

# FELT Newsletter

The Forum for English Language Teachers in Ireland

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## RELSA & MEI vote to Merge

On Wednesday 26th last, a fundamental change took place in the structure of the Irish EFL industry - the AGMs of both the Recognised English Language Schools Association and Marketing English in Ireland voted to merge their associations. The results were 52 In favour, & 1 Against.

The new merged association will come in to being in the New Year and will take the form of a Limited Company. As well as the main Board of Directors, there will be six sub-committees - Quality & Standards, Education & Training, Government Liaison, Industry Liaison, Technology and, of course, Marketing.

The Education & Training sub-committee is to be particularly welcomed, as it is a ready-made forum for teachers to participate in this new organisation. We hope that they will be recommending further professional development for teachers, and will look at teachers' conditions and pay in light of the shortage of teachers being experienced by RELSA members at the moment.

FELT looks forward to working constructively with the new RELSA/MEI, both at ACELS and in other forums, in trying to ensure a just and quality oriented EFL sector in Ireland.

## IATEFL is coming to Dublin!

### Do you know what IATEFL is? Adrian Underhill explains...

IATEFL is the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. It has 4000 full-members world-wide and 75 associated teachers' organisations. It is essentially a huge network linking individuals, schools and associations at local, national and international level. Members of IATEFL include classroom teachers, trainers, academic directors, school managers, university teachers and authors, who join to keep in touch with current developments in all of the interest areas and feeder fields of ELT, and to have contact with people with similar interests in other places. Membership opens pathways to continuing professional development across a wide range of ELT specialisation, and through all sorts of avenues.

### Conferences

The annual IATEFL conference attracts up to 1500 participants who come to enjoy not only the huge range of talks, workshops and plenary sessions, but also the special interest group activities, the exhibition, the job shop, the pre-conference events, the social programme and the networking. The next annual conference will be in Dublin on March 27<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> 2000. There are also many local events organised by interest groups and local teacher associations in many countries around the world.

### Special Interest Groups

There are 14 SIGs, each focussing on a key current area of interest: Business English, Teacher Training, Computers, ELT Management, ESP, Global Issues, Learner Independence, Literature & Cultural Studies, Pronunciation, Research, Teacher Development, Testing, Evaluation & Assessment, Media, and Young Learners.

These SIGs are networks of people and activities working locally, nationally and internationally. They organise events in many countries, sometimes in co-operation with local associations or schools. They each produce 3 Newsletters per year. The Special Interest Groups hold a joint conference at which all of them are represented every two years. The next is in Madrid in 2000.

### Participation

For more information about IATEFL membership and how to participate in the Dublin Conference, contact IATEFL, 3 Kingsdown Chambers, Kingsdown Park, Whitstable Kent CT5 2DJ, or by e-mail at [iatefl@compuserve.com](mailto:iatefl@compuserve.com) or visit our Web-site at <http://www.iatefl.org>. So don't delay - our Dublin conference is only a few months away! See you there!

**Adrian Underhill, IATEFL President**

**Of course, FELT will be keeping you up to date on all these issues and we are investigating Associate Membership for FELT members. Closing date for abstracts of papers and presentations will be in September, though you won't have to book a place at the conference until closer to Christmas. A copy of the Pre-Conference booklet and a Speaker Proposal Form are included with this issue of the FELT Newsletter - Ed.**

## Improving Teacher-Student Interaction in the EFL Classroom: A Report on Japanese Learners

Jonathan Snell  
Toyo Eiwa College (Tokyo, Japan)

A common problem for EFL teachers is dealing with a passive class, where students are unresponsive and avoid interaction with the teacher. This is especially true when a teacher seeks interaction in a teacher-class dialogue, such as asking questions to the class as a whole, expecting at least one student to respond. This can be a frustrating experience for both parties. Obviously, there will be times when no student can answer a teacher's question, but often students do not answer even if they understand the question, know the answer and are able to produce the answer. Furthermore, students can often be very reluctant to give feedback or ask the teacher a question in front of the class. This action research project attempted to explore this problem and sought to create a more interactive teacher-class interchange in one class of Japanese adult English learners.

### Action Research Defined

Action research is concerned with trying to improve one specific point in a teacher's technique in a particular classroom using empirical measurement. Richards, Platt & Platt (1992) have defined it as:

"teacher-initiated classroom research which seeks to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning and to bring about improvements in classroom practices. Action research typically involves small-scale investigative projects in the teacher's own classroom. This usually includes having an observer collect data, and together with the teacher develop a plan to bring about the desired change, act on the plan, and then observe the effects of the plan in the classroom."

