

*The English-Only Question:  
An Official Language for Americans?*

Dennis Baron.

New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.

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When Dennis Baron moved with his family to France, only the intervention of a sympathetic authority prevented French school officials from moving his non-French-speaking daughter back from the sixth grade to the first. With this disturbing tale, the author of *The English-Only Question* prefaces his thought-provoking book.

Although Baron's opposition to English-only is evident from this and other harrowing accounts of an official language stance being carried to the extreme, his stated objective is to demonstrate that the arguments both for and against the English-only position have changed little in the last 200 years. And it is the pro-English examples that are most familiar: Benjamin Franklin's expression of fear that Pennsylvania would become "a colony of aliens;" the turn-of-the-last-century suggestion that because Irish immigrants did not speak English, they were not human; Theodore Roosevelt's lament that this nation was becoming "a polyglot boarding house." By citing such examples, and examining them, Baron hopes to prove that concern about the status of English is unwarranted.

The book is divided into six thematic chapters. In chapter 1, "An Official Language," Baron explores the legal status of English and minority languages and reviews current attempts to make English the official language at various levels of government. Chapter 2, "Language and Liberty," investigates the relationship between language, power, and social organization. Chapter 3, "Defending the American Tongue," and chapter 4, "Language and the Law," deal with language and nativism, the proprietorial

attitude toward the United States that is held by many English-speaking people. Chapter 5 concerns the treatment of official English in the schools and the impact of such policy on minority-language speakers. The final chapter reviews the ways in which other countries have handled the official language issue and reports the substance of congressional debate over the English Language Amendment (ELA).<sup>1</sup>

The status of English in the United States, Baron maintains, has always been fraught with political implications. He cites the long-standing goal of literacy programs to assimilate non-English-speaking peoples by supplanting their own language and culture with the dominant language and culture, and also notes attempts to disenfranchise such groups as immigrants, radical minorities, and non-Protestants. Literacy tests have always been intentionally discriminatory, asserts Baron, maintaining that the one he himself was required to take in 1965 before registering to vote in New York state had originally been contrived to disenfranchise Yiddish and German speakers.

Baron is quick to note weaknesses in the thinking of English-only proponents. Basing its mythology on the Judaeo-Christian ideal of a pre-Babel monolingual Eden, the pro-English constituency argues that monolingualism will promote national solidarity. As Baron points out, however, few modern nations are indeed monolingual.<sup>2</sup> Equally illogical, in Baron's view, is a public language policy that encourages immigrants to forsake their native languages while it simultaneously deplors the inability of most Americans to speak a second tongue.

The treatment of the literacy issue by various states is examined. The encouragement of French in Louisiana through state constitutional protection of "historic, linguistic, and cultural origins" (p. 87) is contrasted with the situation in New Mexico, where Spanish has traditionally been stigmatized and school children even penalized for speaking it while at play (pp. 94-104). As for California, the negative climate manifested by the 1986 passage of Proposition 63, which declared English the official state language, is scrutinized (p. 17). (These attitudes have become more mainstream with the recent acceptance of Proposition 187, which denied undocumented immigrants access to public education and social services.)<sup>3</sup> Occupying a rather neutral position is Illinois, where English is statutorily the official language, but speakers of minority languages are offered a variety of support services (p. 113).

Baron also explores the very real difficulties of establishing bilingual programs. The mixed successes of other countries in dealing with the literacy issue are instructive. The author suggests that rather than legislating the

use or nonuse of any given language, our national goal should be to enable Americans "to learn to read and write well enough in any one language ... to make that language work for them" (p. 199).

The breadth of historical, political, philosophical, and literary information is impressive. Inclusion of such commentaries as John Locke's observations on the arbitrary nature of word to referent, Walt Whitman's expressions of enthusiasm for a language as democratic as America itself, and Henry James' condemnation of American linguistic anarchy give richness and depth to the book. The work is well annotated and contains a substantial bibliography. In addition, although Baron's opposition to the English-only stance is clear from the outset, he is commendably dispassionate and unbiased in his presentation.

