



## SE Regional TESOL Conference Myrtle Beach, SC September 22-25

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Registration: [www.carolinesol.org/regional/registration.pdf](http://www.carolinesol.org/regional/registration.pdf)

Reduced-rate Application: [www.carolinesol.org/regional/reduced.pdf](http://www.carolinesol.org/regional/reduced.pdf)

Free conference flyer: [www.carolinesol.org/regional/flyer.pdf](http://www.carolinesol.org/regional/flyer.pdf)

Pre-conference Workshops: [www.carolinesol.org/regional/preconfr.pdf](http://www.carolinesol.org/regional/preconfr.pdf)

## Featured Speakers

**James J. Asher:** Creator of the *Total Physical Response (TPR)*

**Elsa Auerbach:** Theorist on critical literacy and participatory education

**Judy Gilbert:** Expert in teaching pronunciation, author of *Clear Speech*

**Dave Sperling:** Proprietor of the Internet's [Dave's ESL Café](#)

**Walt Wolfram:** Honored author, sociolinguist, and dialectician

**Myrtle Beach** [www.carolinesol.org/regional/location.pdf](http://www.carolinesol.org/regional/location.pdf)

Located on the coast of South Carolina, Myrtle Beach is one of the top vacation destinations of the US. Myrtle Beach offers the entire family fun with golf courses, water parks, amusement parks, variety shows, miniature golf, museums, fishing, and a beautiful beach. Why not bring your entire family and extend your conference stay into a full vacation?

**Hilton Kingston Plantation** [kingstonplantation.com/accommodations/hilton-myrtle-beach-resort.cfm](http://kingstonplantation.com/accommodations/hilton-myrtle-beach-resort.cfm)

We are excited to be hosting the SE Regional conference at the Hilton Myrtle Beach located in the Kingston Plantation, an award-winning resort convention facility. Kingston Plantation is not really a plantation, but rather the largest oceanfront meeting space on the east coast. For reservations at the Hilton, call 1-800-Hiltons. We have around 250 rooms there, and the cost per night is \$99 for an ocean-view room, and \$139 for a suite.

For reservations at the Embassy Suites, call 1-800--876-0100. The costs of rooms at the Embassy Suites are \$149 per night. We have only 50 rooms reserved there. ■

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

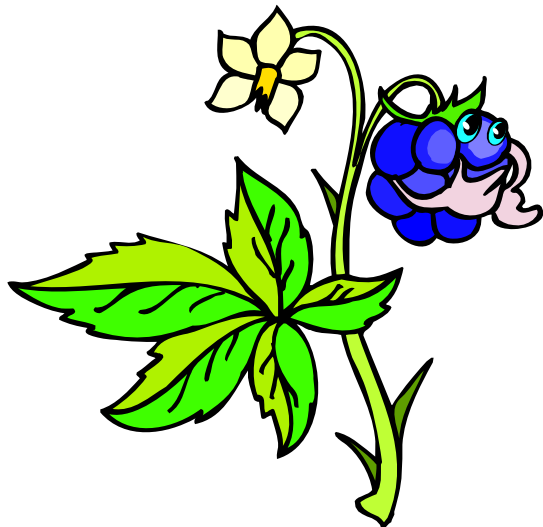
Dear TNTESOL members,

I hope this summer brings rest, recreation, and restoration for all TNTESOL members. We have faced the challenges of the 2004-2005 academic year to the best of our ability as professionals. K-12 Educators, **you are appreciated** for the hard work you have done both in administering the new CELLA test and communicating its results. University Intensive English Programs have been hard at work rebuilding post 9-11. Adult programs are facing new, diverse, and growing populations. The 2005-2006 year promises new challenges, but for the moment **let's rest and renew ourselves. You need it, you deserve it, and you will be a better teacher for it.**

### MINI-CONFERENCES

Let's remember that **TNTESOL needs recreating, too**, as we look to return in the fall (for most of us). We need to get more individuals involved professionally throughout our state. One way to focus on this is the **mini-conferences** that we listed as a priority at the spring meeting in Clarksville. The Board at its last meeting agreed to support these conferences in the areas of publicity and refreshments. Now we need some of you to pick up the ball and run with it. Please contact the education department of your college or university, local education agency, or adult education program. Tell them this support is available and **help plan a mini-workshop for ELL**. Even half-day workshops would be great. Those of us who gave program presentations will be on call to do repeat sessions in our areas. Wouldn't it be great to have TNTESOL mini-conferences in several locations throughout Tennessee this fall! TESOL always seems to come to the forefront in September and October with new immigrant populations that need serving and **classroom teachers that need retooling** for the job. That is what TNTESOL is here for, isn't it? It will take some work on our part, but it will be worth it to meet the training needs of

