

Speaking of Pronunciation

by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez, NCLE

Research has contributed important data about factors that can influence the teaching and learning of pronunciation skills. Consider the following factors:

Age. Views about the impact of age on language acquisition and specifically on pronunciation are varied. Some researchers argue that, after puberty, lateralization (the assigning of linguistic functions to the different brain hemispheres) is completed, and adults' ability to distinguish and produce native-like sounds is more limited. Others refer to the existence of sensitive periods when various aspects of language acquisition occur, or to adults' need to re-adjust existing neural networks to accommodate new sounds. Most researchers, however, agree that adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation. Yet experiences with language learning and the ability to self-monitor, which come with age, can offset these limitations to some degree.

Prior instruction. Prior experiences with pronunciation instruction may influence learners' success with current efforts. Learners at higher language proficiency levels may have developed habitual, systematic pronunciation errors

that must be identified and addressed.

Aptitude. Individual capacity for learning languages has been debated. Some researchers believe that all learners have the same capacity to learn a second language because they have learned a first language. Others assert that the ability to recognize and internalize foreign sounds may be unequally developed in different learners.

Learner attitude and motivation. Nonlinguistic factors related to an individual's personality and learning goals can influence achievement in pronunciation. Attitude toward the target language, culture, and native speakers; degree of acculturation (including exposure to and use of the target language); personal identity issues; and motivation for learning can all support or impede pronunciation skills development.

Native language. Most researchers agree that learner's first language influences the pronunciation of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents. So-called interference or negative transfer from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, intonation, and rhythm in the target language.

The pronunciation of any one learner might be affected by a combination of these factors. The key is to be aware of

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NCLE Coordinates ESL Research Priorities

“What we don't need is yet another research report gathering dust on a shelf.” Although this sentiment is voiced energetically at times, the hunger for research about teaching and learning will not go away. Educators want research that will help them teach better. Sometimes, they conduct the research themselves.

Teachers these days are more involved than ever before in collecting and analyzing data about their work. Adult educators are tackling research questions in their classrooms and forming research networks. Research is being demystified at the same time as its importance is re-emphasized. Now, perhaps, is a good time to take a look at what we know and what we don't know about teaching English literacy to adults. What research *has* been done, and what has it told us? Two years in the making, with input from many in the field, *A Research Agenda for Adult ESL*, jointly published by NCLE, the National Center for the Study

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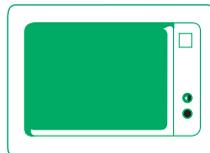
Resource Updates

Low-cost materials designed to deliver health literacy through adult education programs are now available from NIH's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The **Salud para su Corazón** (Health for your Heart) initiative has produced a series of eight easy-to-read brochures teaching heart health in both English and Spanish, a recipe book in the two languages featuring heart-healthy dishes, heart health videos in Spanish, self-help guides in English and Spanish, and heart health curricula. Call (800) 282-9126 to receive a free set of booklets. The Institute invites you to reproduce as many additional copies as needed or order more from (301) 592-8573. You can also download publications from www.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhlbi/cardio/latino/latin_pg.htm.

A useful resource in these days of systemic change is **Performance-Based Curricula and Outcomes: The MELT Project Updated for the 1990s and Beyond** by CAL's Allene Guss Grognet. This work updates the listening and speaking competencies compiled by CAL's Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) project of the early '80s. Its four sections include an introduction, the core curriculum, student performance levels, and a section on assessment and accountability. Order a free copy from the Spring Institute for International Studies (303) 863-0178 or get it from the Web at www.springinstitute.com/elt/. Also available from the Spring Institute is **English Language Training Program Self Review: A Tool for Program Improvement**.

National Conference on
**Heritage
Languages
in America**

Check the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) website at www.cal.org/heritage for information on the first **National Conference on Heritage Languages in America** coming up in Long Beach, CA in October 1999.



Recent and upcoming **telecourses and video series** for adult learners are profiled below. Most include print materials to accompany the videos.

- **On Common Ground** is a series on U.S. history and government that focuses on citizenship. Produced by Intelcom, with funding from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), it is being shown on selected public TV stations through August 21, 1999. The series shows students how to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Contact your local public TV station to find out about broadcast plans in your area. Read about the program at www.pbs.org/adultlearning/als or contact Intelcom at www.intelecom.org or (626) 796-7300 or by e-mail at customerservice@intelecom.org.

- **Crossroads Café**, another series by Intelcom that was broadcast on public TV, was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and several states. It can be accessed at literacy resource centers and libraries or purchased from Intelcom at www.intelecom.org/cafe.html or (626) 796-7300 or by e-mail at customerservice@intelecom.org.