### Class Description

The class observed was a group of twenty-three sophomores majoring in Japanese at a small private Tokyo women's college. The teacher was an American male with several years teaching experience at Japanese universities. The goal of this required class is to teach the students basic English conversation, reading, listening and writing skills. Their English ability level ranged from upper beginner to intermediate. During the observation period, the students appeared motivated and attentive, and they seemed to be enjoying the class.

### Problem Identification

The students, as a class, didn't respond voluntarily to the instructor's questions and did not participate in class discussions. Students also never asked the teacher questions outside one-on-one situations. Thus the teacher received little oral feedback. According to the teacher:

Most of the class members sit looking straight ahead using minimal facial expressions, gestures and verbal utterances. What I want is for the students to be more demonstrative and more overtly communicative in their feedback. I want these behaviours: I want the students to ask questions, make comments and to respond with nods and shakes of the head, with sounds of agreement or sounds of understanding. Also, I want them to be both reactive and proactive.

### Preliminary Investigation

I observed the teacher's class in the fourth week of the semester. In the first 45 minutes, the class went through an intermediate level taped dialogue. The students first listened to the tape with their books closed, then again with the books opened. Next, they did a dictation exercise consisting of 25 short sentences based on the dialogue. The teacher then talked about the sociolinguistic and grammar points of the exercise and went on to probe for comprehension:

T: Any questions? Do you understand everything?

Ss: (no one responds)

T: Okay, how many people were speaking?

Ss: (no response)

T: How many people were speaking?

Ss: (no response)

T: There were two. Two people. Were they friends or strangers?

Ss: (no response)

The teacher asked a few other questions which also drew no response or reaction from the students. The students then had to answer some questions about the conversation in their book. Most of the students seemed to have little trouble doing this, and if there were any questions, they readily asked the student sitting next to them.

The second half of the class was devoted to pair work using the phrases and vocabulary from the taped dialogue in role play. The students seemed to enjoy this, and most tried to create their own dialogues. The teacher circulated the room checking on the progress of each pair. The class atmosphere was markedly different from the first half of the class, with chatter and occasional laughter filling the air. The students answered most of the teacher's questions with alacrity, and some even asked their own questions.

### Hypothesis

Because the students seemed to generally understand the teacher's questions, it was felt that there was something else that kept the students from responding voluntarily in the class-teacher dialogues. Since most Japanese students are taught to listen and not to question a teacher in class, Japanese students have little or no experience of in-class interaction with the teacher, such as questioning or commenting or giving feedback. Students are usually taught to be quiet and respectfully listen to the teacher.

By teaching the students that class interaction with the English teacher is not only acceptable, but normal, useful and beneficial, it was believed that the students would become more interactive with the teacher in teacher-class interaction.

## Plan Intervention

Following the hypothesis, two steps were taken to implement a plan:

First, on the following class, the teacher distributed an explanatory paragraph about "rules" for asking questions in class in English speaking countries. The teacher made an exercise out of it and had students read the paragraph out loud to the class and explained a few difficult words and spent additional time expanding on the text. The "rules" were extrapolated from a culture point in Helgesen & Brown (1994) and were as follows:

Each culture has different "rules" about how students should act in the classroom. In some countries, students are expected to listen and only the teacher should lecture or talk in class. But in English-speaking countries (and in English class), it is good, and important, to answer the teacher's questions and interrupt with questions of your own. It means that you are interested and paying attention. In English, it is your job to ask questions if you don't understand. (p.3)

The teacher went on to say that if they still felt uncomfortable asking and answering questions, they had to at least nod or shake their head as a response to the teacher's questions.

Secondly, the teacher reminded the students of the "rules" at the beginning of each subsequent class and further encouraged them to become more active in the class when the instructor was talking.

## Outcome

In the eighth week of the semester, the class was observed again. A lesson similar to the one in the fourth week was presented. At the beginning, the instructor reminded the class of the "rules." After playing the taped dialogue twice, the teacher began talking about the dialogue, making grammar, usage and sociolinguistic points, interspersed with questions about the passage and the instructor's explanations. This went on for about twenty minutes and included general comprehension check questions such as 'do you understand?' and 'are you okay?' as well as specific questions about the dialogue.