It may be the desire to avoid bias to which the lack of humor in the book can be attributed. Certainly, there must be some laughable incidents revolving around the literacy issue, but however masterfully Baron has researched the historical data, he has failed to uncover a single anecdote that he can relate in a humorous way. To have done so would not only make the book more enjoyable reading but also reinforce the point that the author is trying to make - that some of the reasons for insisting on English-only are downright ludicrous.

Despite this shortcoming, *The English-Only Question* is valuable reading. It would be especially so for ESL teachers in training and for those teaching in bilingual programs or in institutions with varied ethnic populations because it gives some feeling for obstacles that immigrants have had to face. It is particularly timely for its examination of the polarized attitudes towards immigrants that have periodically surfaced in California (most recently in the passage of Proposition 187). For those who have espoused English-only, this book could be the catalyst required to make them rethink their position. ■

#### Endnotes

1. The English Language Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was first proposed in 1981 by Senator S.I. Hayakawa and would require immigrants to learn English. Although still in the planning stages, the ELA, touching upon such issues as immigration policy and language loyalty, has aroused great public furor. It is supported by the lobbying group U.S. English.
2. Considered to be among the most stable of countries, Switzerland, which recognizes three national languages, is a case in point.

3. Editor's note: In the Fall, 1995, Proposition 187 was deemed largely unconstitutional by a federal judge, but California voters have predicted an alarming anti-immigrant trend that must be monitored carefully and opposed locally in California and nationally.

*English: Our Official Language?*

Bee Gallegos, Ed.

New York: H. W. Wilson Company. 1994.

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The recent elimination of affirmative action programs at the University of California, the passage of Proposition 187, and the 1986 passage of Proposition 63 (which declared English California's official language) have political leaders, civil rights organizers, and the intelligentsia scratching their heads. Bee Gallegos' *English: Our Official Language?* gives insight into the economic and social dynamics of the past two decades that have contributed to the xenophobic attitudes of intolerance so prevalent in California today. This collection of articles focuses on the controversy of giving a superior status to English and consequently a subordinate status to other languages and the people who use them. The book is a must for ESL teachers who are compelled to defend students from damaging linguistic policies advocated by U.S. English – a powerful organization that promotes Official English or English Only language amendments to the United States and individual state constitutions.

An instructor in an overcrowded ESL classroom may well wonder at the call to amend the linguistic policy of the U.S. Constitution; after all, there are more speakers of English now than ever before in American history, with tens of thousands on waiting lists to study English. *English: Our Official Language?* sheds light on this paradox; it can enlighten, enrage, and thoroughly inform the reader regarding U.S. language policy.

The collection is divided into four sections, the first of which is dedicated to the current English language amendment controversy. "Language Debates in the United States" by Jamie B. Draper and Martha Jimenez begins the discussion by taking the reader along a tumultuous time line of

language policy throughout the decade of the 1980s (p. 10). These authors provide brief synopses of policies regarding English language amendments, bilingual education, immigration legislation, foreign language instruction, and more in an effort to demonstrate the evolving nature of current language policy.

Articles in favor of an English language amendment, including a speech by the late S. I. Hayakawa (founder of U.S. English), reveal numerous misconceptions and the xenophobic rhetoric that has terrorized a misinformed public into legitimizing the superiority of the English language over other languages. In his 1985 speech, the Senator stated: "... the present politically ambitious 'Hispanic Caucus' looks forward to a destiny for Spanish-speaking Americans separate from that of ... the rest of us who rejoice in ... the English language ..." (p. 19). Ironically, Hayakawa condemned the spending of tax dollars on bilingual education after earlier boasting of his children's multilingual abilities gained because of state-funded university foreign language programs.

The second section deals with the historical, political, and legal impact of the English language controversy, and the third section concentrates on the social, cultural, and economic implications of language policies. Several articles explain that English has never been granted status as the official language of the United States, and this is the basis for an English language amendment to the Constitution. In her article Ingrid Betancourt suggests the framers of the Constitution refused "to institute a dictate that would be both culturally and politically divisive" (p. 132).

