



T E S O L

F R A N C E

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
TO SPEAKERS OF
OTHER LANGUAGES

the
JOURNAL

Parler, Ecouter,
Enhancing

Communiquer

Speaking and Listening
Skills

Volume 8

2001

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Parler, Ecouter, Communiquer

Enhancing Speaking and Listening Skills

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SOPHIE PIETRUCCI
4 RUE DE RIDDER
75014 PARIS

Editorial

Marie-Pierre Beaulieu, President 2001

Both speaking and listening skills involve spoken or oral language, a language which tends to differ from written language in its typical grammatical, lexical and discourse patterns. Whereas “listening” aims at understanding spoken language and “speaking” aims at producing oral language, they both require specific skills. Since the end of the 1970s teaching, testing, and learning these skills has become a branch of second language acquisition in its own right. This is why the Executive Committee decided to focus on this topic for the 2000 TESOL France Colloquium.

The French title “Parler, Ecouter, Communiquer” also acknowledges the fact that listening and speaking involve another primordial aspect of language learning and teaching – communication skills. A good number of articles in the Journal reflect this concern. Communication! Sounds so simple and yet...! What does it mean to us as language teachers? The Journal contains an interesting attempt by one teacher to set up communication practice for her learners in a way which is sensible, meaningful and ambitious. Before you start your reading, I would like to share with you the view that ‘communication’ involves a sharing or an interaction, regardless of its form, in which language, meaning and context are inextricably connected.

I hope you will enjoy this Journal as much as the others.

THE JOURNAL OF TESOL FRANCE

Editor: Sally Bosworth G r me
Assistant Editor: Susan Fries
Design & Layout: Anthony Shelton ISSN 1266-7838

The JOURNAL is published **once** a year. A subscription is included in the dues for membership in TESOL France.

Manuscripts from members and non-members of TESOL France are welcome for consideration by the Editorial Board. In the preparation of manuscripts, prospective contributors should follow the guidelines at the back of this issue.

Essays and reviews in The JOURNAL can be reprinted, provided the source is acknowledged.

Manuscripts, editorial communications and queries about advertising should be addressed to:

The JOURNAL, TESOL France, Telecom Paris, 46 rue Barrault 75013 Paris.

TESOL France

T l com Paris, 46 Rue Barrault, 75013 Paris
T l/Fax (+33) 01 45 81 75 91 e-mail: tesol@enst.fr

TESOL France, an affiliate of TESOL International and of IATEFL, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in France. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and to strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL France organizes various events and a convention each year in Paris. Members receive *The News*, our newsletter, and *The Journal*, the academic journal of the association.

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Introduction

Sally Bosworth G r me, Editor

Teaching oral communication skills can be the most agreeable part of an English lesson because this is when students reveal their true personalities and leave behind the more mechanical aspects of ESL learning. However, this can be the most frustrating part of the lesson too because it seems so difficult to help students make real progress. For example, when we teach listening skills we often see our students smile as if they understood and then proceed happily to do the opposite of what we have just instructed them to do. By applying the ideas proposed in this collection of articles we will be putting our students on the road to real progress.

In discussing the skills we need for authentic communication, Rebecca Oxford provides an overview of the problems teachers face when trying to enhance speaking and listening skills. She takes a strong position in favor of integrating instead of isolating the necessary skills in order to better prepare students for later success in academic communication, career-related language use, or “on-the-street” interaction in the language.

Nick Dawson agrees with Rebecca Oxford’s ideas by reminding us that our final aims are not to produce students who are competent at doing grammar exercises but who are capable of communicating. In order to do this he proposes that when we test speaking skills, we should give our students practical tasks to achieve and measure what students can do in English. As the students become more competent, we can begin to judge how well they do it.

Telephoning in a foreign language is a practical example of a notoriously difficult integrated skill. Ana s Laurent proposes a four-point lesson plan to make sure that the information and corrections students have heard during a telephone lesson will remain with them after they get off the phone. Her systematic approach could easily be applied to more than just telephone courses.

While Ana s proposes a solution for retaining vocabulary, Michael McCarthy’s article will help us to determine which vocabulary to teach in the first place.

Working with the CANCODE corpus ('Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English'), Michael and his team have determined which words are used most frequently. However, only taking into consideration frequency of use would lead to strange practices indeed. Should we only teach two days of the week (Monday and Friday) because they are high on the word frequency list and Tuesday and Wednesday are not? Computer-generated lists of frequently used words have led Michael to propose nine categories that should be taken into consideration for vocabulary building materials.

From Cambridge and Nottingham, we go around the world to the UNITEC Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. Pip Neville-Barton uses a camcorder to film formal oral presentations in order to use this video footage the following year. These films help the students to prepare their presentations by showing them that this task is not as difficult as they had thought. The films also help presentation markers to use the same criteria to judge performance. Her thorough study of using video footage shows that it is a reliable tool and has effectively changed performance both of presenters and of markers.

TESOL France has the privilege of proposing a second article from Asia with David Nunan's contribution on teaching listening. He suggests that it is important, not only to teach bottom-up processing skills such as the ability to discriminate between minimal pairs, but also to help learners use what they already know to understand what they hear. He summarizes recent research on listening tasks and proposes strategies that might help students deal with this most difficult aspect of language learning.

Studying the same theme, my article is a summary of my doctoral thesis on the problems of French people who try to listen to English. The first part briefly describes how we understand the spoken word in any language and then goes on to explain some of the differences between oral French and oral English. The second part describes an experiment carried out with French university students using two different strategies for listening improvement.

To integrate listening and speaking skills in the huge thirty-five student classrooms that secondary school teachers have to deal with is not an easy task. Christine Reymond proposes a new solution using a source of authentic communication

which is becoming readily available to everyone: the Internet. The Tandem system pairs non-native speakers up with native speakers, allowing them to exchange both linguistic and cultural information.

What can be more authentic than conversation at a dinner party? Rosemary Wilson proposes simple guidelines for teachers on structuring classroom interaction so that if their classrooms were a dinner party they would be invited back. She proposes that teachers can act as a resource and a stimulus to enrich classroom discourse within a task-based approach but this does not mean that they monopolize the conversation time. Much of language learning involves talking about oneself and the teacher should be prepared to contribute to these kinds of discussions while at the same time maintaining the three basic tenets of learner-centredness.

It is only appropriate to conclude this journal with an article by a teacher who puts into practice the theories proposed at the beginning by setting up a class based exclusively on authentic communication. Roslyn Young's very personal article explains how to help students get the hang of chatting by doing just that: chatting. By becoming personally involved with her students and fostering a friendly party-like atmosphere in her classes she changes the way most English courses are taught.