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## New Languages, New Challenges: There's Treasure Everywhere

Doug Blanton,  
Rhea County Schools

### Overview

The indigenous language, Mixteco, has until recently been familiar only to linguists and those concerned with the ethnic and economic conflicts in Mexico. Two child-custody cases in Lebanon, Tennessee, though, have now focused American public attention on Mixteco. These two cases received national attention when a judge ordered two Mixteco-speaking women from southern Mexico to learn English as one of several conditions that would determine the custody of their children. The judge ordered, in part: "The court specially informs the mother that if she does not make the effort to learn English, she is running the risk of losing any connection – legally, morally, and physically – with her daughter forever."

These cases were more complex than they appeared in some of the news articles, and, to be fair to the judge, language was not the only issue. For teachers, though, two very important things stand out. First, not everyone from Mexico speaks Spanish, and second, a significant percentage of Tennessee's migrant and ESL populations have Mixteco – not Spanish – as their L1 (mother tongue). Four hundred of 1200 foreign-born migrant workers in the Lebanon, TN, area speak an indigenous Mexican language (usually Mixteco), and there are an increasing number of Mixteco speakers working in agriculture, poultry processing, and manufacturing jobs in Tennessee and other states.

My attention was focused on Mixteco when I began teaching ESL in Rhea County at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year after working in Central Asia for a number of years. I was somewhat sad when I returned to the United States because, although I am not a very good language learner, I had enjoyed learning some Uzbeki and Farsi, and I knew I would miss the stimulation of the exotic cultures of the region. I was fortunate that I soon found another linguistic treasure in a much unexpected place: Rhea County, Tennessee.

Within a few days of the beginning of the school year, I realized that I was encountering a language that I had never heard before. A number of the ELLs would speak to each other only in whispers, and were careful not to allow anyone else – teachers or students – to hear them. I further noticed that on the home-language surveys, "Mixteco" often appeared as the first language learned, or as the language spoken in the home. One day, I asked one of the older Mixteco students who was also fluent in English and Spanish to interpret for me, and I was astounded by the eerie musical cadence I was

hearing. That night I zipped an email off to a linguist friend of mine that I had worked with in Uzbekistan and asked him, "What in the world is Mixteco?"

He replied that Mixteco is a pre-Columbian Native American group of tonal languages that form the largest sub-group of the Oto-Manguean language family. The tonal aspects of the language are crucially important – a change in pitch can completely change the meaning of a word. For example, *kumi* can mean "I have" or "four" depending on the pitch. I asked a native speaker to say "I have four dogs" quite a few times in order to hear the difference. (*Kumi* is a tentative transcription and does not include the tone markers.) Oto-Manguean languages can have up to five contrastive tones so that any word (sound cluster) can potentially have five meanings according to the pitch used.

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*President, continued from page 2*

Tennessee educators and to bring new faces to TNTESOL.

Well, that's something to think about as you **sit under the beach umbrella!** And if you want to extend that period of refreshment and recreation on into September 23-25, remember the SETESOL meeting at **MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA!** To receive the basic rate with no late fees, register by August 15. I hope to see our winning Tennessee presenters there! Make your plans. Summer doesn't have to be over after Labor Day if you don't want it to be!

Speaking of winning Tennessee presenters, this year when you complete your presentation proposal for TNTESOL, there will be a way to indicate whether you would like for your presentation to be evaluated for possible International TESOL presentation as well as for SETESOL presentation. It's time for you to start thinking about what you do best and how you can share that specialty with others. This fall, start keeping documentation and student work and get a great presentation ready for Gatlinburg. Remember **you don't have to go solo!** Get some of the other great teachers from your system to help you present.

Well, that's plenty to keep my imagination busy as I sit in my blue and white striped cabana on the beach (in my dreams!). Again, I hope you have a beautiful, restful summer and come back ready to go strong again this fall!

Please write if you have any comments, or just to let me know how **your** summer is going!

**Bye!**  
Beverly Hearn  
([LHearn@charter.net](mailto:LHearn@charter.net))



*Treasure, continued from page 3*

It is almost as important to say what Mixteco *is not* as well as what *it is*. Mixteco is *not* a dialect of Spanish and is in fact radically different from Spanish in structure. Mixteco is not one unified language, but has more than 40 variants, some as different as the related but different romance languages French, Portuguese, and Italian. Mixteco is sometimes subdivided into Mixteco Alto and Mixteco Bajo, after two of the main areas in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca State in southern Mexico.