- **Connect with English** will be broadcast on public TV in June 1999. It consists of 25 segments, following events in the life of a young woman who leaves home to pursue her dream of a musical career in San Francisco. The *telenovela*-style series also includes study guides for classroom work, home viewing guides, and optional readers. It was produced by WGBH-Boston. Information about how to order a preview kit is available on the Web at www.pbs.org/adultlearning/als/publication/guide/cwen.htm.

- **TV 411**, produced by the Adult Literacy Media Alliance (ALMA), is a series of 26 literacy videos in which a gallery of characters and situations interact. Designed for native English speaking audiences as well as English language learners and centered on the themes of parenting, health, and personal finance, each episode includes celebrities, personal stories, and recurring characters. For example, in *Laverne*, actress Liz Torres

plays a store clerk who helps a customer calculate how many diapers to buy for his triplets for one week's use. *TV 411* is scheduled for national distribution in 1999. More information is available at www.edc.org/ALMA/ or by e-mail from alma@edc.org.

Upcoming

- **Workplace Essential Skills**, produced by Kentucky Educational Television (KET), will be aired on PBS. For more information, visit www.ket.org/ or call (800) 354-9067.

Magazines are useful not only for classroom collage projects—some of them should stay intact for awhile as teaching resources. Here are two newcomers:

American Language Review is published bi-monthly. Recent issues have looked at topics such as bilingual language policy in the United States, Intensive English Programs, TESOL master's programs, and what's current in ESL/EFL publishing. Departments include summaries of world news related to English language teaching, book reviews, and a column on using technology in the classroom. Subscriptions are \$19.95 for one year (6 issues) from Delta Systems, Inc., 1400 Miller Parkway, McHenry, IL 60050; (800) 323-8270; (815) 363-2948 (fax); www.delta-systems.com. A sample copy is yours for the asking from Delta.

ESL Magazine offers information to ESL/EFL teaching professionals from the elementary to the adult level. Regular columns provide book and materials reviews, interviews, news in brief, discussions of technology use in the classroom, and tips for using the Web in the classroom. Published bi-monthly. Subscriptions are \$16.95 per year (6 issues) from ESL Magazine, 220 McKendree Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21401; (410) 570-0746; (410) 810-0910 (fax); eslmagazine@compuserve.com (e-mail). The magazine also sponsors a website at www.eslmag.com.



Images © Laubach

Faces of women tell the story of Laubach Literacy's international work.

Laubach Literacy's **Women in Literacy/USA** awards grants to literacy and ESL providers so that women learners can, in the words of coordinator Jane Hugo, "use improved literacy skills as a tool for collective action." Women in Literacy is offering sets of notecards that feature images of women served by its international program. Proceeds benefit the program. To order, call (800) 448-8878.

The **Women and Literacy** e-mail listserv was launched earlier this year as a forum for discussions about women and literacy and all of the intersecting issues. To join, or to look at recent postings, go to the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) website at www.literacy.nifl.gov and choose <Literacy Forums and Listservs>.

TESOL Defines Quality Programs

A draft of Adult Education Program Standards was presented at the March 1999 Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) convention in New York. Developed by a TESOL task force, it is due to be finalized this summer. The document identifies key criteria of a quality adult ESL program in the following areas:

- program structure;
- administration and planning;
- curriculum;
- instruction;
- recruitment, intake, and orientation;
- retention and transition;
- assessment and learner gains;
- staffing, professional development, and staff evaluation; and
- support services.

These criteria, expressed as indicators of program quality, reflect characteristics of effective performance, taking into

account the various types of ESL programs that exist.

For each area, the document also identifies at least one example of a measure—a tool to determine the extent to which an indicator is present or achieved—and a performance standard—the level of acceptable performance. These are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather a springboard from which to adapt and implement elements of quality that fit local goals and needs.

The document was posted on the TESOL website (www.tesol.edu) for comment until mid-May. Feedback received at the convention and since then is being incorporated into the final revision which will be reposted on the site sometime this summer. For more information, contact John Segota at TESOL by e-mail at john@tesol.edu.

Citizenship Initiative Unlikely to Succeed

The Clinton administration's Fiscal Year 2000 budget request to Congress includes a \$103 million increase in adult education state grants (money that funds many adult ESL programs) and \$70 million in Common Ground Partnerships which aim to improve English literacy skills and knowledge about the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. The Common Ground initiative, a new program, would require authorizing legislation and, at press time, has little visible support in Congress. Policy analysts say also that funding for new programs is unlikely this year. Increased funding for existing programs such as state grants may even be a challenge. Contact your Congressional representatives' offices for additional information.

