am not against underlining, and not against details in prose material. Obviously, the college student will have to underline material and take notes. Just as obviously, some materials are a lot more detailed than others, and will take correspondingly longer to read. But material designed to foster the skill of reading, rather than to transmit information should flow as smoothly and painlessly as possible, and should be as spare of superfluous detail as possible.

"Discourse Structure in Reading" Part 2 will appear in the Spring, 1977, issue of The TESL REPORTER.

from the Editor . . .

AN APOLOGY

to M. Shuet Lee, author of "Pronunciation Problems Different and Similar Among Cantonese and Mandarin Speakers" in the Summer 1976 issue of the *TESL Reporter*. Inadvertently, the tone markers were left off of the Chinese examples and the ˇ 's and ˆ 's were omitted on pages 4, 5, and 6. All Chinese characters and nonstandard English characters had to be handprinted when the article was typeset and these omissions were an oversight both in the original setup and in the proof reading. Please accept the editors's apology for these errors and correct any filed copies.

Dr. Greg Larkin conducts an outdoor session with Undergraduate Students in the American Samoa Program.
(See p. 8)

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