Jack Citrin's "Language, Politics, and American Identity" is an historical study of political and social trends that have shaped policy and attitude towards English language amendments. Citrin points to the political attitudes of ethnic solidarity during the 1960s and changes in immigration patterns during the 1970s and 1980s as the impetus for the current English language amendments throughout the United States. Currently, 17 states have English language statutes or amendments to their constitutions. Other articles in the second and third sections discuss California's own Proposition 63, as well as English language legislation in other states, especially Arizona's Proposition 106.

The final section of the book deals with issues of education tied to language policy, for example, bilingual education. The article titled "Bilingual Education" presents a detailed history of bilingual education and foreign language instruction throughout the United States dating back to the 18th century. This article discusses the twists and turns that bilingual educational philosophies took as a result of the expansionist agenda, the Civil War, massive immigration, the world wars, the Civil Rights Movement, and cur-

rent immigration patterns. The need for colleges and universities to serve foreign students, especially in the sciences, and the impact Proposition 63 has had on libraries are also addressed in this section.

Contesting unfounded claims that bilingual programs fail, Lisa Davis reports on the successful bilingual program in Calexico, California, where 90% of the student population live in poverty. Davis retraces the academic steps of a young man who entered the United States and the Calexico school district five years earlier. She cites specific examples of what the district has been doing to beat all odds. The bottom line is that the district is truly dedicated to a well-developed and sound bilingual program. English-only advocates can point to the district's low test scores and claim that Calexico is failing its students. Calexico's superintendent, Roberto Moreno, is the first to step up and admit "kids are coming here from backgrounds that prevent them from doing well on [standardized] tests," but he gladly points out low dropout rates (15%) and proudly states that 95% of the graduates go on to college (p. 116).

Several of the issues and facts discussed throughout this collection are touched upon in more than one article, which is actually a strength in this book, because the breadth of information requires reiteration. ESL/bilingual teachers must fight to preserve the rights of the language-minority communities we serve. *English: Our Official Language?* is an historical, legal, social, and pedagogical arsenal of facts that educators can use to intelligently and concisely counter the ethnically divisive and detrimental philosophies of U.S. English and other similar organizations. ■

*Collaborations: English in Our Lives,  
Beginning 1 Student Book*

Jann Huizenga, Gail Weinstein-Shr

*Collaborations: English in Our Lives,  
Beginning 2 Student Book*

Gail Weinstein-Shr, Jann Huizenga

*Collaborations: English in Our Lives,  
Beginning 1 and 2 Workbooks*

Jann Huizenga

*Teacher's Kit, Blackline Masters, Transparencies,  
Assessment Program (In development)*

Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1996.

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In response to the challenging question, "Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?" David Nunan (1995) suggests that it is possible to close the gap between teaching and learning if learners can be encouraged to actively participate and make decisions about (a) the content of what they learn, (b) the process they use to learn, and (c) the language they use to communicate in real or simulated contexts. In both *Collaborations 1* (low beginning) and *Collaborations 2* (high beginning), Jann Huizenga and Gail Weinstein-Shr address these issues. Shifting from a traditional audio-lingual, competency-based approach (although competencies are addressed) to a more interactive, learner-centered approach, these authors encourage students to reflect on their own experiences and learning styles and use language to fulfill genuine purposes. Teachers and administrators should note

that the *Collaborations* series adheres to California state model standards, which will facilitate implementation of these standards.

Many traditional beginning-level ESL books treat the competencies (health, transportation, food, etc.) as separate entities and divide them by chapter. The *Collaborations* books link the competencies throughout the six units, beginning with the individual and moving out through a series of widening language environments; the units are (1) self, (2) school, (3) home, (4) work, (5) local community, and (6) global community. Each unit contains high-interest narratives by newcomers to North America, which give readers the opportunity to compare and contrast their own experiences. Some of the competencies that are interwoven throughout the units are family, employment, food, transportation, and celebrations.

In the series, students are given an active say in content. An excellent example of a learner-centered critical thinking exercise is "Making Classroom Rules" (*Book 2*, p. 30). In small groups learners make the rules they want for their classroom; this is a collaborative activity, involving negotiation and team-building skills, skills essential in the workplace as well as in the classroom.