**Implications for Instruction**

- Mixteco is a tonal language with different phonemes from English or Spanish. Reading research puts phonemic awareness at the top or near the top of the list of predictors for reading success. While phonemic awareness is not necessarily causal in learning to read, it is a factor to be considered when planning instruction. An excellent way to help an ELL “hear” the phonemes of English is to read simple picture books with the student for significant amounts of time.
- Be careful that the L1 of students is identified. It is an understandable assumption that people from Mexico speak Spanish, but that is not always the case. Three summers ago, a colleague of mine observed a newly-arrived sixth-grade Mixteco student being berated in Spanish for not returning a library book. The child had no idea what was going on. He had never been to school in Mexico and thus did not speak Spanish. He had moved from place to place all of his life and had only a limited oral Mixteco vocabulary – and nothing else. He has been in the same school now for three years and his progress is very gratifying, although he still has far to go. In Rhea County, we use a Mini-Language Evaluation for new students, which does three things. First, it identifies their L1. Second, it identifies the languages the students are literate in and an approximate reading level in that language. Third, we try to determine the level of previous schooling. We have a number of Mixteco students who went to school in Mexico before coming here, and they are literate in Spanish and often well-educated in content areas.
- It is important to note that I have never met an adult Mixteco man who does not speak at least some Spanish, although many of the men are non-literate. Spanish is of course used in the Mixteca region of Mexico as the government language, as well as the language of trade, so men must be proficient enough in Spanish to function in the society. On the other hand, it is not unusual for Mixteco women and children to be monolingual. Because most adult male Mixteco speakers speak Spanish, it is still

- useful to use Spanish-speaking staff for parent conferences and other parental communications. One problem in using Mixteco-speaking staff members would be that their Mixteco variant may be significantly different from that of the student and make accurate interpretation impossible.
- Learn about and be sensitive to conflict paradigms that the students may have experienced in Mexico. There are often tensions between Spanish speakers and Mixteco speakers that are a result of ethnic and economic conflicts in Mexico. Indigenous people in Mexico have often lived in extreme poverty and have been subject to discrimination in many forms, sometimes resulting in periods of violence and minor rebellions. In my first year in Rhea County, the Mixteco students and the Spanish speakers would not interact, but now they have become friends. One key to reconciling the two groups was when two eighth-grade Spanish-speaking girls went out of their way to be friendly and inclusive to a seventh-grade Mixteco girl. The seventh-grader had been extremely shy and had a very large chip on her shoulder, but this friendship helped her greatly, both socially and in learning English. In general, the Mixteco speakers and Spanish-speakers are now friendly to each other and eat lunch together, etc. It has been encouraging to see genuinely caring students in contrast to the bullying that has sometimes occurred.
- Create a high-context, comprehensible English environment at a level appropriate for the individual learner. This objective can be achieved with books, films, various ESL teaching strategies, and personal interaction. Don’t forget that it is very easy for a non-English speaker to “tune out” all the English around him or her as a way to deal with culture shock and language stress. I did so when I worked overseas and I’ve seen it in several of my current students. This tuning-out is why simple immersion in English does not guarantee progress in learning the language. On the other hand, systematically teaching basic social and academic

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

**2006 TN TESOL Conference: Gatlinburg,**  
April 27-29, at the Park Vista Hotel & Resort

**ADDRESS CHANGE?**

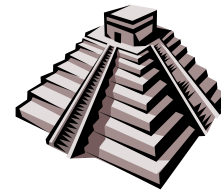
If you mailing address changes, please notify Lee Martin, *TNTESOL Newsletter* editor:  
[lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu)

- English as used by students and teachers will enable ELLs to begin to learn by context the English they are immersed in. This way the overall English context of the school setting works in the ELL's favor. Once the ELL begins participating in class at even the most limited level, he is on his way to proficiency.
- Value the language and background of the ELL. One thing I did was to find the personal web pages of Mixteco interpreters in California and show them to our students as role models. One of the interpreters emailed us, which, of course, impressed the students. Another thing that we are doing is what we call *The Mixteco Project*. Linguistic students from nearby Bryan College are working with some of the older Mixteco students to learn and describe their particular variant of Mixteco. Of course, the high value we place on Mixteco is the opposite of what the students experienced in Mexico. Now, instead of denying that they speak Mixteco and whispering to each other, they are proud to share their linguistic treasure with us. This new attitude is an enormous boost to their self-confidence.

Mixtecan languages, including numbers of speakers and location. See [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) for the online version. Consult a good introductory linguistics textbook for a basic description of tonal languages.

Because of the large Mixteco population in California, there are lists available there of indigenous interpreters. See <http://www.laneta.apc.org/fiob/interpretes.html> for one example. Here the interpreters classify their Mixteco as Mixteco Bajo or Mixteco Alto.

