

FOUNDATIONS  
FOR TEACHING  
ENGLISH AS  
A SECOND  
LANGUAGE

Theory and method  
for multicultural education

Muriel Saville-Troike

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Foundations  
for Teaching English  
as a  
Second Language

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for multicultural education*

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# Preface

During the past decade, rapid changes have taken place in linguistics, in education, and in the very nature of American society, which have had profound implications for the teaching of English as a second language. Much of the traditional content of ESL programs and materials has been rendered obsolete by these changes, and the goals and methods of ESL instruction have been called seriously into question. The assumptions regarding the nature of language and language learning upon which ESL methodology was founded have been in large part discredited, and special ESL classes in the public schools have been determined to be educationally unsound in many instances, and in possible violation of desegregation laws and decrees. ESL, formerly the handmaiden of assimilation, has found itself in the unfamiliar role of partner with vernacular instruction in the context of education for a pluralistic society.

There is an urgent need to formulate a new set of goals, methods, and concepts for ESL instruction if it is to remain viable and make its potential contribution to American education. The present work draws on recent developments in linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and language pedagogy in an attempt to provide a theoretical basis for such a new formulation. At the same time it draws on my own classroom experiences in teaching non-English speaking students, from the children of migrant laborers in kindergarten to foreign students in college, to suggest practical procedures and strategies for implementing the new directions which are called for.

Most of the background information and instructional strategies presented here are meant to apply primarily to heterogeneous, integrated classes rather than to segregated ESL classes or to English as a foreign language (EFL) programs in other countries, though much of what is said is obviously relevant to them as well. I have also placed emphasis on the role of ESL in bilingual education, explaining their compatible and overlapping goals and procedures as well as their unique methods and contributions. There have been unfortunate misunderstandings in both of these areas regarding their relationship, and too little practical classroom assistance has been available for English teaching which is appropriate to these contexts.

Because a child's first years in school are critical in terms of his self-image, his attitudes toward learning and his wider environment, I have placed a heavy emphasis on early language development and on the acquisition of academic skills (such as reading) at the kindergarten and early elementary levels. At the same time, however, I have attempted to provide suggestions for solving specific problem situations which are likely to occur at a number of different levels. While there are some commonalities in teaching English as a second language across all age groups, there are also many differences which need to be taken into account. Any apparent redundancies in the text are purposeful rather than inadvertent, and are intended to reinforce points regarded as important.

This book has been written both for teachers and for teachers-in-training, especially those interested in ESL and bilingual education, but also for teachers in self-contained classrooms, and for teachers of reading, mathematics, social studies, and other subject areas who have one or more students learning English as a second language while also needing to learn the content of instruction. My aim has been to make current pertinent information from a number of fields accessible to readers who have little or no previous background in these fields. Because the treatment of each subject is necessarily very abbreviated, I would hope that readers would pursue further information through the additional sources which have been suggested after each topic.

The teacher of English to speakers of other languages has a special trust, and a special responsibility. The student who comes to us exposes more than just his lack of command of a subject. So deeply is language bound up with a person's sense of self-identity and self-worth, that the chances for psychological and social damage to students in the teaching process are very great. In addition, language is not merely an object or a skill, but is the very medium through which much subsequent learning will take place, including the learning of language itself. A great deal of a student's academic, social, and economic opportunity depends upon

his control of English, but if it is gained at the cost of the individual's most deeply held values, the gain may not be worth the loss. It is my sincere hope that this book may contribute to helping teachers to teach more effectively, and more sensitively, and to realize more fully the depth of their responsibility in teaching that most human of human traits—language.

No book such as this is created in a vacuum, and I am deeply indebted to many teachers and colleagues for suggestions and insights which have influenced the evolution of my own theory and practice in teaching English as a second language. While I could not possibly name them all, I would like particularly to mention and thank Frederick Brengelman, Archibald A. Hill, Mary Finocchiaro, Robert Lado, John C. Manning, Christina Bratt Paulston, Wilga Rivers, and Rudolph C. Troike. I would also like to express my appreciation to the very competent editorial and production staff of Prentice-Hall who have been of great help. Marilyn Brauer, Fred Bernardi, and Cynthia Insolio.

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# From Melting Pot to Salad Bowl

## CHAPTER 1

*Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . .*

—from the sonnet "THE NEW COLOSSUS,"  
by EMMA LAZARUS

This verse, found on the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, expresses the philosophy which has dominated the concept of America for the past two centuries. To a Europe torn by war and weighed down by political oppression and rigid class barriers, America was indeed a land of opportunity, where a man's status was determined by his ability rather than his birth, and where the Constitution protected his personal liberty.