Regarding general comprehension questions, most of the students did nod in response and a few answered 'yes' to these questions. And it was believed that they did, in fact, understand.

With the specific questions, however, something unexpected happened. When the teacher asked a question, he was usually greeted with poker-faced stares, as before. But when he moved closer, looked specifically at a student, or pair of students, and repeated the question, the students usually tried to answer. In general, I noted, the instructor was paying much more attention to the students, moving closer to them, and looking at specific students and trying to make a better connection with them. Instead of asking questions with the feeling that they really weren't going to be answered anyway, as before, the teacher made a greater effort to communicate the questions, and acted as if he expected to get responses.

Also, toward the end of the instructor's talk on the dialogue, two students, without prompting from the teacher, asked questions before the class. Although the questions were not related directly to the dialogue, the fact that the questions were asked before the entire class was considered a breakthrough.

## Conclusion

There were some areas where the results of this action research were not as successful as hoped. For instance, the students needed to be prompted with eye contact and a repeated question from the teacher to answer a question, and when they did not understand something, they still did not interrupt the teacher with a question.

And yet some progress was definitely made, especially when the brief span between observations is considered. The students did interact with the teacher by nodding, some did answer the instructor's questions, and two, on their own initiation, even asked questions before the class. The unanticipated side effect of the teacher becoming more concerned with the interaction was a welcome surprise and contributed to the improvement. There seems to have been some success in instructing and reminding and then expecting the students to become more interactive with the teacher.

## Reflection

This action research project forced both the teacher and the observer to remember that ESL teachers in Japan are not just teaching a language, but also a culture, and this includes instruction in the sociolinguistics appropriate for the native English speaking classroom. Perhaps more importantly, they had to think about why the cultures are different, in this respect, and how to try and bridge that difference. This led to questioning the conventional notion that Japanese students simply do not like the native English speaking classroom culture.

An additional reason for interest in the problem addressed here was the belief that this was a common problem in Japan. Teachers, especially native English speaking ones, often become frustrated with a lack of initial success in obtaining an interactive dialogue with the class. This often leads them to mistake a lack of familiarity with a lack of interest, and to teach within the students' culturally conditioned classroom expectations, instead of introducing the expectations commonly found in classrooms in English-speaking countries. While intending to be more accommodating to students, they are failing to give students a useful sociolinguistic skill, which students would likely want and benefit from. Some may think encouraging the use of this student-teacher interaction common in native English speaking countries is culturally arrogant. But if it is introduced in a sensitive and reasonable manner, it actually contributes to a more fulfilling English class. After all, most students don't study English just for linguistic competence. They will also want to develop sociolinguistic competence for communicating in different situations in English speaking countries, and this includes the classroom.

## References

Helgesen, M. & Brown, S. (1994) Active listening: Building skills for understanding. Melbourne: CUP.

Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992) Dictionary of language teaching & applied linguistics (2nd ed.). Essex: Longman.

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© 1999 Jonathan Snell - First published in the Internet TESL Journal, Vol. V, No. 4, April 1999. Jonathan Snell teaches English in Japan at Tsuda College and Toyo Eiwa College. He holds a Master of Education degree and is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. His interests include the role of motivation in language learning and materials development.

## Cultural Differences and Chinese Learners of English

by Jane Evans

The profile of the English language classroom in Ireland is changing. As language learners pour into Dublin from all parts of the globe, language teachers are now required to adapt to the needs and expectations of learners from very different cultural, political and linguistic backgrounds. While improved international communication has made travelling much easier, we should not ignore the fact that these people have travelled great distances to come to Ireland, and that they arrive with cultural baggage which is alien to us, and to our notions of conversation and socialisation. We cannot mould these people to behave like the European language learners that we are more familiar with. Instead we need to address their differences in order to create a positive learning environment in which they feel comfortable and in which they can learn efficiently.

I would like to discuss the communication differences of the typical Chinese learner of English, in an effort to show that what might appear to be uncooperative, uncommunicative behaviour, is in fact just a difference in expectation. Of course we have to remember that individuals use personal constructs as well as cultural constructs when communicating, and we are talking about trends in typical behaviour rather than suggesting that all 14 billion Chinese people are exactly the same. I would like to talk about Chinese rules of speaking as I suggest that they might influence (rather than control) the communication style of the Chinese learner of English, communicating in an international context.

