

ASSIGNMENT 8

TEACHING THE SKILLS

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(All quotations ---except when specified otherwise----- are taken from; Brown, Douglas 2001, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, Second Edition, White Plains, NY: Longman. (abbreviated as IALP); or Brown, Douglas 2000, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Fourth Edition, White Plains, NY: Longman (abbreviated as PLLT))

CHAPTER 16 TEACHING LISTENING

QUESTION 1

Input and intake are two quite different things. “Input” ----including the important comprehensible input defended by Krashen---- concerns the aural reception of language which in Krashen’s case implies going just beyond the learner’s current ability (“i + 1” input) . In contrast, “intake” is related to what is actually stored in a learner’s comprehensive competence (Brown, pg. 248). In a sense the very words help to understand the difference; “input” implies “putting” something, and usually putting something refers to something dealing with the external. “Input” comes usually, but of course not exclusively, from the teacher. On the other hand, “intake” is concerned with taking something; that is to say, it requires internalizing some aspect or other. A teacher might provide all the listening input in the world, but her concern ought to be that students take such “input”, really, “in”. (Perhaps a similarity occurs in terms of Krashen’s differentiation between learning and acquisition; the first involves consciousness learning, the second subconscious and even unconscious internalization.) So it seems these concepts are opposites. How, then, could some contact between each come about? Well by thinking of them as ideal extremes in a dynamic continuum within the learning process. Moving from “input” to “intake” is the absolutely crucial migration required in the area of listening skills. The main question is to know how to convert one into another: how to move from putting something out there, to actually taking it in, making it our own. In order to do this the learner and teacher must begin to comprehend some assumptions about how listening itself is done. This means focusing on, at least, three aspects: 1. understanding that listening is interactive, 2. learning about the different types of spoken language, and finally, 3. trying to understand what characteristics make listening a difficult affair. Through this triad we can better open the road which leads from “inputting” to “intaking”. This triad can aid us, and students, to open our

sometimes closed listening channels. Since each of these elements is quite complex in itself, I will only take one subcategory found in each, and try to develop it in embryonic form.

1. Interactive Model. It is of utmost importance to understand that listening is not a one-way street (Brown pg. 249). When we listen we are not simply receiving information in a passive state. Not even when someone aggressively scolds us, and we remain impotent against this threat, are we truly passive. Even disconnecting ourselves from listening to such abuse is itself a kind of action. Rather, we are so constituted -----our brains are so set up---- that we humans organize our environment and ourselves in meaningful ways. This is also true of listening itself. In this sense the fourth point mentioned by Brown is absolutely central to understating that listening is an active process. When hearing we do not merely hear “physical sound waves” hitting our eardrum; in reality we do not hear our eardrums. Instead, when hearing “the hearer recalls background information” (Brown pg. 250). These background frameworks for organizing information are known as *schemata* in ESL terminology. We spoke of a type of schemata in our previous essay when we pointed to the role of paradigms, and how they might lead us to be unable to hear certain puzzles. This kind of deafness can eventually lead to an undermining of paradigms; or at least to a certain kind of boredom.

But how is it that listening is schematized and contextualized? Well, can you imagine hearing a noise? This is quite difficult (although not impossible). Why is this so? Because for the most part when you hear the noise “creeek”; you usually do not hear that. Instead you listen to the old wooden door from the haunted house opening. So much do you hear it that your heart may even speed up! But this is odd! You just heard “creeekkk”! Or when you hear a “bbrruumm, brummm ” your do not hear that. You might instead hear the car which is warming up in a winter morning on the way to work. So much do we hear the car, that the latest Porsche commercial shows a man dropping the phone and letting a friend hear the exhaust noises. Do you think his friend hears “brummmm”, or rather a car?