I love the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip. See Bill Watterson, *There's Treasure Everywhere*, Kansas City: Universal Press Syndicate, 1996. Hopefully, I do not remind my friends of another Watterson book, *Weirdos From Another Planet*, Kansas City, Universal Press Syndicate, 1990.



**Conclusion**

I feel very fortunate indeed to work for the Rhea County Department of Education in a very stimulating linguistic and academic environment. The teachers and administrators here have been unusually helpful in arranging the logistics of scheduling instruction in multiple schools, and are genuinely interested in the welfare of all of their students. It has also been great to have Bryan College nearby. I have used Bryan College education and linguistics students as tutors, instructional aides, interpreters, and student teachers. Basically, utilizing the Bryan College students has enabled me to arrange the additional instructional time that ELLs so badly need. Finally, the Rhea County central office administrators and staff have done an excellent job in arranging funding for instructional materials and equipment, and have provided much-needed behind-the-scenes support to the ESL program. I am a little bit like the comic strip characters Calvin and Hobbes: If you look for it, "There's Treasure Everywhere."

**Notes on Sources**

Multiple articles about the child-custody cases in Lebanon, TN, are easily found on the internet. I used mainly FoxNews, 2-26-2005 and the Los Angeles Times, 2-14-2005. A follow-up article appeared 6-8-2005 in the Tennessean (Nashville).

Most of the linguistic information came from the Summer Institute of Linguistics. See <http://www.sil.org/mexico/mixteca/00i-mixteca.htm> and follow the links. SIL's *Ethnologue* is a monumental work in progress and contains brief descriptions of more than 40

**TN TESOL** is an active and vital organization and we encourage and promote all TESOL professionals. If you know someone who would be interested, please let us know. We look forward to hearing from you.

The **TN TESOL Newsletter** is published four times a year. Submissions are accepted on a variety of topics. We welcome book reviews, issues in the fields of K-12, Refugee ESL, Adult Ed, Higher ED and more, as well as articles on teaching strategies, news related to TNTESOL or the field, jokes, classroom anecdotes, even recipes. The style for submissions can be informal and articles are typically 500 words. Of course, exceptions can be made! A bibliography is not necessary unless the article is research-based.

Send your ideas via e-mail, an attachment, and your personal information by the issue deadline to Lee Martin, [lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lee.martin@vanderbilt.edu).

**Publication dates**

- October 2005
- January 2006
- May 2006
- July 2006

**Deadlines**

- September 15
- December 15
- April 15
- June 15

## Book review

### **Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching, Keith S. Folse (2004)**

Jim Cracraft  
Vanderbilt University

Here's a TRUE/FALSE quiz for language teachers:

- Using word lists to learn second-language vocabulary is unproductive.
- Guessing words from context is an excellent strategy for learning L2 vocabulary.
- The use of translations to learn new vocabulary should be discouraged.
- The best dictionary for second language learners is a monolingual dictionary.

If you answered TRUE to any of the above, you may want to read Keith S. Folse's book, *Vocabulary Myths*. These are four of the maddeningly reasonable-sounding "myths" that Folse tries to dispel in his latest book. I must admit that the book's title led me to skip right over the Dedication, Preface, and Acknowledgements and go directly to the tantalizing table of contents: all eight myths laid out in plain English. These are ALL false? Hmm. Given that I had bought into several of these myths, I had to keep reading.

Written primarily for ESL/EFL teachers working with adult learners, *Vocabulary Myths* is an analysis of 8 commonly held beliefs about vocabulary teaching/learning in a second language. Folse devotes one chapter to each myth, first relaying (mostly his own) real word experiences with vocabulary teaching and learning and then moving on to what the research says, and finally providing practical tips in the *What you can do* section that concludes each chapter.

Many of the myths seem to be part of the communicative approach "package" that teachers automatically subscribe to without a second thought. Providing learners with "comprehensible input" is certainly important, but doing so has given teachers a false sense of how much vocabulary is actually being understood and acquired by their students. As the audio-lingual method fell out of favor and the communicative approach was embraced in our field, vocabulary was one of the casualties. Even more than other areas, though, vocabulary is absolutely crucial for communication. A 1972 article that Folse quotes summarizes the situation well: "While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed."

Regardless of your students' proficiency level, most will rightly share a belief that in every skill area, vocabulary is one of the biggest keys to mastering English and lack of vocabulary is among their greatest problems. But what are the best strategies for teaching vocabulary? What kinds of activities and techniques will best facilitate the acquisition of



vocabulary? How do students like to learn vocabulary? Although, he does not have a definitive answer for each, these are some of the questions that Folse tackles in *Vocabulary Myths*.