### ***The Chinese Communication Process - 5 Rules of Speaking***

It used to be thought that there were universal rules of communication, which were followed in the same way by all peoples. Grice's 1975 Principle of Co-operation suggested that conversation is constructed following four maxims which are universally accepted. The maxims dictate that people speak to tell the truth, to give appropriate information, and to be relevant, unambiguous and sufficiently brief. This theory has been rejected however, and research has shown that in Chinese culture there are rules of speaking which follow very different criteria. According to Gao, Ting Toomey and Gudykunst (1996) Chinese rules of speaking are governed by five distinctly alternative rules:

- hanxu (implicit communication)
- tinghua (listen-centredness)
- keqi (politeness)
- zijiren (a focus on insiders)
- mianzi (face-directed communication strategies)

To generalise about Chinese culture, it might be described as collectivist as opposed to individualistic, and intent on harmony and conflict reduction rather than existential self-fulfilment. As a collectivist culture - influenced among others by Confucius and Mao Ze Dung - there is a concentration of emphasis on the insider to the

exclusion of the outsider, thus making it difficult for the typical Chinese speaker to approach strangers (or outsiders) and fall into conversation with them. Their focus on family and on belonging to a group makes it difficult for them to be open and individualistic.

In the same vein, the desire for harmony leads to different expectations for truth telling. Chinese rules of speaking dictate that it is better to be polite, non-threatening and implicit rather than, as Grice says, to supply accurate information, which is sufficiently clear for an unambiguous message. This gives Chinese people a very valid reason for not speaking out in circumstances where a Western person would expect someone to be explicit. Following the same rule of speaking it is possible that they will verbally agree to do something that they have absolutely no intention of carrying out. This is in order to save the face of the person they are negotiating with. The intention is to be polite and avoid conflict.

To maintain harmony within the group, it is essential both to save face and to show respect. For this reason, the typical Chinese native speaker maintains a more listener-centred attitude within communication. Speaking out of turn is considered to be struggling for power and authority. Gao et al, (1996) say that specific conditions are associated with speaking, and not everyone is entitled to speak. People only voice their opinions when they are given recognition. Recognition is often derived from one's expertise on a subject due to years of experience, education, or a power position. A spoken 'voice' is thus equated with seniority, authority, experience, knowledge and expertise.

According to Gao et al, (1996) Chinese school children are taught to look for guidance from their teachers and to listen to them, believing them to be moral and social leaders; experts who know everything in their specific area. The teacher should tell students how to proceed, and they should be worthy of imitation. It is expected that students listen attentively to their teachers: 'They are in class to hear what the teachers have to say.' They suggest that most Chinese schools emphasis listening skills, memorising skills, writing skills, and reading skills, but rarely give importance to speaking skills. As a result Chinese children tend to have poor verbal fluency, because assertiveness and eloquence are considered to be signs of disrespect.

### ***Confusing classroom behaviour***

Such research might explain why Chinese learners of English initially have a difficult time interacting in the communicative classroom. They are not familiar with having open conversations with strangers. They are not used to being asked to express opinions on matters that they know little about; and they have been trained to listen to the teacher, rather than to be listened to. The notion of holding an argument is, to some extent, alien to a culture where the objective is to find peaceful solutions worked out on the status of different speakers.

Taking these factors into consideration, it should be appreciated that the apparently non-co-operative learner might be confused by the differences of the communicative classroom. Their attempts to show respect and maintain harmony may be perceived as being non-committal, unfriendly and unwilling to share. But this is not the case, and with some mutual understanding authentic communication can be achieved. To a great extent all learners of a foreign language use the rules of speaking and socialisation of their first language, and try to apply them to the second language situation. Where there are large cultural differences between the two groups, it is inevitable that a percentage of these rules will be misapplied: resulting in communication breakdown. It is our responsibility as language teachers to show sensitivity to these differences. We need to respond to them in such a way as to bridge the gap between the first and second language and to reduce cultural distance.

### References:

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Grice, H.P. (1975) '*Logic and Conversation*' in Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*. Volume 3. Speech Acts. PP43-58

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## Internet URLs

We had a number of requests after the last issue of the FELT newsletter to give some more detail about the Internet URLs:

- The Internet TESL Journal is one of the gems out there. Published monthly, it provides a good blend of practical classroom activities, handouts, lesson plans and accessible theory:

<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>

- An excellent starting place for a great many ELT resources can be found at:

<http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/bio/>

- The Oxford University Language centre is another good place to start:

<http://info.ox.ac.uk/departments/langcentre/langlists/efl.html>

- The rather commercial, yet still excellent Dave Sperling's ESL Café - an eclectic blend of all sorts:

<http://www.eslcafe.com>

- The TEFL Farm is an attempt to copy the ESL café - a hard act to follow, but has some interesting interviews:

<http://www.teflfarm.com>

- Can't forget IATEFL, can we?