Students are challenged to reflect on their own learning processes and are thereby encouraged to be independent thinkers. As early as *Book 1*, students develop metacognitive skills by articulating what they learned and why they liked it. In the exercise "Looking Back" (p. 47) students have to think about their learning and tell the class their ideas. A structured form is provided so even very low level students begin to express themselves.

In both *Workbooks 1* and *2* there are "Language Learning Diary" exercises, a kind of structured journaling in which students write what they learned, who they spoke to, what they read, the new words they learned, and what they want to learn. I have done reflective activities like this in my class and students respond positively to them; the *Collaborations* series would encourage me to do more. This diary is also a good retention strategy in open-entry classes. When students actually see what they have accomplished, they are motivated to continue coming to class. Students are also requested to assess themselves. In both books there is a learning log or "Checklist for Learning." These exercises not only help students articulate what they have learned, but they build self-esteem and confidence, characteristics that are essential for students in their daily lives and when they start their careers (The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992).

Huizenga and Weinstein-Shr also include exercises that enable students to use language in real settings for real audiences. In *Student Book 2*, students work in groups to make a "Handbook for Newcomers Survival

Guide" – they are encouraged to be their own researchers and ask people outside of the class to help them with their guides. There are revision exercises such as, "With your classmates, look again at your page. What else should go in? What should come out? What corrections do you want to make? Decide together and revise what you wrote." There are also questions that give students a notion of audience, such as "Who should read it?" (p. 96) In *Student Book 2*, "Bringing the Outside In" (p. 92), students make wall displays about themselves – this excellent interactive activity becomes a sort of poster session that builds rapport in the classroom as well as integrates the four language skills for a real audience.

Another exercise that encourages students to use language to communicate in real contexts is in *Book 1*, "Bringing the Outside in: Samples of Our Work." In other books I have seen Employment units with exercises that ask, "What can you do? Tell your skills." *Collaborations* goes further by asking students to demonstrate their skill: "What work can you do? Bring something to class. For example, if you knit, bring in a sweater. If you paint, bring in a painting. Tell the class what you can do (and show the class)" (p. 61). Such esteem and rapport builder exercises lower the affective filter (in other words, help students relax and open up) and are essential components of a successful ESL class.

The weaknesses of the book are few, but experienced teachers will notice them and want to supplement with their own materials to compensate for them. The first one is the absence of any kind of pronunciation practice. Pronunciation should be integrated into the lessons. Even in the beginning level, basic intonation practice and work on problematic sounds as they come up in the unit should be practiced in context. The second shortcoming (especially in *Student Book 2*) is the lack of challenging writing lessons. While there are several different exercises that students have to write (journal writing, learning diaries), the only writing I saw that had actual paragraphs was in *Workbook 2*, "Write your own story about your past, present, and future work" (p. 45). This book needs more formal paragraph writing instruction so that beginning students become familiar with paragraphing instead of waiting until the advanced level to develop their writing strategies; in addition, basic peer revision techniques should be included as well.

The strengths of *Collaborations* are many: The level of sophistication in these beginning-low books is very impressive. By using these books, students can become active participants and decision makers in their classrooms. I admire Huizenga and Weinstein-Shr for going down a different path to meet the needs of our diverse adult students – in doing so, they have enhanced competency-based education. ■

## Acknowledgement

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### *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*

H. Douglas Brown.

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.

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*Teaching by Principles* is a companion piece to the now classic *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* which recently came out in its third edition (1994). *Teaching* begins where *Principles* leaves off, moving the TESOL trainee from understanding the theoretical framework behind language teaching and into the classroom itself. It is a how-to book, guiding the novice through activities, group discussions, and individual soul-searching, as Brown attempts to shape a beginner into a seasoned teacher. If students master the material he has presented, there is a good chance their success rate will be high.

*Teaching* reiterates the foundations of language learning and teaching (chapters 1 through 5), goes on to explore contexts of teaching (chapters 6 through 8), and then moves rapidly into how one actually teaches listening, speaking, reading, and writing to warm bodies. The author concludes with a section on classroom practicalities: lesson planning, classroom management, and lifelong learning. There is a superb bibliography and both a subject and name index.

