



Volume 23 Spring 2000

TESOL SPAIN

n e w s l e t t e r

TESOL Spain 23rd Annual Convention

Befriending and enjoying pronunciation teaching

Cast the net wider - from idioms to idiomaticity

Everyday English

Assessment and young learners



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Editor's Note

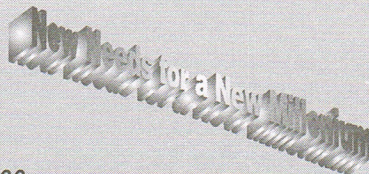
The TESOL Spain 2000 conference is around the corner. To give you a taste of what is to come, this edition of the TESOL Spain newsletter contains articles by three of the speakers at the forthcoming convention. Paul Seligson, one of our Plenary Speakers, gives us advice on how to incorporate pronunciation teaching into our classrooms, while Morgan Lewis widens the concept of *idiom*. Paul Hancock examines the notion of *International English* in a stimulating article which readers might like to respond to. You will also find a fourth article on young learners by Melanie Williams, who unfortunately can't be with us at the 2000 convention, as well as a book review by Kim Turner, a report on the GRETA conference by Bryan Robinson, regional news and a variety of forthcoming events for the millenium year.

Look forward to seeing you all at the March convention. It's going to be a great one, so don't miss it!

Barbara Stevens

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Editor y Publicidad
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Envío de Manuscritos
Si les interesa que se publique su trabajo en esta revista, vea la página 9.

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Las opiniones expresadas en ésta revista no coinciden necesariamente con las de el editor o los organismos de la asociación, y tampoco estamos obligados a entrar en correspondencia sobre el contenido del mismo.

Contents

Inside cover	
Editorial Board	
Editor's note	
TESOL Box	
<i>Article</i> Befriending and Enjoying Pronunciation Teaching	
Paul Seligson	3
<i>Article</i> Cast The Net Wider - from Idioms to Idiomaticity	
Morgan Lewis	6
<i>Article</i> "Everyday English"	
Paul Hancock	8
Assessment and Young Learners	
Melanie Williams	10
Talking to HAL at GRETA	
Bryan Robinson	13
Book Review	
Kim Turner	15
Regional News	
	16
Book Suggestion	
Cary Barney	17
IATEFL application form	
	18
Stop Press: News for Teachers	
	20
Forthcoming Events	
	22
Board Directory	
	24
Back cover	
TESOL Spain membership application form	

Talking to HAL

A Humanistic Questionnaire

(Self-) evaluation from the floor of the the XV Greta Jornadas "ELT 1999: A Space Odyssey" (Granada, 9-11 September 1999).
Keynote speakers included David Crystal, John McRae, Carol Reed, and Norman Whitney.

Some months ago, Mario Rinvolucri of Pilgrims (Canterbury, UK) gave me a humanistic questionnaire as a present. He and a group of colleagues had first used it at the Humanism in Language Teaching conference in Portonovo, Italy in September, 1998 a conference that had been organised by Valeria Gallarani of LEND. Mario sent it for me to use with the simple request that if I did so, I should acknowledge its originators.

When the Greta *Jornadas* came along I passed it on to the *Junta Directiva* with Mario's original message, and consequently it was no great surprise that, at 9.30 on the final morning I was handed a photocopy of the questionnaire. The truth is that I'd been wondering how long I'd have to wait before I got a chance to fill it out - here is the introduction to the form:

Many questionnaires we are asked to fill in treat us as customers/consumers and ask us to evaluate what we have been offered.

- **This questionnaire is different. It asks you to evaluate your own inner process over this course/conference. Its aim is twofold: for you to stop and think about yourself**
- **for us to see how, in depth, your depth, the course worked out.**

The questionnaire assumes your creativity and particular genius and avoids trivial questions about what we set before you. The only significant thing is what happened in your heart and mind over this period.

Of course, consumer surveys are quick and easy to complete. That's the essence of them, otherwise we wouldn't bother to fill them in. They are like TV ads (or shuttle rides in the "Discovery"): short and packed with content, but subliminal content that we're not expected to handle consciously. However, a thinking, in-depth questionnaire... now that's another matter. That's much more like the full feature movie (or a journey to the outer reaches of our Solar System): 105 minutes long, with lots of time to put two and two together. Time to follow the protagonists through thick and thin; time to reflect. A good movie is one that you come back to again and again - sometimes they make such an impact that I have no choice but to re-visit them until I can mentally resolve whatever they have set off in my head.

So, what's a non-trivial questionnaire like? Here is my attempt to respond to one.

Please describe three important moments in your thinking and feeling process over the period of the course/conference:

What does an "important moment in your thinking and feeling process" look like? The expression is strange and remote to me. I take it to mean a moment that made an impact, made me think, or made me feel something different, or unexpected.

David Crystal made something of an impact, even though it was not unexpected: he made me think. There were moments in his opening plenary talk that made all of us laugh and smile, too. "From Scrabble to Babble" was a superficially "light" topic leading to the question "Why do people play with words?", and I'm not all that sure I came away with a clear answer to that question, but I did re-learn a few word game-based activities: write/tell a story

that you know using only words that begin with the letter "a", for example. He told us part of Genesis: "Adam and amenable associate...". And I found the meaning of gematria.

David Crystal made us all think about numbers, symbols, and metaphors. He defined and demonstrated gematria, a cabalistic method of assigning numerical values to letters and then playing with words in terms of their "values". His talk took place on the ninth day, of the ninth month, of nineteen ninety-nine, but, he countered this by referring to the programme for the jornadas, in which Tony Harris (currently President of Greta) had pointed to the number seven as being the "number" for the conference. David Crystal had us all hastily scribbling down our names and attempting to sum up their value in order to prove whether or not we were intended to be at the jornadas. And then he asked the crucial question: "Why?" Why do we play with words, numbers, metaphors and symbols?