<http://www.iatefl.org>

- The Linguistic Funland is a bizarre bazaar of things linguistic and EFL related:

<http://www.linguistic-funland.com>

# FELT Editorial

Well, my dear FELT members, much has happened since the last issue of the FELT Newsletter. Our membership has more than doubled, I'm delighted to report, so I guess we're doing something right! You may have noticed that we've changed the layout of the newsletter on foot of your feedback - it should be a little easier to read now. We have also printed further internet addresses with a quick summary of their content as the reaction to the last list was great. And look at all the articles we have in this issue - sincerest thanks go out to all who have submitted materials. We even have a submission from Japan, so shame on our Irish members who have not done something yet! We are open to suggestions on content - so send us some feedback too. Our address is at the top of the front page, or if you are wired, our e-mail address is [feltireland@hotmail.com](mailto:feltireland@hotmail.com)

Nothing in life is free, as we all know, and *this is the last FELT newsletter which will be distributed to schools free of charge* - we simply can't afford the cost of postage and photocopying and so on. In future, the Newsletter will only be sent to paid-up members of the Forum. So, why not fill in the application form included in this Newsletter and put it in an envelope with £10 - that's 1999 membership and cheap at that!

## IATEFL Conference - Dublin 2000

As you probably noticed on the front page, IATEFL is coming to town. This is the most amazing opportunity for everyone in the EFL business, not just teachers - the international exposure we will get can only strengthen Ireland's position in the world market. For us teachers it represents the perfect opportunity to gain some badly needed professional development - Dublin will be flooded with big names and small names alike, just dying to share their experiences of EL teaching with us. And, you know, there's no reason you can't put in a submission as well. IATEFL has an open submission policy, so it's just as easy for you to give a presentation at the conference, as it is for Adrian Underhill, their President. This is the perfect opportunity to share...

FELT is working closely with IATEFL trying to smooth the way for all delegates, organising activities, trips and naturally, drinking sessions. We are also looking at IATEFL Associate Membership, to see if we can gain any benefits for FELT members. More on this in the next Newsletter (which is only going to members, remember!).

## Professional Development

We all know there is a shameful neglect of the professional development of EL teachers, not only in Ireland, but all around the world. But, did you know that ACELS runs sessions for teachers, from time to time? The Directors of all Recognised Schools receive the details of these sessions, so if these notices are not being put up on your teachers' notice board, you should ask your Director why not. There are Workshops on Curriculum Development being run in Dublin, Cork and Galway this June, though numbers are limited to 2 per school. FELT is also preparing a number of sessions in the autumn covering all kinds of teaching related matters, as well as the mundanities of how to start a pension or a savings plan.



## Language Learning through Storytelling and Irish Ballads

by Teresa Murphy

*The ballads of Ireland tell the whole of its history, they are the jigsaw of three thousand years* (Laurie Lee)

The Irish are a nation of storytellers, possessing a tradition going back centuries; indeed, the 'Seanachee' or chief storyteller was the most important person in the tribe and later in the village, passing down through generations the legends and folk-tales of Ireland both in speech and song. Music activates our emotions, particular melodies making the hair on the back of our neck stand on end; it is therefore a powerful medium to express language and create the need for this expression.

Keeping both these concepts in mind, I found that the combined lyrics and music of Irish ballads could be used to exploit the language needs of our students in the classroom, provoking thought and thus the need to express these thoughts.

I introduced the exercise by playing a verse from the 'Johnny Jump Up', a light-hearted story of one man's experience of drinking an extremely potent cider. The story is told in the song and a discussion commenced on the differences between listening to a story being told and being sung. The conclusion showed that music and the witty words set to a certain rhythm created a greater involvement for the listener, or at least a different relationship with the story. The following 3 questions are of concern:

1. What makes a good story?
2. When do our students need to tell stories?
3. What language do they need to be able to do this?