One of the reasons that Brown's book works well is its layout. It has sections and subsections set off by varying type sizes, which indicate categories and degrees of importance. At the end of each chapter is a section offering "topics for discussion, action, and research," from which I was able to select items for exploration either in class or for home reflection. These questions are often directed to pairs or small groups, which reinforces the interactive approach that Brown hopes trainees will utilize in their classrooms.

In Part I, Foundations for Classroom Practice, Brown moves the trainee through basic second language acquisition theory, and discusses historic and contemporary approaches to language teaching. He analyzes the learning process and the learner from the standpoint of cognitive, affective, and linguistic variables, a concrete pedagogical construct for the teacher trainee. From there, he moves into Part II, Contexts of Teaching, and describes learner variables including age, language proficiency level, and sociopolitical and institutional contexts. His chapter "Teaching Across Age Levels" explains in eight succinct pages how language learners differ by age; he does a similar job with his chapter, "Teaching Across Proficiency Levels."

Part III, Designing and Implementing Techniques, begins with an analysis of materials (texts, audiovisuals, and computer technology), describes the processes involved in interactive language teaching, explores grouping and groupwork (cooperative, collaborative, etc.), and considers learning styles and learner strategies. Included in these chapters are some interesting charts, tables, and inventories by which the reader can get a grip on some of these critical elements of instruction.

Brown has compiled resources from the corpus of second language pedagogy. Thus the reader encounters such masterful tools as "A Taxonomy of Language Teaching Techniques," which has been reprinted with permission from another publication (chapter 9), and "Foreign Language Interaction Analysis" (chapter 10). This piecing together from L2 scholarship is one of the things that Brown does best. He finds relevant and innovative data for his teacher trainees, just as he hopes the language teacher will create relevant and innovative lessons for her learners.

Chapters 13 through 19 are the chapters the novice in the field will refer to again and again. For that matter it wouldn't hurt the experienced to refresh themselves with specific techniques and tasks for teaching listening comprehension, oral communication skills, reading and writing skills, and grammar and vocabulary. Rich in detail, these chapters include the what and how of teaching these language domains. Brown includes lists of microskills, procedures for different levels of proficiency, types of performance, and suggestions for designing lessons. The chapters also include samples from pages of the kinds of texts adolescent and adult learners might encounter. This section concludes with a chapter on testing in which Brown offers a rationale for tests and testing and describes how to design good ones.

I used *Teaching by Principles* in a methods course I teach for the CLAD (Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development) certificate. This is a course for beginning and experienced K-12 teachers who will be working

with limited English speakers in their classrooms. On the same evening in the room next door, another teacher used *Teaching* with her TESOL-certificate students who will eventually be going overseas. These are two very different groups of learners, and while the book worked for my students, I suspect *Teaching* was a better match for her group. Let me explain why.

My students are practitioners who, for the most part, are already teaching or who have taught before. They have completed a fifth year of education courses which is required for California teaching credentials. They have studied foundations of learning; they know about groupwork and learning styles. They are learning how to teach their non-native speakers in the most effective ways to promote academic success. Accordingly, they loved the chapters on the nuts and bolts but were less than ecstatic about the theoretical underpinnings. And even in the practical sections there was still a significant mismatch because many of my students were primary grade teachers (K-3). What is useful to the adult instructor may be of little use to the elementary school teacher because learning takes place in small children very differently, as Brown notes.

The focus on the adult learner, however, is the only weakness of the text. *Teaching* is a terrific book, and I suspect the students in the class next door will refer again and again to this thorough text when planning lessons in Seoul or Tokyo or Madrid. *Teaching* shows its strength in what Brown knows best: the college student and the adult learner. For the teacher of these students it is a near-perfect training manual. ■



*Creating Contexts for Second Language Acquisition*

Arnulfo G. Ramirez

White Plains, NY: Longman, Inc. 1995.