Folse shares many memorable and amusing anecdotes in the conversational "real world" section that opens each chapter. These stories illustrate various points nicely, but there are some sections where I can't help but feel that Folse relies too heavily on anecdotal evidence to debunk the myth in question. In addition, the research that he summarizes doesn't always convince me that the myth really is a myth. For example, research clearly shows that it is better to present new vocabulary in thematic sets rather than in semantic sets. But the "words" in the studies he cites were all nonsense words; there were no studies with actual English words. Admittedly, there is still more research to be done, but until that time I think that the jury may still be out on several of the myths.

To conclude, *Vocabulary Myths* is clearly written and well organized and would be a helpful resource for any second language teacher. The "what the research says" section of each chapter is quite thorough and the 17-page "works cited" section provides an exhaustive list of references on vocabulary learning and teaching from the 1970s through the present.

The book can be read straight through, but the chapters are all non-sequential and fairly self-contained, and a teacher might want to focus on a particular myth/belief that s/he holds and see what the research says about it. Whether or not you make any major changes to the way you teach, at the very least, *Vocabulary Myths* will probably cause you to examine or reexamine how you approach vocabulary in the classroom. ■

## WEBSITE of Interest

Ready-to-use EFL/ESL lesson plans based on current affairs.

Graded news articles, listenings and communicative activities uploaded daily.

<http://www.BreakingNewsEnglish.com/>

by Sean Banville

## **WILLIE NELSON AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT...**

Beverly Hearn  
TNTESOL President

I can just hear Willie droning out that old song, in his mellow monotone: "If you've got the money, honey, I've got the time..." Well, it could be just the opposite with TNTESOL.

If you would like to attend a professional meeting, be it state, regional, or international, and if you have the time, but are **in need of financial assistance** to meet your professional goal, then TNTESOL might be a source of either partial or full financial support.

We do have **funds available** in the **Gundi Fund** to support TNTESOL members' professional development. The Board of Directors' next meeting will be **November 19, 2005**; that would be the **time to apply** for spring TNTESOL in Gatlinburg or International TESOL in Tampa. If your proposal is approved, you will be reimbursed at the approved level upon presentation of the appropriate receipts.

To apply for the Gundi professional funds, write a letter to the TNTESOL Board of Directors c/o Sandra Baker, Secretary, well in advance of the proposed event. Explain the meeting, event, or seminar you would like to attend, your area of need, the expected benefits, your other sources of financing, and the amount that you need for TNTESOL to subsidize. You will be notified whether your request is approved after the board meeting in November.

On a similar note, at its last meeting, the Board adopted a **reduced student conference fee of \$25.00**. This lower conference rate will be available to full-time college and university students upon presentation of a **letter** from a University official **documenting full-time student status** during the semester the conference is held. Please **share this new policy** with college and university faculty members who come in contact with full-time students who might wish to attend our spring conference in Gatlinburg.

Now you have a source for the money; **it's up to you** to find the **time!** ■

## **WEBSITE of Interest**

NCELA's **free** email news bulletins will keep you up-to-date on important issues relating to the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students in the United States. E-News information is synthesized from a variety of sources by the NCELA InFormation Analyst staff.

Our weekly **OELA Newsline** contains timely information on:

- ★ No Child Left Behind Update
- ★ News in the Nation
- ★ Research Publications and Resources
- ★ Education Conferences
- ★ Education opportunities
- ★ Job opportunities

## **PREVIEW**

### **TNTESOL 2006 in Gatlinburg!**



The conference will be at the Park Vista Hotel in Gatlinburg from **April 27th-29th**. It will begin with the Welcome Time on Thursday evening and end with the noon luncheon on Saturday. The theme for the conference is: **"Vistas and Visions for TNTESOL"**. The following individuals have agreed to speak at the conference.

**Judi Haynes** – author and co-author of four books on helping classroom teachers. She has a popular ESL Website for ESL Teachers-'Everything ESL.net'. Judi will be one of the main speakers and will also do a workshop. Judi has taught ESL for 24 years.

**Rebecca Oxford** – currently a professor in Second Language Education at the University of Maryland. Dr. Oxford is a well-known author, researcher, and speaker at national and international conferences. Much of her research and writing has focused on learning strategies and learning styles. She will be our other main speaker and has also agreed to do a workshop for us.

**Christy Crouse** – Regional Director for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This has been one of Dolly Parton's focuses in improving education in East Tennessee. It has grown over the years to include the rest of the state and has also expanded to other parts of the country. Ms. Crouse will be speaking about this special program to our teachers. ■

Then, head south?