The American dream was a reality for many; millions came to our shores seeking to become a part of this new nation and gladly put behind them the languages and cultures they had left, to embrace the new. The passing of the frontier ended the seemingly infinite capacity of the continent to absorb new immigrants, and quotas were imposed, which though biased were still generous. Even today probably no nation on earth admits as many immigrants, nor has so many who wish to come.

Much has been made in recent years of the "myth" of the melting pot. But for many groups for many years it was—and for many still remains—a cherished goal. Millions of people have willingly melted into the mainstream, often contributing something of themselves as they did so.

Our national motto, *e pluribus unum*, "out of many, one" can serve to describe our cultural and linguistic sources as well as our political origins. Although our institutions and values reflect the heavy influence of our heritage from England, our national culture is not the invention of a single ethnic group; rather it is a rich amalgam to which many groups have contributed. Terms such as *skunk* and *moccasin*, *mesa* and *rodeo*, *chow* and *bayou* bear the stamp of the American experience, and distinguish American English from British English (just as, for example, the varieties of Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Mexico differ from that of Spain and reflect the unique history of each of these places).

In most cases, the many immigrant groups to the United States (the Irish, German, Greek, Polish, Czech, Russian, Scandinavian, Italian, and others) wanted to assimilate to the dominant culture, and generally succeeded economically, linguistically, and politically by the second generation of residence. Children often could not talk to their grandparents, so rapidly and completely was the transition to English completed.

Other non-English-speaking communities did not move to the United States; rather, it moved to them: the Native Americans, the original Spanish-speaking in the former Mexican territory of the Southwest, the Acadian French transplanted from Canada to Louisiana, and most recently the Puerto Ricans via our island conquest. Whether they have rejected or been refused assimilation by the dominant society, these diverse speech communities have maintained their linguistic and cultural identity for generations. The "melting-pot" concept has not fully applied to them.

As the United States reaches its bicentennial, we are conscious that we have as a nation begun to mature, and with maturity has come greater sophistication and self-awareness. We have begun to realize that the American dream, which was and is real, has not been equally available to all, and we have begun, however haltingly, to do something about the inequities. Some of us have also begun to recognize that being American does not necessarily mean rejecting our natal languages and cultures, but that successful and satisfying bilingualism and biculturalism are possible in our society. These new realizations reflect one of the most profound changes ever to take place in our national values, and it is important that we understand some of the implications of this change, including both its promises and its problems.

As we look to the experience of history, we find that a certain amount of cultural and linguistic uniformity is a necessary prerequisite for achieving stability in the process of building a nation-state. Linguistic and cultural differences are a great obstacle to national unity, and to full participation by all groups in the national life. At a recent meeting spon-

sored by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, African delegates repeatedly made this point: bilingual education is a luxury which only a developed and secure society such as the United States can afford. Even in purely economic terms, most countries cannot afford the cost of developing educational programs in several languages, particularly when they can barely afford to provide an educational system in one. Politically, we must be concerned with the potential centrifugal effects of separatism on our social fabric.

We have few guides as to the ability of truly multilingual and multicultural societies to survive. In the past, most such nations have been conquest states and have lasted only so long as a central government was powerful enough to maintain control—usually by force of arms. We have only to read the newspapers to know how many minority languages are suppressed in nations around the globe—Welsh in England, Breton in France, Basque in France and Spain are examples—and how often linguistic differences lead to bloody clashes, as in Belgium and India. Although with respect to some of our minorities mentioned above, the United States too is a conquest state, the American experience is largely unique both because we are a democracy, and because so many of our non-English-speaking groups came here by choice. Our past history and our present situation are therefore largely without precedent, and a resolution of the problems inherent in a policy of cultural self-determination will require much sincere attention and dedication.

While we cannot deny the *historical* validity of the melting-pot concept—in spite of the fact that not all groups fully melted—nor indeed the *necessity* of developing common cultural institutions in the process of building a nation, we must recognize that we have entered a new period in American history, for which a new metaphor is appropriate—that of the salad bowl.<sup>1</sup> This metaphor is particularly apt, for a salad is not just a mere mechanical mixture of elements; it is rather an emergent entity which is more than the sum of its parts, in which the parts remain distinguishable and we can still recognize their separate contribution to the whole. It is this integrity of our cultural components, then, and their identifiability, which forms the basis of the new metaphor.