Why do we do it? I'm left asking myself. Why do we humans communicate in words and symbols? Why do we play with words, making horrific, unquotable puns in one language and its culture, such that they cannot possibly be translated into any other language and its culture? Why? The power of metaphor and the intrigue and delight inherent in wordplay, leave the contents of many an EFL lesson cold and dead. Why? Why do "whole people", in the real world, play with words, while their shadows "work" with language in the classroom?

Two and a half days later, John McRae brought us back to the same question from a different angle. He asked, impertinently as always, is it "Time We Stopped Teaching English?" and drew the whole Space Oddity to a literary conclusion. That moment made me both feel and think that it is time, has been for a long time, that we stopped teaching English, and got on with teaching people.

When you attend a conference like Greta or TESOL, with ten or more parallel sessions in every time slot from 9.30 to 20.30, and barely a break between workshops and concerts for a bite of lunch, you have to make big, people-oriented decisions. Who do I go to see? Whose talk is going to benefit me most? Like everyone, I suppose, I was torn between pleasure and duty. Do I go and attend David Crystal's second session because I know it'll be good value? Or, do I choose something dutifully correct, because I think it'll be of value to my learners? On the first day of a conference, duty wins hands down. But, you often regret it! I did.

Not all speakers are what their programme entry says they are? Not all workshops or talks deliver the goods they offer, either. Yes, the subject read like it was right up my street. And the biodata made him look good: impressive CV, in and out of Spain. Publications, experience, ... but it didn't say he'd retired to the coast ten years ago, and was really going through hell just to be there! It didn't say he was as nervous as you or I would be if we had to perform before 50 or more people. Is this my feeling process in action, then? We do all have a feeling process. We all, teachers too, put ourselves in situations that make us uncomfortable. Many people "do" workshops at conferences for the points, for their CVs, for their dreams and ambitions. Did I learn much about the subject? Well, no. But it did make me aware of my "feeling process". Was

Bryan Robinson

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Readers might like to use the questionnaire as a heuristic for their own exploration of the TESOL-Spain Conference.

that my "whole person" stirring in his sleep?

By Saturday morning, if you make it to Granada's green marble Palacio de Congresos, your "whole person" must have been aroused, and even taken control of you. You've lost the urge to be dutiful, after all, anyone who's had two days at the jornadas will have collected enough "stamps" to be sure of their MEC-homogenized certificate! Saturday morning is for the "whole person". Self-indulgently I chose a session on a subject I'd read a lot about. I chose a session that I thought would be easy to follow, comfortable, and relaxed. I chose the session, and found myself thinking and feeling more than I had expected. When, after an hour, the speaker handed out a bibliography I said to myself "But you've read half of these! Why does it all seem so new and fresh? How has she helped you to understand something that you've read about so often?"

This was a workshop that made me think and feel clearly things that previously I'd only understood intellectually. Here was a session that made me re-realize that going to conferences is about experiencing; that learning is about experiencing; and that there's no possible justification for avoiding that.

Please describe three bad moments in your experience here

So what about my three bad moments? I guess I've already described them in answering the first question. Anyway, you don't have to answer questionnaires the way the authors intended, do you? Learners/"whole people" never do that!

Please outline ONE contradiction that has arisen for you during the course/conference:

David Crystal highlighted the power of the metaphor, and the strength of human delight in playing with language. A host of other presenters worked with different aspects of "whole learning", "whole people", and "whole fun", which proved unavoidable links in a chain that reached all the way through the two and a half days. The intertwined messages, particularly those that drew on aspects of language usage, metaphor, and awareness, brought me face to face with one enormous contradiction. So much of what we think is revealed in what we say and in the words we use to say it. The NLP-oriented sessions - and there were many, excellent workshops that presented or developed, or simply applied aspects of NLP - all touched on the language we use. What, then, are we to make of speakers who talk about "killing", "frustrating", or "smashing the students"? What does the phrase *asqueroso empollón* tell you about the speaker who used it? Even if it did get them a cheap laugh? Is it Time They Stopped Teaching English? How many teachers and students are still caught up in a sort of Cold War, stereotyped relationship of opposition and conflict? I believe that it's not just politically correct to talk about "learners" and not "students" or "children". A change of language can lead to a change of thinking. And a change in your thinking process can bring about changes in your feeling process, and provoke a spiral of other changes, too. And maybe some contradictions can be ironed out in the process.

Please list three actions you intend to take following the work here

Ah, now comes the crunch: the New Year's Resolutions. The part I skip, or complete in a hurry, knowing that I really have no intention

of carrying them out. Well, let's take a deep breath...

- I intend to fill out the questionnaire and think seriously about it while I do so. Done that, so that's 5 brownie points for me!

- I'd like to spend time re-thinking all kinds of aspects of my overall approach to teaching. But how on earth will I ever find enough time to do that?

- I do intend to do more! To read more, to write more, to prepare more, to attend more conferences. Maybe what I really need is to think and feel more, too.

Overall, how successful have you been in making this course/conference fruitful for you?

Very successful	Partly successful	Not successful
10	9 8 6 5 4 3 2 1 0	

If I convert that into a Yes/No question, I can say "Yes, I have been successful". But if I want to be strictly honest I have to answer the "How successful?" part. Well, partly successful, I suppose. I can give myself a 7 out of 10. Didn't David Crystal say that seven was the number of the jornadas? Yes, I can give myself a seven, top of the "partly successful" range. Writing up this questionnaire has ensured that my particular space odyssey has been partly worthwhile. Maybe I haven't even got close to the stargirl transformation, but I may be on the way. My personal dialogue with HAL seems to be developing well. Perhaps, I don't need to shut him down after all....

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