This is why when you hear something quite unexpected, some sound which is not meaningfully available to you, you are truly puzzled, you cannot fit it in. You cannot take it in; it is not available as “intake”. Think of the first times you heard the sounds of love. Were they not unusual and rather odd? You certainly paid attention at the time, though later on we might forget. Or take, once again, the case of our cars. We are too young (!) to remember, but we did not always have cars that went “brummm” while polluting the Earth. And the first people to hear them were quite shocked with what for them were strange dragon-like sounds. It is literary

authors who best remind us of all this. We'd better hear them and not remain listening to our all too common sounds. Faulkner writes in his incredibly amusing novel *The Reveries* about a world in which certain sounds came to be, and how they came to be connected not simply with an object, but with status and the destruction of natural resources. Listen to how he views the consequences of these new sounds::

“Because Manfred de Spain was a banker, not a hunter like his father; he sold lease, land and timber and by 1940 ...they ---we--- would load everything into pickup trucks and drive two hundred miles over paved highways to find enough wilderness to pitch tents in; though by 1980 the automobile will be as obsolete to reach wilderness with as the automobiles will have made the wilderness it seeks. But perhaps, they ----you--- will find wilderness on the backside of Mars or the moon, with maybe even bear and deer to run it” (pg. 21)

Perhaps being unable to listen to positions which link language and ecology –as I have defended in all my previous assignments--- is quite dangerous. Can you yourself hear Faulkner?

And this active participation is specially true when we hear sounds from others close to us. Certain voices bring a smile, others a yawn, some scare us and some even a recognition of the fact that what one might hear will inevitably transform us. Listening to some teachers listening to their thoughts, and to the puzzles of their thoughts, becomes much more than mere input. The words spoken are so spoken that they generate in us students truly transformational intake. If we are lucky enough to hear such words we are never the same. Other teachers just do not transform us.

Perhaps because of all this it is Heidegger in the 1920's who first made us look at listening rather than at our all too obvious capacity to speak. In his difficult *Being and Time* he writes:

“what we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to ‘hear; a ‘pure noise’ (pg. 207)

But wait it gets better still. Heidegger goes so far as to claim that hearing is the “primary and authentic way in which Dasein (note: a word which refers to “human”) is open for its ownmost potentiality for Being --- as in hearing of the friend of whom every Dasein carries with it” (pg. 206). According to Heidegger, investigating what listening is all about can lead you to your ownmost potentiality and to the greatest friendship. Do we, can we, listen to ourselves interactively? And just because listening meaningfully distinguishes us humans is that when

another speaks in a foreign language we do not hear sounds; rather we hear meaningful words, which for us lack the meaning we usually expect.

But this capacity to actively take in information heard, is itself dangerous. We humans tend to make the world first OUR schemata. We hear “tweet tweet tweet” in English, and we hear birds. Interestingly, we hear “pio pio pio” and we hear birds in Spanish. But what we fail to do is to recognize the multiplicity of bird sounds in the world. (Go to the ROM display of sounds to see a wider selection) In other words, we have schemata but we must be aware of their limiting and sometimes simplifying nature. These schemata might turn out to have us! We Colombians are peculiar in this. When we hear a “boom”, unfortunately we are prone to hear a bomb. Canadians would never even expect to hear a bomb; that is why Trudeau invoking the War Measures Act is so deeply ingrained in your consciousness. You just do not hear that kind of thing here.

But let us move back to the classroom given that these remarks may seem too much out of place, another way of saying they do not touch our too rigid schemata. When presenting any listening activity a teacher cannot just play it. He must set it within a context without which students will be unable to use their schemata to understand what they are hearing. Listening exercise must be set within a background so that students may use their own background information to understand that listening is an interactive process and not merely a passive one. What kind of aids can one think of here? Some prior questions, pictures, a brief discussion on the topic to be touched upon. In this sense one need point out that exams such as the TOEFL are quite unrealistic for they set up in their listening comprehension sections context-less information.

But even within ESL courses one may deal with interesting literary issues. While teaching an Advanced Student Literature course we read the following poem called *A refuge of Nocturnal Birds*:

High on a cliff there's a twisted pine;
intently it listens into the abyss
with its trunk curved down like a crossbow.

A refuge of nocturnal birds,
in the deepest hours of night it resounds
with the swift fluttering of wings.

Even my heart has a nest

suspended into the darkness, and a voice;
it, too, lies awake listening at night. (*World Writer's Today* pg. 184)

Can you listen to what Salvatore Quasimodo is saying? What does it mean that we listen into the abyss? Well among other things my students and I tried to open ourselves to listening actively to such cliffs, pines and birds. We started to take them in, to “intake” them. Perhaps this is how we proceeded from input to intake. Listen to this poem, you will hear how what is input (something external), becomes intake (something internalized). To this we will return.