The salad-bowl concept of American society is a relatively new one, and like all new ideas, will take time to mature, to be institutionalized, and to spread. It expresses a rich fulfillment of the purposes for which our nation was founded, yet one which will require many readjustments in the equilibrium of our present system of national values and cul-

<sup>1</sup>The term "salad bowl" was used by Bambi Cárdenes at a meeting on Mexican-American education held by the United States Commission on Civil Rights in San Antonio, Texas, in March 1974

tural institutions. As civic violence from Little Rock to Boston has attested, these readjustments by dominant segments of the society do not come easily. Nor have they, much as we might have wished, sprung from an enlightened sense of justice and humanity toward all our citizens. Rather they have resulted from militancy by minority groups demanding equal rights, and from court orders sometimes enforced by federal bayonets—even against a governor standing in a schoolhouse door.

We still have a long way to go before all of the minorities in our country enjoy equal rights, equal access to opportunities, and equal standards of living. As government statistics repeatedly show, there continues to be a vastly disproportionate distribution of minorities with respect to almost any measure of income, health, education, or occupation. Until these inequities have been righted, the American dream will remain for many more of an ideal than a reality.

Inherent in the vision of America expressed by the salad-bowl metaphor is a new approach to education which finds expression in two related movements, bilingual-bicultural education and multicultural education. These movements have their roots in two sources: the demand by minority groups to the right to their cultural integrity, and a humanistic concern for both equal educational opportunity for all children and increased understanding and respect for the cultural diversity in our midst. Taken together, bilingual-bicultural education and multicultural education constitute probably the single most significant movement in the history of American education.

For the child from a non-English-speaking background, language is at the heart of equal access to educational and economic opportunity. English is the national tongue of the United States, and a command of it is essential for full participation in the academic, economic, and political systems of this country. Yet many thousands of children enter our schools each year unable to speak the language. If these students are to have a chance for success in our society, a chance to defend themselves from exploitation, or even a chance to be free to manage their own affairs, they must become fluent in English. To be able to deal with the majority culture on their own terms, they must master most of the basic grammatical structures of English, its sounds, and an adequate English vocabulary, as well as fundamental reading and writing skills, and they must acquire a knowledge of how to use all of these appropriately in a variety of social settings to acquire information and to express themselves.

Different groups and different individuals have a variety of reasons for seeking, or rejecting, the attainment of a fluent command of English as their goal. Apart from the decisions which a group or individual may make, however, the courts have decreed that it is discriminatory for the

schools, as public agencies, to require achievement in English of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds without making special provision for them.<sup>2</sup> Thus the schools are under a mandate to provide such students with the linguistic means necessary for their equal access to educational opportunity. Whatever form this provision may take in particular schools, it will inevitably involve some special attention to improving the English skills of these students.

The primary concern of this book is to lay out the foundations which teachers should have to help them more effectively meet this need. These foundations include first of all understanding of the linguistic, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of the situation, as the basis from which any valid methodology must spring. Although many of the methodological directions reflect the results of practical classroom experience, it is a basic premise of this book that the teacher who understands the factual and conceptual foundations of second language teaching in a cross-cultural setting will be much better prepared to apply the methodology in appropriate ways to meet the needs of the individual student than will a teacher who has been given only a mechanical set of procedures to follow.

If we are to realize the goals of providing equal educational opportunity to children who come from other language backgrounds, we must first learn to accept their existing linguistic and cultural patterns as strengths to build upon, rather than as handicaps to successful learning. We must begin with an understanding of language and culture, because children do not begin learning when they come to school. They are part of a social community, and have already learned much of its values and its expectations. They have acquired communication skills in at least one language, and these are already related to ways of thinking and feeling and acting. Even more importantly perhaps, it should be remembered that the school forms only a part of students' larger learning experience, and that they will continue throughout their school years to learn more outside than in it.

We must recognize such facts as the following:

Teachers as well as children come with culturally determined individual and group attitudes, expectations, and skills.

Non-English-speaking children usually have different experiences from the ones assumed or desired by the school; the school is thus a cross-cultural learning situation for them.

<sup>2</sup>This was the conclusion of the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Lau vs. Nichols* on January 21, 1974. This decision is of such critical importance for teaching English as a second language, it is included in its entirety as an appendix (see p. 144).

Unconsciously held attitudes and expectations cause teachers to react differently to linguistically and culturally diverse children.

Children's self-image and their achievement levels are strongly influenced by the view and expectations which the majority culture holds of them.