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*Creating Contexts for Second Language Acquisition* promises to be a valuable resource for teachers and researchers whose focus is on language acquisition in the classroom. The material was compiled to assist second language instructors of English, French, German, and Spanish at the high school and adult levels. A guiding aim of the book is to help teachers develop awareness of how they can create effective learning contexts in second language classrooms.

Ramirez offers many teaching ideas and highlights relevant research. But although he states that second language acquisition research can provide valuable insights into facilitating classroom language acquisition, the many fine teaching ideas supplied throughout this text often appear to stand isolated from the pedagogical orientations that inspire them.

These ideas for second and foreign language teaching, drawn from a wide variety of sources, generally support a communicative approach incorporating a strong interactive emphasis. Pedagogy, learner variables, and assessment concepts are presented with clarity. Each chapter of the book ends with a summary and an exploratory section offering a variety of activities, such as practice lesson development, assessment of student attitudes, and interviews with teachers and language learners. Useful reference lists complete each chapter.

Chapter 1 sets the instructional theme for the book, which has authentic communication at its heart. Ramirez focuses on communicative competence. He explores a variety of dimensions including such social strategies as the ability to keep conversations going after misunderstandings occur and the awareness of turn-taking rules.

Chapter 3, devoted to cultural considerations, contains a treasury of ideas that furthers teacher and learner sensitivity. Survey instruments for assessing stereotypes about ethnic groups can inform the teacher or researcher about attitudinal orientations learners have. The results can be used in classroom discussions or other activities that develop insight into helpful as well as negative attitudes. Ramirez provides simple suggestions for teaching about culture that are very *do-able*—these include staging cultural minidramas, using authentic cultural realia, and having students consider the multiple, cross-cultural connotations of such common terms as *bread*.

Chapter 5 takes the reader on an historical walk through the history of language teaching. The renewing emphasis on the teaching of grammar, albeit within a natural context of usages, is described and supported with citations of recent investigations. Such an approach values the use of inductive reasoning. Sample exercises include having learners complete sentences, combine sentences, complete blanks in dialogues, and create dialogues and interviews to practice specific constructions, such as “If I were a teacher, I would ...” (p. 128-9).

Ramirez gives considerable attention to pronunciation by providing a variety of exercises, such as rehearsed practice and extemporaneous speaking for work with segmental and suprasegmental features. Listening and spelling exercises are also described that enhance awareness of standard pronunciation. The text provides sample classroom exercises focused on English, French, German, and Spanish.

Chapter 6 highlights measures for assessing learner differences with respect to language learning strategies, communication strategies, learning styles, attitudes, motivation, and anxiety levels. These measures provide excellent insights into why learners perform as they do.

A chapter each is devoted to listening, speaking, reading, and writing that briefly summarize recent major research and present a variety of instructional activities for beginning-, intermediate-, and advanced-proficiency students. The reading and listening chapters deal with these receptive skills from the perspective of process learning and meaning reconstruction, representative of the current pedagogical state of the art. Ramirez enhances the section on reading comprehension with material that shows how culturally determined meanings (from a Filipino and U.S. perspective) affect understanding of a sample passage about the nature of farming.

Speech skills are considered in light of the goal of affording learners the ability to engage in human interactions competently. Helping the learner to realize the importance of discourse style while accounting for such context variables as age, power relationships, gender, and cultural back-

grounds leads to valuable communicative sophistication. Also useful is the concern for building awareness of a wide variety of discourse strategies, like getting another’s attention, initiating and terminating or avoiding topics, and methods of conversational repair.

Because he views writing as a vital social act, Ramirez advocates giving assignments with authentic human purposes, providing generous allotments of class time for these assignments, and planning for collaborative writing among groups of students.

Teachers seeking to further their skills in the language classroom may benefit from the observation and self-reflection scales provided in chapter 12. Some indicators of successful teaching are drawn from the school effectiveness research of the last two decades and the California Foreign Language Framework. Additional indicators have their sources in the communicative teaching criteria developed by Richards and Nunan (1990) and in learner strategies scholarship. Ramirez also suggests participation in the major language teaching organizations listed for further professional development.