2. types of spoken language. Students can be better prepared to move from “input” to “intake” if they come perceive the diversity of spoken forms. It is one thing to prepare oneself to listen to a meaningful dialogue set up as a presentation in a classroom setting, and quite another to be able to understand the lectures on philosophical topics by challenging professors. Or still yet, quite another to listen to the poem previously quoted. Still another to be able to understand the weather report, so crucial to move around in Canada. In this sense, it is important for teachers and students to understand the difference between monological and dialogical discourses, as well as the relation between transactional and interpersonal dialogues.

Take the case of monologues. While working as interpreter in Colombia my working partner Luis and I had to translate many well-planned monologues (written reports/essays orally presented) which had no interruptions. As Brown puts it, in listening “the stream of speech will go on whether or not the hearer comprehends.” (pg. 251) The presenter for Uruguay started reading her presentation on the nature of tariffs, border issues and taxation in the world economy. A quite specialized, quite boring, topic. She read her presentation so fast that at one point in time the very delegates from other countries told her to slow down because it was most unfair with us interpreters. To our surprise she did. She slowed down for one paragraph and then continued as if it were a competition to read as fast as one could. Now these are particular difficulties for translators. However, what can this teach us regarding our students? Maybe that to follow a monologue is in and of itself extremely difficult unless some prior background information’s provided. By setting the context of a given topic students can better be prepared to take in what they are listening to. Thus we can move from input to intake. Moreover, students can learn to be able to be selective and use extensive comprehension strategies so that they do not focus on all the aspects but rather on getting the general idea of an extended monologue. Unfortunately we interpreters cannot do the same. We must get everything the person is saying. This is not easy.

What could be said in the case of types of listening involved in more dialogical affairs (listening to dialogues, for instance)? Well once again one cannot but emphasize that students must be given pre-listening information so that they know what they are going to hear about, and to be able to look for the connections a given teacher requires them to make. This can be done through pictures, previous questions, and discussions on the topic.

However, much more than this can be said. Let us look at another philosopher who enjoys writing on language issues. Charles Taylor, in his important essay “Theories of meaning”, tries to make us listen to the beautiful intricacies of language. And he does so by providing some amusingly simple examples. He asks us to think about the case where we are walking with another on a hot beach under a full blue sky. Suddenly one of us says to the other “Whew it’s hot!” (or the use of a tag question: “It is hot, isn’t it”; a tag questions which serves not as a yes/no question, but rather as an affirmation), Here, interestingly, we do not expect the other to answer something like: “Well, yes, look at the sweat in my forehead”. Rather Taylor argues something odd is going on here. Let us try to listen to what he says:

“What the expression has done here is to create a rapport between us, the kind of thing which comes about when we do when what we call striking up a conversation. Previously I knew that you were hot, and you know that I was hot, and I knew that you must know that I knew that, etc.... But now it is out there as a fact between *us* that it is stifling in here. Language creates what one might call a public space, or a common vantage point from which we survey the world together” (pg. 259, in *Philosophical Papers: Human Agency and Language*.)

In listening to these useless words ----“Whew it’s hot!”---we have opened a bridge between us, we have made something not just mine but rather ours. Or think about how odd it is to say that lights are out when everything turns pitch black in a blackout. Do you suppose the people around you did not notice it? Why do we do it?

And what can teachers and student learn from all this? Many things for sure. But at a very minimum the fact that in learning to listen we open up a common space. Such is the place of the classroom which invites is to learn to be able to enhance our dialogical capabilities not only in a foreign language but in our lives as well. Or do you think, as we argued in Assignment Number 4, that English-speaking Canada listens much to French-speaking Canada? Is Canada such a “public common “ space; or rather two solitudes? Or, as we pointed out in our last Assignment, is there not a great need to be able to open our ears as ESL teachers and Philosophy professors to what each of these areas -----which deal so concretely with language---- have to say to each

other? And again, who can best listen but she who can understand both ---or more--- languages? Would she not have at least 4 ears?

