

Indexing the *TESL Reporter*: Interview with Alice C. Pack

by James E. Ford

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*The twelve-year Index to the TESL Reporter, to be issued Summer 1979, will cover 219 articles from forty-eight past numbers. To get an idea of the background and potential of the Index, one could do no better than to discuss it with Alice Pack, TESL Reporter co-founder and its editor during the last ten years. Pack began her B.A. work after she was already several times a grandmother—and “grew up” with the field of teaching English as a second language. She helped start the BA-TESL program at BYU-HC, one of the very first such programs in the nation. Now teaching and editing on emeritus status, Pack, who is in great demand as a consultant, has published during the last twelve years seven books and over thirty articles on TESL concerns.*

Q: Since your involvement with the *TESL Reporter* dates from its beginning, if I ask the right questions, your answers should tell potential users what to expect from the forthcoming Index. First, the reportorial questions; will you tell me the who, when, and why of the journal's launching?

A: Well, William Conway and I had been going to the University of Hawaii, working on masters degrees in TESL there. He suddenly got the bright idea, “Why don't we start a journal?” There wasn't any such thing in the TESL field at all.

Q: You just saw the need?

A: Yes, and it was sort of a natural outgrowth. We already had our ELI program and at the time we were working on a TESL program.

Q: What year was that?

A: It was 1967. We printed the first issue here on the AB Dick press, black on brown; it looked pretty bad.

Q: How did you let people know the journal existed, start getting contributors?

A: We figured if we could have some big names, it would help. First there was Don Bowen, a pioneer in TESL. He and Fe R. Dacanay had just put out their early book on *Techniques and Procedures in Second Language Teaching*. We already knew Bowen, and of course Dr. Dykstra, at the University of Hawaii. Dr. Dykstra was very encouraging, thought it was a great idea. I can remember one early issue; I had no lead article and finally went to him and said, “What do you have?” He was very willing to do that kind of thing for me. And Dr. Yao Shen sent in a lot of material, but she's more in the linguistics line. Happily, over the years these authorities have been joined as contributors by others such as Ted Plaister and Virginia French Allen. I might add that we have always encouraged submissions from students.

Q: What was your specific focus? I assume it has something to do with the title you chose.

A: There wasn't anything in the field, as I said. There were scientific linguistics journals, but nothing for the teacher of English as a second language. Ours was to be for the lay teacher, with only a little bit of theory.

Q: TESL methods?

A: That's right, TESL materials and methods. Also, it was geared mainly for the Pacific Basin. Our mailing list is still 75 percent Hawaii, Guam and the South Pacific. Now of course we're also all over the world, even Russia and the People's Republic of China. Originally we had very few people on the U.S. Mainland. They have increased because of the increasing need with Vietnames refugees, Puerto Ricans in New York, and other relocations. Teachers need more and more help.

Q: What is the circulation now?

A: Well, we print three thousand issues, and possibly all but 150 go out on the subscription mailing.

Q: You mentioned that the state of TESL studies twelve years ago, when it was fairly new, was heavily linguistic. Can you give an overview of how the pages of the *TESL Reporter* have reflected developments in the TESL field?

A: Early on it was called in some places applied linguistics. The army language schools had started many of the trends in World War II. Then Charles Fries's structural grammar provided some contextual frames and the audio-lingual method was in its heyday when we started our journal. The first issues featured some comparative linguistics and simple lessons on English phonology—that was the time when teachers concentrated on teaching individual sounds in isolation, feeling that the student would put them all together. All phases of ESL teaching seemed to have that focus—fairly uncoordinated individual teaching units on specific problems, either in grammar or speech. Then along came a shift to include psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Next came the situational approach, counseling-learning and, more recently, the Silent Way. All of these approaches focus on the student's real-life needs in learning a new language. Finally, the latest method, the Notional-Functional Syllabus, takes the idea as the primary unit and considers how it should be communicated within a communication function, like asking directions or making a purchase. Where once vocabulary was largely ignored, now learning accepted vocabulary and structure within a given situational framework is primary.

In general, the trend has been from complete theory to the practical type. The *TESL Reporter*, though it reflects the changes somewhat—we have consistently reviewed major books of all types as they have appeared—has pretty much kept its focus on the practical-situational.

Q: How has the profession made use of the *TESL Reporter*?

A: We've been used in a cross-word puzzle. I mean, in the daily newsletter at the TESOL Convention two years ago, the hint for four-across was "*Reporter from Hawaii*," and the answer was "PACK." And we get some more serious use as well! We are always getting requests to reprint articles. As two instances among many, Ilyin and Tragardh's *Classroom Practices in Adult Education* has three of our articles, and we have one of four in *Nonverbal Communication*, a text of the Kyushu American Literature Society of Japan. And then we have people who are working on doctoral degrees write and request more information on something they've seen in the journal. By the way, we are happy to be able to announce that all of our issues are now available from the ERIC data base. Oh, the *TESL Reporter* is also a major source of book reviews. Ted Plaister's "Classified Bibliography of ESOL Text Reviews" [1979] shows that, of the six sources used, the *TESL Reporter* is second in total number of reviews published during the past twelve years. Most importantly, we get letters from teachers thanking us for practical help in the classroom.

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**INTERVIEW WITH ALICE C. PACK**

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- Q: The twelve-year index has just been completed and will come out this summer. Can you describe it and tell what significance you think it can have?
- A: It will be nice to have—it will be helpful to me. Previously, I have maintained various scrapbooks for reviews, classroom games, etc. I've cut up the *TESL Reporter* and categorized its contents. But that's the only sort of index I've had. Now, I will be able to use the Index for myself and to help me answer letters of inquiry on specific people and subjects we get from students and other. There will be an author and a title listing. Also, and this will be most helpful, there will be a subject section divided into thirty-five headings, from Adult Education to Writing, with such topics as Contrastive Studies, Drama in ESL, Games, and Visual Aids in between. Many articles are multiple-listed. We consulted the descriptors in the *TESOL Quarterly* Index for the sake of uniformity, but about half of the descriptors are ours alone.
- Q: Do you have any specific plans for the *TESL Reporter* in the future?
- A: Well, as sort of a companion to the Index, we are going to put out a retrospective anthology of the most significant articles of the past twelve years. The Index will be a great help to me here. Other than that, we'll just continue to do what we've been doing, with continued improvement, I hope.