For regular policy updates, visit the National Institute for Literacy website at www.nifl.gov.

NCLE Funding Update

In our tenth year, NCLE is pleased to report that we have received bridge funding from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) at the U.S. Department of Education, to continue to provide services to adult ESL educators and others. We are cautiously optimistic that there will be funding beyond 1999 as well.

More Enroll in Adult ESL

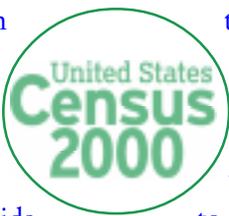
The Department of Education's latest data show that English language programs continued to represent a greater share of overall enrollment than either adult basic education or adult secondary education in 1997 and that 1,848,055 adult students took English as a second language (ESL) classes. ESL enrollments made up almost half of all 1997 adult education enrollments, up from 39% in 1996 (but down from the high of 54.1% in 1993). Almost two thirds of the ESL total was from California, a rate that has held steady over most of the decade.

Don't hide your light under a bushel!

Effort Reaches Out to Language Minorities

In less than a year, Census 2000 forms will be in the mail. This time, the Census Bureau is making a special effort to reach out to groups that have been undercounted in past census efforts, including people whose primary language is not English. This is crucial because census results are widely used to allocate funds for language minorities and other groups. The Census Bureau is launching the Census 2000 Language Program to provide information and to overcome language barriers that might prevent any individual from full participation in the decennial census. Census 2000 Language Assistance Guides will use visual aids to assist respondents completing the Census 2000 questionnaires. Information about language(s) spoken at home is part of what is collected by questionnaires, which will be available in Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Korean.

For general information about the Census, go to the Census Bureau's website at www.census.gov/ and choose <Census 2000>. Articles on the site that will interest ESL educators include "In Any Language, the Census is Important," "Working Along With Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers," and "Race, Hispanic Origin, and Ancestry."



Have you ever worked hard on a paper, conference presentation, lesson plan, curriculum, research report, program description, or program evaluation only to find it languishing on a shelf or in a file drawer a short while later? Have more of an impact by sharing this work with others in the field of adult ESL! Send it in now for the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) database.

When you do this, you contribute to one of the most visible and accessible sources of education information and you make your own work more available to colleagues throughout the world. (Having work in ERIC does not affect your copyright or reproduction rights.)

And, even if you post your work on the World Wide Web, are you sure people will be able to access it in 5 years from the same site? In 15 years? ERIC provides a reliable permanent archive for what you've produced.

As an adjunct ERIC clearinghouse, NCLE collects and evaluates materials for the ERIC database. We identify high quality resources, strengthening ERIC in the area of language and literacy education for adults and out-of-school youth learning English.

To submit something you've written to the ERIC database, contact MaryAnn Florez (maryann@cal.org) at NCLE. Or send a clear copy of the document and a completed ERIC Reproduction Release Form (you can download one from the World Wide Web at <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com/submitting.html#errp>) to MaryAnn's attention.

For more information about ERIC, visit Access ERIC's website at www.accesseric.org or e-mail accesseric@accesseric.org.



NCLE's Miriam Burt and Carol VanDuzer meet and greet people at the 1999 TESOL convention. NCLE publications were quite popular.

Research Priorities from page 1

of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), and TESOL, presents that overview in a useful framework.

The document (available on the Web at www.cal.org/nCLE) identifies five areas for research—the adult English language learner, program design, teacher preparation, instruction, and assessment. At the March 1999 TESOL convention in New York City, a panel of experts assembled by NCLE staff discussed a major issue in each area. Discussants then provided critiques. Following are key points from these presentations:

Panelists

• **Characteristics and needs of adult English learners**

Gail Weinstein, San Francisco State University

Adult learners in ESL programs are a heterogeneous population that bring to class rich knowledge and skills. Are they simply recipients of teaching or participants with teachers in learning and research? How can we foster communities of learners within classrooms?

• **Program design and instructional content and practices**

Elsa Auerbach, University of Massachusetts at Boston

Learners as well as researchers need to conduct research on programs and to have a stake in the design and uses of the research. How do we know which program types, approaches, and practices are most effective with which groups of learners?

• **Teacher preparation and staff development**

Jo Ann Crandall, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

We need extensive analysis of the needs of teachers (through questionnaires, surveys, and listserv solicitations) as well as case studies of innovative professional development models.

• **Learner assessment and outcomes**

Heide Wrigley, Aguirre International

With the current focus on learner outcomes (e.g., in the National Reporting System), we need to reconcile what we are able to measure, and what standardized means of measurement exist, with what it is important for learners to be able to do.