Ramirez’ book is a fine resource of ideas that provides a context for language acquisition in the classroom along with ways to assess the progress of that acquisition, but it fails to address some current key trends in teaching. Thematic and literature-based approaches to lesson planning are in wide use today and should be discussed. Multicultural literature resources should also be mentioned (e.g., Day’s annotated listing [1994] is excellent for secondary levels). Portfolio development has come into wide use, yet this text does not deal with its possibilities for demonstrating language growth. Although some theories of language acquisition are referenced, the author does not clearly link much of the material on teaching techniques or assessment procedures to them. On the other hand, the usefulness of this teaching resource outweighs its deficiencies, which could be addressed in a second edition. *Creating Contexts for Second Language Acquisition* is a comprehensive book that ought to be a component of the professional libraries of secondary and adult level language teachers and researchers. ■

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*Academic Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice:  
Preparing ESL Students for Content Courses*

Hugh Douglas Adamson.  
New York: Longman, 1993.

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Teachers have long believed that the most important factors in academic success are general language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence (i.e., how to interact in socially appropriate ways). Research by Collier (1989) and Cummings (1984) suggests that ESL students' academic success depends on not only proficiency in English, but also on contextual understanding or background knowledge of academic material. Similar conclusions were reached in a study by Saville-Troike (1984) in which the term *academic competence* was developed to describe such nonlinguistic factors of knowledge.

Hugh Adamson's *Academic Competence* provides both an empirical and a theoretical framework to use in preparing ESL students for content courses. This student-focused text cautions the reader that the failure of current mainstreaming practices lies in isolating ESL programs from the curriculum and in using theme-based textbooks that provide little if any help to the ESL student (pp. 114-119). Adamson emphasizes the concept of academic competence and presents case studies in support of the proposition that proficiency must include knowledge other than that of linguistic patterns.

In chapter 2 Adamson compares and contrasts two dominant theories of language learning – structuralism (the analysis of structures such as words, sounds, and sentences) and communicative competence (the claim that language proficiency consists of much broader abilities than those measured by traditional language proficiency tests). Familiar models pre-

sented in this chapter include the separate abilities theory of language proficiency, generative and universal grammar, speech acts, the cooperative principle, and the preference model of language proficiency. (Tables summarizing the key characteristics of each model would be helpful to include in this and the next chapter in a future edition of the text.) Adamson concludes that reasoning ability and background knowledge are as important as linguistic structures, general vocabulary, and language functions in achieving academic success.

Schema theory, which emphasizes the "relationship between general language proficiency and a background knowledge in a particular topic" (p. 48), is adequately presented in chapter 3. To move successfully from the ESL program to the mainstream, students must cultivate the ability to understand discourse by mastering contextual information (brain-to-page or top-down processing). They must also increase their aptitude in grammar and vocabulary (page-to-brain or bottom-up strategy). A strength of this chapter lies in the author's efforts to analyze the impact of relevant schools of educational philosophy, such as objectivism, social constructionism, and experiential realism, on ESL teaching and learning practice.

According to Adamson, ESL students fail academically because they have little if any acquired knowledge of an academic subject in their first language, lack basic information about the target culture (e.g., what is expected of them at school), and have weak coping skills. The case studies described in chapter 4 provide ample evidence and serve as an urgent call for reevaluating the nature and organization of ESL programs. Adamson advocates augmenting the three types of established content courses (theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct) by offering "precourses" in which knowledge of specific subject matter, academic learning strategies or scripts for school, and critical thinking can be taught more effectively (pp. 98-101).

The theory of academic competence discussed in chapters 5 and 6 suggests the following general principles for preparing ESL students to meet the demands of mainstreaming:

1. Academic strategies should be explicitly taught on an individual basis.
2. Students can best learn academic strategies in a content-based course that uses authentic texts in a setting that provides for contact with native speakers.
3. Teaching should be interactive and experiential.
4. The subject matter should be one that students will need to know when they are mainstreamed.

The last chapter of the book is particularly helpful because it presents in detail a week-long instructional unit from an adjunct course along with a host of reading, listening, and writing activities. Spolsky's preference model of language proficiency is concisely described in the appendix, where the ESL practitioner will find that interlanguage, the psycholinguistic system, and other components of the model are discussed from the learner's viewpoint.