The answer to the first 2 questions are connected to our everyday lives; we tell stories when we talk about what happens to us as we perform our daily routines, when we tell anecdotes, jokes, report incidents. In order to keep our audience, our stories have to have a logical progression, interesting vocabulary and be told with the right balance of fluidity and pausing. Our students can manage this in their own languages, but in the majority of cases they cannot transfer this skill to English. This is where we come in; using some language input exercises and the emotive strains of Phil Coulter singing *Steal Away* I found that I could provoke the natural yearning to express thoughts and the language to do so.

### The Language Input

To prepare for the task my language focus was one of logical progression using correct tenses. I wanted to look at their meaning and relevance to storytelling. To illustrate this I gave my students a jumbled-up story, which they had to put in order and say HOW they did it, *i.e.* what tenses, nouns, pronouns, and articles helped them. They were then asked to link the story together, using suitable connectors and finally to add details to the story to make it more interesting. The story was presented like this:

*A man and his wife had been to a party. They had had a very good time. They were driving back together. He accused her of flirting with his best friend. She laughed and denied it. He crashed into a tree. They escaped unhurt.* (Adapted from Davis and Rinvolucri (1988) Dictation Cambridge: CUP).

The analysis of logical progression and eventual storytelling, with actual students, highlighted the necessity of correct language if they want to make themselves understood clearly when expressing themselves, for example, to their host families. It proved to be quite a revelation to them that speaking and grammar, while taught separately are not mutually exclusive.

Now, the ballad STEAL AWAY the lyrics of which are as follows:

<i>Steal away, let's steal away, no reason left to stay,</i>	<b>(Why?)</b>
<i>For me and you let's start anew, and darling steal away,</i>	
<i>Let's steal away and chase our dreams</i>	<b>(What dreams?)</b>
<i>And hope they never find us.</i>	<b>(Who?)</b>
<i>The dreary days, the empty nights,</i>	<b>(What Happened?)</b>
<i>We'll leave them all behind us.</i>	
<i>We'll leave with just our memories,</i>	<b>(Good or bad?)</b>
<i>And make a new beginning.</i>	<b>(Where?)</b>
<i>We'll have to choose, to win or lose</i>	
<i>And it's time we started winning</i>	<b>(Why?)</b>

Students were then organised into groups of 3. They listened to the music and allowed the haunting melody to work its magic. Then using the cue questions, provided in bold, they decided what the song/ story was about. One person in each group changed places and 2 people in the new group told their different stories keeping in mind the importance of:

- a) The qualities of a good story
- b) The language necessary to tell it effectively.

### Conclusion

Songs that tell, or suggest, stories can be a huge source of inspiration when we want to demonstrate how to tell stories. The language we use and want our students to use can be summarised as follows:

1. **Grammar:** tenses, linking words, fillers
2. **Vocabulary:** synonyms, adjectives, intensifiers, adverbs (luckily, tragically)
3. **Pronunciation:** pitch/tone, emphasis/stress, voice modulation

The language-input session will depend on:

- a) which song we are using
- b) which language we wish to practise.

While Irish ballads provide a rich source of material for this type of activity, there are a vast number of non-Irish artists who can do the same: for example, Tracy Chapman (Fast Car), Elton John (Daniel), Billy Joel (Piano man), Garth Brooks (The Dance), Cat Stevens (Father & Son), Harry Chapin (Cats in the Cradle) included in the album called Greatest Stories. Highly recommended! Dire Straits (Why Worry?) And many, many more...

Many songs are poetry put to music, and the emotion activated by the music can push otherwise reticent students to want to express themselves, which helps their confidence, which in turn can help their fluency. I don't claim that it will automatically make students flow with articulate English, but it will give them a kick-start in speaking both fluidly and grammatically; listening to a song they like and can engage with, and wanting to talk about it and wonder what really happened. Through the songwriters constraints we unleash a well of creativity, and exploiting this we create confidence and willingness in our students, whatever their background, to communicate through English.

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Teresa Murphy is an EFL teacher in the Centre of English Studies in Dublin and a leading member of the ACELS Materials Development group. This paper was first presented at the 1999 MATSDA Conference in Dublin.

## EFL in Ireland - Prepared for the New Millennium?

by Dr. Kevin McGinley

Recent correspondence in the FELT Newsletter contains the adjectival 'quality orientated' in relation to the EFL industry in Ireland, which, to this reader, raises the question: are we getting this quality or are we likely to get it?