For these reasons, we will first discuss some of the common misconceptions and stereotypes held by the majority culture which may inhibit teachers' real understanding of the non-English-speaking child, and therefore his education. Methods and materials for classroom instruction are, of course, important as well, but they will be addressed later when we may do so critically from a vantage point of psychological, linguistic, and cultural awareness. Finally, special attention will be given to the role of teaching English as a second language in bilingual education programs, and to questions of preparing ourselves or others for the changing requirements of multicultural education.

#### FOR ADDITIONAL READING

AARONS, ALFRED C., BARBARA Y. GORDON, and WILLIAM A. STEWART, eds., "Linguistic-Cultural Differences and American Education," special anthology issue, *The Florida FL Reporter*, 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1969).

ABRAHAMSON, ROGER D. and RUDOLPH C. TROIKE, eds., *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972).

ALATIS, JAMES E., ed., *Bilingualism and Language Contact: Anthropological, Linguistic, Psychological, and Sociological Aspects*, Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics, No. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1970).

FISHMAN, JOSHUA A., *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

# Psychological Foundations

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

Given appropriate motivation, a normal child can learn any language to which he has adequate exposure. If he hears and responds to two (or more) languages in his environment, he will become bilingual.

Much of a child's language development is completed before he ever comes to school. By the age of six months an infant has produced all of the vowel sounds and most of the consonant sounds of any language in the world, including some that do not occur in the language his parents speak. If the child hears English spoken around him, he will learn to discriminate among those sounds that make a difference in the meaning of English words (the *phonemes*), and he will learn to disregard those that do not. If the child hears Spanish spoken around him, he will learn to discriminate among some sounds the English speaker learns to ignore, as the single *r* in *pero* 'but' and the doubled *r* in *perro* 'dog', and to disregard some differences that are not distinctive in Spanish, but vital to English word-meaning, as the *sh* and *ch* of *share* and *chair*.

The average child has mastered most of the distinctive sounds of his first language before he is three years old, and he controls most of its basic grammatical patterns before he is five or six. Complex grammatical patterns continue to develop through the school years, and he will add new vocabulary items even through adult life.

This feat seems little short of miraculous, and we are not at all sure



how it is accomplished. The nature of our speculations has changed radically in the past decade, primarily owing to recent developments in theoretical linguistics and psycholinguistics. These hypotheses have extensive implications for language development programs used during the beginning years of school.

It has been suggested by some that primary language acquisition is in large part the result of the child's natural desire to please his doting parents, who wait impatiently for him to utter a recognizable word. Yet the offspring of even relatively indifferent parents acquire language, as do children of parents who are completely deaf, if there is another at least minimal source of language in their environment. (We are speaking here of hearing children learning the oral expression of language; either hearing or deaf children may acquire language through exposure to the visual mode of expression, sign language.)

It has been suggested by others that a child's language acquisition is purposive, that he develops language because of his urge to communicate his wants and needs to his caretakers. Research indicates, however, that talking develops as an activity that a child indulges in to a great extent for its own sake. Up to the age of about eighteen months, "talk" tends to accompany action or activity rather than be a substitute for it.<sup>1</sup> Within the child's limited sphere of activity, communicative needs seem to be satisfied by gesture and such extralinguistic vocalization as squeals, whines, grunts, and cries.

Perhaps the most widely held view is that a child learns language by imitation (the behaviorist stimulus-response theory). It is true that much of a child's initial language learning can be attributed to his imitation of sounds and words around him, but many of his utterances are quite original and cannot be explained as imitations at all. This stimulus-response theory also holds that the adult's role is to correct the child when he is wrong in his language use and to reinforce him when he is right. In fact, there seems to be no evidence that either correction or reinforcement of phonology and grammar occurs often enough to be an important factor. Parents do correct taboo expressions and misstatements of fact, but seldom correct immature grammatical forms.<sup>2</sup> The same infrequency of correction is found from India to Samoa.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Arnold Gesell, *The First Five Years of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1940).

<sup>2</sup>Vivian M. Horner, "The Verbal World of the Lower-Class Three-Year-Old: A Pilot Study in Linguistic Ecology" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester, 1968); Roger Brown, Courtney Cazden, and Ursula Bellugi, "The Child's Grammar from 1 to 3," in *1967 Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, ed. J. P. Hill (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1969)

<sup>3</sup>Dan I. Slobin, "Questions of Language Development in Cross-Cultural Perspective" (paper prepared for a symposium on Language Learning in Cross-Cultural Perspective, Michigan State University, 1968).