*Sunshine State TESOL  
of Florida*



*Your Gateway to  
Teaching English as a  
Second Language in  
Florida*

29th Annual Conference --April 28-30, 2005--  
Hyatt Regency-Orlando Airport, Orlando.

## Phonology: Worth the Bother?"

David Crowe

MATESL graduate, Carson-Newman College

Why should anyone ever bother with phonology at all? Probably few ESL teachers, and even fewer of their students, have ever asked this question. Most likely it is because they have never even heard the term "phonology" or why one might consider engaging such a subject. Those among teachers who may have heard about it may not have a full understanding of the subject and may not possess a strong visualization for how it should be manifested in the classroom. But what happens when the learning experiences meet the real demands of the world outside the classroom? Often the English preparation does not match the English demands in the real world. These same teachers and students quickly begin to notice a need for some "Great Enigma" that would finally cause English to serve all their language needs just as their first language did. The Great Enigma is phonology.

To begin with, why should any educator bother with phonology at all? Consider the well-educated student who presented a report among colleagues (Morley, 1987). While speaking about the field of civil engineering, he describes the effects of "suit particles" rather than "soot particles." Though similar in spelling, the "ui" sound in "suit" produced a word of far different meaning from the "oo" sound in "soot." Since the "oo" spelling in "boot" matches the spelling of the "oo" in "soot", should "soot" not be pronounced the same as in "boot?" All this seems perfectly logical in the student's mind. However, regardless of what the student thinks, listeners miss the intended meaning because of the mispronounced vowel (Gilbert, 1987). The first and greatest of all arguments for phonology is stark: understanding is communication (Celce-Muria, 1987). If teachers want to empower their students to communicate effectively through the medium of English, then phonology is the key for oral understanding and comprehensibility.

Successful teaching of phonology requires teaching material to hold more than mere segmentals; it must include all suprasegmentals: intonation, rhythm, stress, deletion, reduction, and linking. These external components of language give a far greater feel of the essence of native-like speech – even more than phonetically correct words. In fact, suprasegmentals from the second language are so important that it is more productive to teach them before segmentals. If suprasegmentals are not taught first as the student learns the second language, then the suprasegmentals from the first language will pull the individual sounds and words of the second language back toward the suprasegmental pattern of the first language (Stern, 1995).

A second part of a phonological curriculum should include effective oral evaluations for the speaking skills taught in class. Though judging speech can often be subjective, it does not have to be a vague and unguided endeavor. A general rubric can give focus to what things should be

scrutinized in speaking (Stern, 1995). This rubric is based on how a native would react to a non-native's speech. A) Does it sound foreign or native-like? B) Is it easy or difficult to understand? C) Is the speaker's attitude on the subject clear or unclear? D) How likely or unlikely would the native be to continue listening? E) How likely or unlikely would the native be to seek out a conversation with the speaker again (Stern, 1995)? Through using evaluative techniques like this, instructors must endeavor more to help students to overcome the social distance in conversation that can result from an unfamiliar sounding and mentally straining accent.

A third phonological assumption for a curriculum is that teachers need to get to know their students as much as possible. Pre-classroom evaluation can help teachers know students' backgrounds. This in turn can aid on how to adapt phonology to meet particular needs (Wong, 1987). Knowing about such things as their first language, whether or not they have had native or non-native teachers, their exposure to authentic English, or whether they have had communicative opportunities can greatly assist student assessments.

Why, then, should anyone bother with phonology at all? Teachers must learn from their ineffective teaching from the past and modify it for today. Students must accept that oral English is as essential as grammar or writing in international relations and commerce, and then they must seek oral instruction that includes phonology. It has been said that if one keeps doing the same thing in the same way, then one can only expect the same results. What are the results that a true teacher should expect in later student performance? What should a student expect from his or her language instruction? The answer is the same for both questions: successful performance. If there is anything less than success, then more of the same teaching in the same way will simply produce the same unsuccessful results. Can students meet the demands of being an international link in their future jobs without clear English expression? Surely the answer is no. Consequently, teachers must create an urgent demand for more phonological teaching methods and classroom materials from researchers and publishers. Learners, as well, must realize that what they say is only as effective as its comprehension by the listener and its verbal "appearance" in its presentation.

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## Assessing Oral Language Skills: Is it Possible?

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If our goal is to improve communication skills among our students then assessment of each student's oral communication skills is not optional but a necessity requiring frequent evaluation. It is through the skills of speaking and listening, that direct communication takes place. One of the most difficult challenges of communicative testing has been the construction of practical, reliable, and valid tests of oral production ability. For teachers in ESL/EFL classes there are three challenges concerning oral assessments. They are **making time, selecting assessment activities, and determining evaluation criteria**. Most teachers do not generally assess oral language on a continuing ongoing basis. They either cannot find the time or do not have procedures for assessing oral ability.