The problem about addressing the industry in Ireland is that commenting on one aspect inevitably raises questions on other, related matters. So, suggesting how to promote quality presupposes that there are acceptable structures that are likely to 'deliver' it. This consideration raises the question of teacher training. But, however important teacher-training structures may be in helping to deliver quality they are but one factor in the equation. So just as language teachers perceive function preceding form, I would like to have a look at the thinking behind and the provisions of the government's Green Paper of 1992<sup>1</sup> which led to the re-constitution of the Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS). The aim, as far as possible, is to reveal the facts and leave judgement to the reader. The issues of teacher training and the practice of 'quality', I will leave for another time.

On 23 December 1992, the Department of Education invited The National Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language to nominate a representative to the new ACELS. The wording of the letter is interesting as it reveals the representation the new company will have. It is clear that the tone is advisory and not consultative: see 'The Government decision..<sup>2</sup> It was this very fact that led to frenetic activity among the EFL community and demand for increased representation: see Ruane (1995). Further, the community complained that it had not been consulted in the process of forming the new body. So, it must be asked: just whom did the Department of Education consult in a policy initiative that would take us into the new millennium? Certainly, somebody was consulted. What counsel and advice were given? So much for trying to examine the thinking behind the Green Paper!

The 'objects of the company' as stated in the paper remain unchanged in the subsequent White Paper. It is interesting that 'object number 1' is not concerned with what ACELS is supposed to be primarily concerned with - the recognition function.<sup>3</sup> Rather it is concerned with controlling standards in teacher training. If the stated objects of ACELS are in rank order, then it would seem that there has been a conspicuous failure to address the problem of unsatisfactory teacher-training courses. And, if anything, the problem has been made worse by the decision to introduce the 70-hour minimum 'course.'<sup>4</sup>

So, where are we today? ACELS, despite the listing of the objects of its company, is fulfilling its function of regulating the recognition system and seems to do so reasonably well. In the future, the New Model Inspection Scheme will be introduced and should be a step forward. The TEFL Accreditation Scheme has, however, been deferred. If it had proceeded, it may have led to a number of problems potentially including a breach of EU competition rules, as another organisation itself a TEFL training

provider, was in a position to influence the proposals in a manner that might give that organisation advantage over competing providers.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the Department of Education set out to control the new Council. It may well feel that it was largely successful in doing so. There is no evidence that this writer knows of as to who was consulted. The ethos of the approach seems to have been secretive and controlling - the kind of Ireland I thought we were trying to leave behind. An approach of transparency and democracy would have been better preparation for the future.

### Notes

- The objects for which the Company was established are as follows:
  - To control standards in teacher training, both initial and in-service, for EFL teachers in Ireland and to maintain a register of such qualified teachers.
  - To control standards in accreditation of EFL schools and courses.
  - To ensure the establishment of appropriate tests for EFL students and to control standards in the certification of their performance.
  - To make recommendations to the Department of Education on the granting of, and continuance of, official recognition as approved English language courses.
  - Etc.
- The new company will have extended representation, which will provide for direct involvement of the EFL industry through the Recognised English Language Schools Association (RELSA) and the National Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (NATEFLI). (*NATEFLI was FELT's predecessor -Ed.*) The Government decision provides for also for representation from the Departments of Education, Foreign Affairs and Justice as well as from An Bord Trachtála, Bord Fáilte and the Regional Tourism organisations. These representatives will form the Board of Directors of the company.
- Example, communication dated 5 April 1995 from L. A. O'Connell, Principal, Department of Education 1995 to this writer.
- This measure was introduced with no consultation and little notice in 1997. It soon transpired that schools could not identify enough teachers who fulfilled the requirement and was considerably modified. Two things can be said about it:
  - A 'course' with no syllabus and assessment system is, to say the least, educationally unsound
  - The measure resulted in TEFL providers, who were mostly not language schools, to claim their course met the requirements of ACELS. In some cases, there are so many contact hours and the remainder 'study hours' making up the total.
- It is arguable that RELSA, given its strong representation at ACELS, is in a position to influence the terms of the TEFL Accreditation Scheme without necessarily having to consult with the ATT and other TEFL providers.

### References

- Ruane, M. (1995). 'Academic Regulation of EFL in Ireland: Developments since 1991.' In Teanga: 15, 1995, Dublin: IRAAL.  
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## Office Graffiti - Bringing e-mail Funnies in to The EL Classroom

Office graffiti is that proliferation of linguistic material, which used to appear anonymously on notice boards and was photocopied and placed on friends' desks, only nowadays, of course, it is more likely to be propagated by e-mail! Because of its preoccupation with words and their 'real' meanings, office graffiti can usefully be regarded as rich fodder for the language teacher. Some examples follow, with suggestions for using them [or not] in the classroom.