3. Listening is difficult. Our schemata, which allow us to listen to things and not mere sounds, likewise make it difficult to listen to new information. Why learn a second language when I can comfortably understand my own? Truly our students have great courage to try to expand their schemata. Let us remain at the ESL context here. Students, I am ready to argue, suffer with English listening. They do so because many teachers ----at least in my EFL experience----- do not emphasize listening strategies as much as they should. Take the example the difference, to which we will return, between Spanish and English. One is a syllable-stressed language, the other a time-stressed language. How difficult is listening in/to English? Absolutely difficult; particularly in a multicultural context where a multiplicity of accents generates a complex reality. Let's take one famous example from my classes. Many years ago I asked in a beginners course if anyone knew what "an appointment" was, as differentiated from "a date" (In Spanish the same word correspond to the two, namely, the word "cita"). In the back a risk-taker raised his arm and answered absolutely sure of himself. "Yes teacher I know," and to my surprise continued, "'Anapoima' is a small town between La Mesa and Girardot." Now to see how difficult listening is, you yourself might be having difficulty listening to what my student had said. Why? Because you do not have the necessary Colombian background to follow. Learning to listen to names in another language is quite difficult. What, then, had he done? He had confused "Appointment" in English with 'Anapoima' which is the name of a small town in Colombia which happens to be located just between La Mesa and Girardot, two other small towns in Colombia! What had my students and I learned? We learned to laugh at our own learning process, for difficult things need not be damaging.

But more concretely, take the case of reduced forms. English has a tendency to contract, to economize. Even in beginners' courses we are faced with strange facts such as having reductions for "I am" ("I'm"). If you speak English this is not odd; if you do not, then it is baffling. You cannot do it in Spanish. "How come English speakers eat their words?", many students ask. The slow and permanent reminder of the process of introducing new schemata must be emphasized by teachers so that listening ----which is difficult in itself---- does not become a real torture. In the case of Spanish, students must be lead from the input of knowing that Spanish is syllable-stressed while English time-stressed, to the intake of being able to produce adequate stress rhythm and intonation. To this we will return below.

QUESTION 2

In answering this question we are to look at six types of classroom listening performance (255-5); in doing so we are to provide examples of each and gauge their appropriateness in the classroom

1. Reactive: This type of exercise involves mere repetition. We become parrot-like at this level. But parrots are beautiful too. Many times this is quite useful in a classroom. We listen merely to react. The case of learning the pronunciation of past forms in English is quite important. Students must come to realize that although the past is relatively easy in English ---one form for all subjects, versus 12 different forms in Spanish or in French ---- the difficulty lies in pronunciation and being able to listen to the adequate pronunciation. When presenting regular endings (/t/, /d/, and /ed/) teachers can seek to have simple repetitions. This does not mean students will interiorize them, but it is a first step. Another interesting example of reactions the use of tongue twisters in the classroom. I have found students love them, and for a teacher they always provide back-up plans. Some of these include, as you know:

1. “she sells sea shells by the seashore”,

2. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers/A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper Picked/If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers/ Where is the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?”

or, finally, 3. to practice the difficult ‘r’ for Spanish speakers: “Round the rough and rugged rock the ragged rascal rudely ran”. If you can say this last one easily, surely you are not a Spanish speaker. And surely you will have difficulty listening to and saying, for instance, “carro”. What are those? The ones that go “bruummm”

2. Intensive ... At this level of listening performance we focus on particular components, on particular elements of the language such as phonemes, intonation, or discourse markers. One such example used many times is that of clapping when we hear the occurrence of a specific linguistic topic. For instance, one tells students to clap whenever they hear a preposition. If all goes well, at the sound of “under” many claps should follow. Another very interesting case is that of songs which can aid students in understanding that listening is central to learning a language. But how could this be intensive, that is to say, how to focus on these particular

elements? I will provide you with one of the exercise I did with my students in this regard. Alanis Morissette has a song entitled *You Learn*. In order for students not merely to sing a song but rather to make themselves more skilled at listening strategies, one can come up with two sets of copies. One is for the teacher, “Whew it’s hot!” namely the song itself:

You Learn

I recommend getting your heart trampled on to anyone
I recommend walking around naked in your living room
Swallow it down (what a jagged little pill)
It feels so good (swimming in your stomach)
Wait until the dust settles

CHORUS

You live you learn
You love you learn
You cry you learn
You lose you learn
You bleed you learn
You scream you learn

While the student gets the following copy:

I _____ getting your _____ trampled _____
I recommend _____ around _____ in your _____
_____ it down (_____ jagged _____ pill)
It _____ good (_____ in your _____)
Wait _____

CHORUS

You _____ you _____
You _____ you learn
You _____ you learn
You _____ you learn
You _____ you learn
You _____ you learn

By focusing, let us say, only on the chorus, students will listen intensively for the base form of verbs. And that listening should be contextualized follows from the selection of the song. It reminds us of the learning process itself. You lose you learn.