The focused writing style, the well-designed qualitative research, and the practical recommendations contained in this text will make it very appealing to classroom teachers of beginning literacy, high school ESL, and university courses. The timely policy suggestions found throughout this volume will benefit ESL program coordinators and decision-makers at all levels. Lastly, ESL researchers should heed Adamson's message and strive to develop sound methodological tools that can be used to more effectively mainstream our nonnative students and improve their academic performance. ■

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*How To Be A More Successful Language Learner:  
Toward Learner Autonomy (2nd ed.)*

Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson.  
Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1994.

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Anyone who has ever tried to master a foreign language dreams of finding some way to make the process easier. *How To Be A More Successful Language Learner* helps the language learner toward this goal by explaining in detail the skills and approaches that promote language learning. Although reading this how to/self-improvement book will not make readers fluent in any language, it will give them a running start toward the acquisition of their chosen foreign language. The writers of this book have effectively made the wealth of information accumulated during the last 20 years of second language acquisition (SLA) research accessible to non-professionals. As a result, everyone can benefit from the methods and techniques now known to lead to greater success in foreign language learning.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, *Before You Begin*, contains seven chapters and is designed to familiarize students with the essentials of language learning. The first two chapters deal with what recent SLA research has taught us about factors affecting language learning and the process of language acquisition. Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on setting realistic goals and establishing a study plan, thus helping students establish a clear idea of what they expect to accomplish and the best way to go about attaining their objectives. Chapters 5 and 6 give the language student an overview of the different aspects of communication and language; the goal of these two chapters is to make language learners aware of the vitality and intricacy of language so that they begin to realize that the task they are about to undertake is not simply or quickly accomplished. The

final chapter in this section explores the resources available to help the language learner succeed.

The second part of this book, *Once You Begin*, contains eight chapters. Some of the information in this section repeats what is found in the first part, either as reinforcement or for elaboration. In chapter 8, as in chapter 3, the writers impress on the language learner the importance of taking charge of a study plan. Chapter 9 is a pep talk; it lets language learners know that they are not beginning their language study at point zero but rather already possess a lot of knowledge that will help them to learn their chosen language. Like chapter 4, chapter 10 encourages learners to evaluate their progress continually, and it provides questionnaires to help learners assess how well they are doing. The remaining five chapters in this book follow the same pattern – each chapter takes an aspect of language acquisition and suggests a strategy to follow to best achieve the chosen skill. At the end of the book the writers include two appendixes: one lists the addresses of major publishers of foreign language materials, and the other the addresses of useful organizations.

This second edition of *How To Be A More Successful Language Learner* augments the first edition (published in 1982) most notably by including sections on cognitive and metacognitive strategies for language acquisition and the application of computers and media devices to language learning. The inclusion of these sections improves the book for the language student and makes the book even more useful for foreign language teachers than it was before.

There is no doubt that this book can help foreign language teachers organize their classes around a specific skill area; it can also make teachers more aware of different learning styles and methods, thus enabling them to create more appropriate lessons for their students. The overriding purpose of this book, however, is to give self-motivated language students the tools and knowledge to control and direct their own language study. These students may very well be learning in a formal classroom setting, but the writers' philosophy is that even in a classroom students should play an active role in guiding their course of study.

To a certain degree this book preaches to the choir. It will probably be most helpful to a language learner who has already experienced some degree of success in studying a language and wants either to improve in that language or get a fresh start with a new language. If a student has had quite a bit of trouble learning a foreign language, some of the easy and sometimes obvious solutions the writers of this book propose will probably not be of much use. However, as a tool to improve one's language learning skills and to make the most of a foreign language class this book is extremely effec-

tive. Academic research is at its most useful when it can improve the lives of the general population. *How To Become A More Successful Language Learner* takes the information gained from SLA research and makes it available to the foreign language student in a way that is both easily understood and highly applicable to the student's own language study. Everyone with an interest in language acquisition would benefit from reading this book. ■