Students seldom have problems with 'nobody' [unless, of course, they confuse 'him' with 'everybody'] but 'somebody' and 'anybody' cause such confusion that they might almost be identical twins. Wait until the problem of quantifiers [in any form] arises before introducing the Story. Present some student errors - anonymously - on OHP, the board, or

photocopies. Invent a few if necessary. Ask students to identify and explain errors. Allow as much confusion as possible to arise - don't tell them what is correct or not at this stage. When frustration appears to be about to break out, hand out copies of A Little Story, below.

There is no way to ensure that the terms have been understood, but at least now you have a bank of relevant and [somewhat] contextualised quotations which you can refer to when further queries, questions and problems arise!

Ross Gravec has spent many years teaching and writing materials. He recently abandoned the EL classroom to concentrate on designing and delivering courses on Intercultural Communication Skills. In his spare time he is writing a slim volume on F. Max Mueller.

### A LITTLE PHOTOCOPIABLE STORY

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got mad about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

## Office Graffiti - Gender Differences & Socio-pragmatics... maybe?

The next section was submitted by e-mail. It is intended as a piece of fun and we hope no one will be offended by it. Yeah... sure it's a bit clichéd, but hey, what the hell. It's perfect Office Graffiti, as described in the article above! It would make interesting class material for upper-intermediate or advanced students.

### Women's English....

1. Yes = No
2. No = Yes
3. Maybe = No
4. I'm sorry. = You'll be sorry.
5. We need = I want
6. It's your decision = The correct decision should be obvious by now.
7. Do what you want = You'll pay for this later.
8. We need to talk = I need to complain
9. Sure... go ahead = I don't want you to.
10. I'm not upset = Of course I'm upset, you moron!
11. You're ... so manly = You need a shave and you sweat a lot.
12. You're certainly attentive tonight = Is sex all you ever think about?
13. Be romantic, turn out the lights = I have flabby thighs.
14. This kitchen is so inconvenient = I want a new house.
15. I want new curtains = and carpeting, and furniture, and wallpaper....
16. Hang the picture there = NO, I mean hang it there!
17. I heard a noise = I noticed you were almost asleep.
18. Do you love me? = I'm going to ask for something expensive.
19. How much do you love me? = I did something today you're really not going to like.
20. I'll be ready in a minute. = Kick off your shoes and find a good game on TV
21. Is my butt fat? = Tell me I'm beautiful.
22. You have to learn to communicate. = Just agree with me.
23. Are you listening to me!? = Too late, you're dead.
24. Was that the baby? = Why don't you get out of bed and walk him until he goes to sleep.
25. I'm not yelling! = Yes I am yelling because I think this is important.

#### Answers to "What's wrong?"

- The same old thing = Nothing
- Nothing = Everything
- Everything = My PMS is acting up
- Nothing, really = It's just you're such an asshole

### Men's English...

1. "I'm hungry." = I'm hungry.
2. "I'm sleepy." = I'm sleepy.
3. "I'm tired." = I'm tired.
4. "Do you want to go to a movie?" = I'd eventually like to have sex with you.
5. "Can I take you out to dinner?" = I'd eventually like to have sex with you.
6. "Can I call you sometime?" = I'd eventually like to have sex with you.
7. "May I have this dance?" = I'd eventually like to have sex with you.
8. "Nice dress!" = Nice cleavage!
9. "You look tense, let me give you a massage." = I want to fondle you.
10. "What's wrong?" = I don't see why you are making such a big deal out of this.
11. "What's wrong?" = What meaningless self-inflicted psychological trauma are you going through now?
12. "What's wrong?" = I guess sex tonight is out of the question.
13. "I'm bored." = Do you want to have sex?
14. "I love you." = Let's have sex now.
15. "I love you, too." = Okay, I said it...we'd better have sex now!
16. "Yes, I like the way you cut your hair." = I liked it better before.
17. "Yes, I like the way you cut your hair." = \$50 and it doesn't look that much different!
18. "Let's talk." = I am trying to impress you by showing that I am a deep person and maybe then you'd like to have sex with me.
19. "Will you marry me?" = I want to make it illegal for you to have sex with other guys.
20. (while shopping) "I like that one better." = Pick any freakin' dress and let's go home!

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