3. Responsive. At this level we are concerned with short stretches of teacher language designed to elicit immediate responses such as asking questions, giving commands, seeking

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clarification and checking comprehension. This follows frequently from the usual presentation one might use when presenting a new topic for a new unit. Herein lies the importance of selecting carefully the textbooks and presentations themselves. The quality of the texts will, to a great extent, be responsible for student listening to what is most conducive to their general listening improvement at the "i + 1" level. Through their responses, a teacher can actually check that the gap between input and intake is not so broad as to make the exercise useless.

4. Selective: At this level students must seek to understand particular information on a given topic presented audibly by means of speeches, stories, anecdotes or broadcasts. The student is to seek for specific information. She is to scan listening "as" one scans a reading, that is to say, searching for specific information (names, dates location main ideas.) The whole becomes much less important, and field independence is required. Take the case of listening to a presentation of past modals such as "might have" or "could have". As students have difficulty in understanding their contractions, one might try to point them to first try to get the stressed words which follows these, namely the past participles. When trying to hear the words "could have gone", try to listen to the one which actually receives the stress in English (that is to say, "gone"). Perhaps in this way you can move to understanding the whole itself which must be the final objective.

5. Extensive: At this level, and in contrast to the previous one, the student should be interested not in particularities which might take away from comprehension as a whole, but rather be interested in general points made. She seeks global understanding. If when listening to a lecture you look for the occurrences of past modals and their past participles, you will surely fail to get the message; you may even fail your exam. This is why, when listening to a movie students should be aware that if they do not understand several particularities, their main goal should be that of understanding its globality. If not the movie will turn out to be everything but enjoyable. Something similar occurs when trying to understand a joke in a second language. If you stay with the parts, you will never get it.

6. Interactive: This is the final level in which all of the previous ones are summed up and dynamically retaken. This is why it is very odd to see it listed as just another one. But leaving this aside, it should be stressed from the very start given that, as we have said, listening is not merely passive. When listening not only does another open up a common space with me, but likewise in listening we bring our own schemata which can radically alter what in fact we come

to hear. Drills simply do not produce this interaction. As ESL teachers we must move beyond mere repetition, to the creation of truly dialogical exercises which may include discussions, debates, conversations, role plays. A teacher truly becomes a kind of moderator here who makes available to all her students the possibility to have an interchange. I recall teaching students to argue for and against an issue by giving them a specified amount of time to present their theses which would be responded to by a member of another group. Through the negotiating of their perspectives students learned to listen to schemata which were not their own. They broke loose from the listening schemata, thus enriching their ears to other languages and beings. Learning to listen we learn to open ourselves to others, even to ourselves and our darker sides. We as teachers open ourselves to the diversity of our students, to the multiplicity of their learning styles and multiplicity of intelligences. Interactive listening is for sure a prerequisite for being able to cross bridges, to seek to learn to listen in other words other strange and compelling sounds .

QUESTION 3

As I am asked to review the six principles for effective listening techniques (pg 258-60). and then to choose one of 41 techniques outlined in table 16-2 systemically evaluating it according to the 6 techniques, I will begin by pointing out which of the 41 techniques I have selected, and why. It is number 12 found at the intermediate level. Here listeners use bottom-up exercises whose goal is that of “Recognizing Fast Speech Forms, namely, to listen to a series of sentences that contain unstressed function words such as “a”, “of”, “the”. Why select this one? Precisely because it is very basic, and moreover because one hears student say again and again how English “is too fast”. I will be more specific still by taking up the case of prepositions of place in the English language. Prepositions of place, as we know, present the relation between an object and its location in space. When we say in Colombia –whose national flowers are beautiful orchids--- “The wild orchid is on the branch”, we “hear” something like this relation: The wild orchid (thing) is on (relation) the branch (place).