**What are some of the reasons why speaking tests seem so challenging to the teacher?** One reason is

that the nature of the speaking skill is not usually well-defined. There is also disagreement on what criteria to use in evaluating oral communication. Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are listed as parts of an oral assessment but how do you evaluate fluency and appropriateness of expressions. Do we look for quickness of response, amount of information conveyed per minute, or simply a general impression of fluency? Other concerns related to the testing of speaking include how to get students to speak and how to evaluate so many things at once. There is also the practical problem of having to test each student individually.

According to O'Malley and Pierce (1996), the oral language of English learners is typically assessed for one of three purposes:

1. Initial identification and placement of students
2. For movement from level to level within a program
3. For placement out of a program

O'Malley and Pierce suggest that oral language assessment is rarely used to monitor growth in oral language proficiency in the classroom, either for diagnosis or instructional planning. However; oral language assessment is a necessity

*Continued on page 10*

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*Assessment, continued from page 9*

if we are to assemble a complete profile of each student's language proficiency.

### Developing Rubrics/Scoring Procedures

Once you have determined your purpose for assessment, then setting the criteria of an oral language assessment is crucial; without criteria or standards all you have is just a collection of instructional activities (Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters, 1992). It is important to set criterion levels of performance by designing a scoring rubric, a rating scale, or checklist. If you are not comfortable in developing a rubric, begin by using a **model rubric or scale** and revise it to reflect your instructional objectives.

In developing tasks for oral language assessment, teachers can evaluate activities using the following as adapted from Richards (1983).

1. Content validity-Does the assessment measure listening comprehension, speaking, or something else? Have activities been used as part of instruction?
2. Task validity-does the tasks evaluate listening comprehension or speaking, or does memory play a significant role?
3. Purposefulness and transferability-Does the assessment task reflect a purpose for listening that approximates authentic real-life listening or speaking?
4. Authenticity-To what degree does the assessment measure actual spoken language?

### Oral Interviews: Getting Students to Talk

How do you get students to talk? Oral interviews can be conducted with individuals or pairs at all levels of language proficiency and require no preparation on the part of the student. In a classroom setting, interviews can take the form of discussions or conversations with the teacher or other students. Interviews can be used to elicit the following language functions: describing, giving information, or giving an opinion. To prepare to interview individual students, you will want to prepare a list of guiding questions or tasks. These tasks or questions should be appropriate for the level of your students, should reflect students' interests and classroom activities, and avoid cultural bias. Some examples of performance tasks to check for in an oral interview suggested by Underhill (1987) are:

- use **courtesy formulas**? (Greet the student and evaluate his or her response, or ask the student: *What do you say when you meet someone for the first time? or What do you say when you hurt someone by mistake or accident?*)
- ask **simple information questions**? (Ask the student: *What questions do you have for me? or How can I help you?*)

- describe a **series of events** in the past? (Ask the student: *What did you do yesterday, from morning until night? or Tell me about last weekend, beginning with Friday night.*)
- produce a **smooth stream of speech**? (Tell the student: *I want you to talk as long as you can without stopping. Now can you tell me about.....? (family, vacation, etc.)*)

In conclusion, assessing ESL students' oral proficiency skills continues to be a challenge for most classroom teachers. Using some basic principles teachers can create and develop excellent oral assessment tools. Developing and using oral language assessment techniques is crucial to developing students with proficient communication skills.

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## English Must Be Difficult.....

*(For your amusement.)*

In a Tokyo Hotel:  
IS FORBIDDEN TO STEAL HOTEL TOWELS PLEASE.  
IF YOU ARE NOT A PERSON TO DO SUCH THING IS  
PLEASE NOT TO READ NOTIS.

In a Leipzig elevator:  
DO NOT ENTER THE LIFT BACKWARDS, AND ONLY  
WHEN LIT UP.

Instructions in a Belgrade elevator:  
TO MOVE THE CABIN, PUSH BUTTON FOR WISHING  
FLOOR. IF THE CABIN SHOULD ENTER MORE  
PERSONS, EACH ONE SHOULD PRESS A NUMBER  
OF WISHING FLOOR. DRIVING IS THEN GOING  
ALPHABETICALLY BY NATIONAL ORDER.

A sign in a Bucharest hotel lobby:  
THE LIFT IS BEING FIXED FOR THE NEXT DAY.  
DURING THAT TIME WE REGRET THAT YOU WILL  
BE UNBEARABLE.