• **Policy**

John Comings, NCSALL

Federal, state, and local policy will always affect research and practice. We need a long-term, coordinated research effort that looks closely at instruction as well as at outcomes.

Critiques From Discussants

• **Community perspective**

Klaudia Rivera, Long Island University

Research needs to take into consideration the point of view of the learners themselves and the strengths of their languages and cultures in their own right, not simply as bridges to the English language and mainstream American culture.

• **International perspective**

Jill Bell, York University

Research needs to include the development and use of the best standardized tests available as well as community-based research, narrative research, and teacher research. We need to continually ask whether we have identified the most important research questions.

A Research Agenda for Adult ESL gives funding agencies clear research priorities suggested by leaders in the field, gives researchers direction and support for specific projects, and gives practitioners a focus for improving adult ESL programs.

If you are doing research or developing programs focusing on any of the areas listed above, please let us know so

your work can be included in this endeavor. NCLE plans to sponsor a working session at next year's TESOL Convention to continue the discussion and monitor progress. Contact Carol Van Duzer (carol@cal.org) or Joy Kreeft Peyton (joy@cal.org) at NCLE for more information.

The research agenda is available on NCLE's website at www.cal.org/nCLE/agenda/index.html or by mail from the clearinghouse.

Using video as a spark, *A Day in the Life of the González Family* offers high beginning through intermediate level adult English language learners an opportunity to develop communication skills while acquiring cultural content knowledge relevant to their daily lives. A short video focuses on five members of an immigrant family from Mexico who live and work in Napa Valley, California. The experiences of this family—for example, looking for work, giving and receiving job evaluations, helping children at school, and communicating with co-workers—represent typical situations that immigrants may face, regardless of their language and cultural background.

The textbook, by NCLE's Carol Van Duzer and Miriam Burt, consists of ten thematic units that lead learners from guided language practice through the development of project-based activities. These activities support development in vocabulary, grammar, literacy, and problem solving. A teacher's guide, also written by VanDuzer and Burt, completes the package. The video, textbook, and teacher's guide can be ordered from Delta Systems Co. at (800) 323-8270, or www.delta-systems.com.

Publications Order Form

New ERIC Digests from NCLE

Using the World Wide Web with Adult ESL Learners

by Kate Silc

Presents reasons for using Web activities in adult ESL instruction, addresses the issue of preparing learners to use the Web, and suggests activities that use authentic learning experiences to enhance skills.

Using Multicultural Children's Literature in Adult ESL Classes

by Betty Ansin Smallwood

Discusses why and how children's literature can be used with adult English language learners and includes an annotated book list for five English proficiency levels.

Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners

by Donna Moss and Carol Van Duzer

Provides a rationale for using project-based learning with adult English language learners, describes the process, and gives examples from one adult ESL program.

Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills

by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez

Reviews the current status of pronunciation instruction in adult ESL classes, discusses factors that influence pronunciation mastery, and suggests ways to plan and implement pronunciation practice.

Current Concepts and Terms in Adult ESL

by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez

Besides providing thumbnail sketches of current terms, the Q&A lists several recent publications where these concepts are discussed more completely.

ERIC Digests (Free)*

- **Using the World Wide Web with Adult Learners** (December 1998)
- **Using Multicultural Children's Literature in Adult ESL Classes** (December 1998)
- **Project-Based Learning for Adult English Language Learners** (December 1998)
- **Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills** (December 1998)
- **Current Concepts and Terms in Adult ESL** (November 1998)
- **Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Communities** (June 1998)
- **Adult ESL Learners with Special Needs: Learning from the Australian Perspective** (June 1998)
- **Using Software in the Adult ESL Classroom** (March 1998)

*All 62 of NCLE's ERIC Digests are also on the Web at www.cal.org/nclc

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their existence so that they may be considered in creating realistic and effective pronunciation goals and development plans for the learners. For example, native-like pronunciation is not likely to be a realistic goal for older learners; a learner who is a native speaker of a tonal language, such as Vietnamese, will need assistance with different pronunciation features than will a native Spanish speaker; and a twenty-three year old engineer who knows he will be more respected and possibly promoted if his pronunciation improves is likely to be responsive to direct pronunciation instruction.

This article is excerpted from *Improving Adult ESL Learners' Pronunciation Skills* by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez, an ERIC Digest published in December 1998 by NCLE and available on our website at www.cal.org/ncl or by mail from the clearinghouse at 4646 40th St., NW, Washington, DC 20016-1859 or ncl@cal.org.

Reminder

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Thanks to Sonia Kundert for
NCLEnotes' new look!