In a Paris hotel elevator:  
PLEASE LEAVE YOUR VALUES AT THE FRONT  
DESK.

Sign in a hotel in Athens:  
VISITORS ARE EXPECTED TO COMPLAIN AT THE  
OFFICE BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 9 AND 11 AM  
DAILY.

In the lobby of a Moscow hotel across the street from a  
Russian Orthodox monastery:  
YOU ARE WELCOME TO VISIT THE CEMETERY  
WHERE FAMOUS RUSSIAN AND SOVIET  
COMPOSERS, ARTISTS AND WRITERS ARE BURIED  
DAILY EXCEPT THURSDAY.

On the menu of a Swiss restaurant:  
OUR WINES LEAVE YOU NOTHING TO HOPE FOR.

On the menu of a Polish hotel:  
SALAD A FIRM'S OWN MAKE  
LIMPID RED BEET SOUP WITH CHEESY DUMPLINGS  
IN THE FORM OF A FINGER  
ROASTED DUCK LET LOOSE  
BEEF RASHERS BEATEN UP IN THE COUNTRY  
PEOPLE'S FASHION

Outside a Hong Kong tailor shop:  
LADIES MAY HAVE A FIT UPSTAIRS.

In a Bangkok dry cleaners:  
DROP YOUR TROUSERS HERE FOR BEST RESULTS.

In a Rhodes tailor shop:  
ORDER YOUR SUMMERS SUIT. BECAUSE IS BIG  
RUSH WE WILL EXECUTE CUSTOMERS IN STRICT  
ROTATION.

On the box of a clockwork toy made in Hong Kong:  
GUARANTEED TO WORK THROUGHOUT ITS USEFUL  
LIFE.

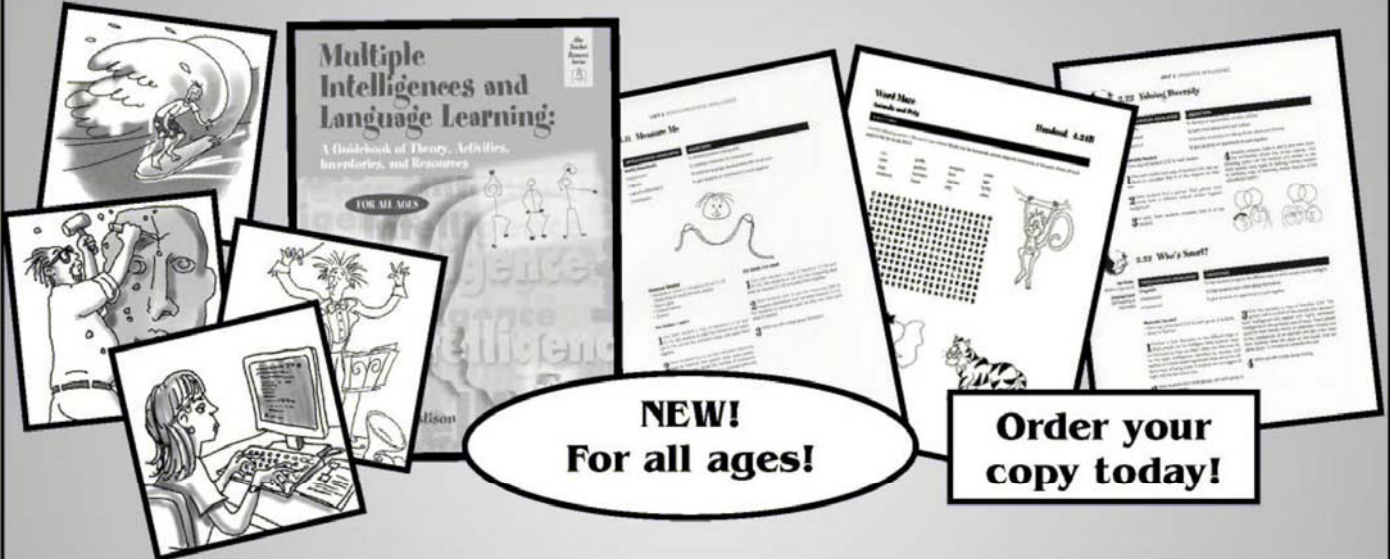
From the Soviet Weekly:  
THERE WILL BE A MOSCOW EXHIBITION OF ARTS BY  
150,000 SOVIET REPUBLIC PAINTERS AND  
SCULPTORS. THESE WERE EXECUTED OVER THE  
PAST TWO YEARS.

In an Acapulco hotel:  
THE MANAGER HAS PERSONALLY PASSED ALL THE  
WATER SERVED HERE.



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