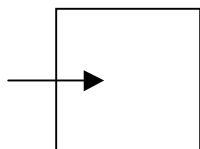
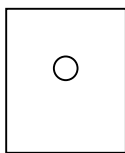
1. Integrate skills while not overlooking listening. As an EFL teacher many times I would have contact with many students who had not done many listening exercises in their classes. Consequently, when they were in my class they would suffer quite a lot! Or let me rephrase that. They listened to many presentations, but they were not being taught to learn to listen. Input did not become intake. Just listening to a presentation is no listening exercise. In the particular

case of technique number 12 you must use it so that unstressed words become the center of attention in a selective and intensive way. Telling, showing, and making students understand that English is time-stressed is of crucial importance from early on. Let us look at the specific case of prepositions. Take the case of the following sentences:

1. Natalia is in the house
2. Natalia in on the house
3. Natalia is at the house

How can the different skills be integrated here? When listening to prepositions try to focus selectively on them as non stressed words so that you are better prepared to see the differences in the above sentences. When speaking, understand that you do not usually stress a preposition; do not say “Natalia is AT the house” when correcting an exercise. Not being able to hear prepositions can be quite frustrating for students for it is quite frustrating to come to understand too late that the basics cannot be understood.

2. Use techniques that are intrinsically motivating. In terms of recognizing fast speech forms our schemata are central. How can one make it motivating? Precisely by pointing out that students may not have ANY schemata of the sort in another language such as Spanish. With only some exceptions which integrate words ("para qué" into "paque"), it just does not exist. It is a wholly new paradigm and therefore the brain just cannot see it; as scholastic Aristotelians could not see the moon, as native Aborigines in Colombia could not see the large Spanish vessels. (See my previous Assignment) Another such motivating factor is painting the prepositions, as I alluded in my first assignment. You yourself can provide them with the following pictures so that they can understand certain differences such as that of prepositions related to movement or static verbs. For instance, the difference between “in” and “into” can be expressed as follows:



Which would correspond to

a. Natalia is in her house.

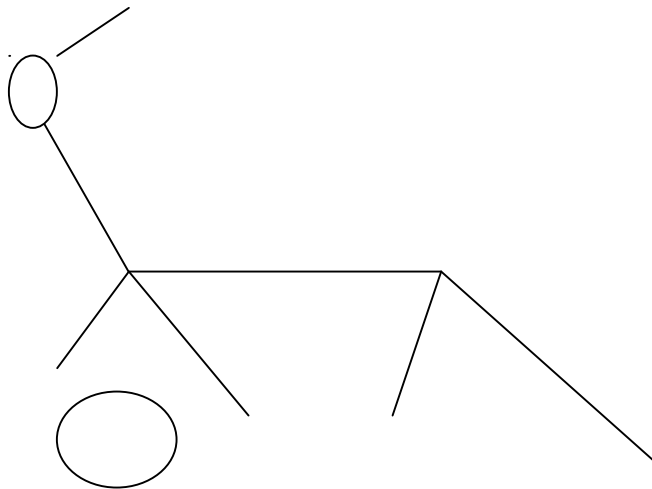
vs. b. Natalia is going into her house.

By seeing the arrow, students can creatively understand what is the difference between preposition which go with static or movement verbs. Have them paint all of the prepositions with rudimentary forms and maybe they will never say things such as: “Natalia is into her house”. In this respect a big board with scenes from a park, from a neighborhood, or from a house, are very helpful.

3. Utilize authentic language and contexts. The main concern here is to see the relevance of classroom activity to long-term goals through the use of real texts rather than artificial material. How could this be done in the case of unstressed words such as prepositions? One typical example is that of having students focus on what is authentic to them. Specially for adolescents what is quite meaningful is their own room. “It is my room,” we hear in all North American movies. Dramatically so in movies such as *Pump up the volume* or *American beauty*. We can use this reality so that the use of prepositions becomes authentic and motivating as well.

4. Carefully consider the form of listeners responses. Although here a multiplicity of checks can be done, I will only focus on the case of understanding by doing, which implies “painting or choosing between pictures”. It is quite different to say that “John is under the tree”, than to say “John is resting peacefully below the tree”. As I mentioned earlier in Assignment number 3 nothing is more exciting than to have student draw prepositions, if only to bring the group

together into their own public space. This is my computer version of “The dog is on top of the newspaper”.



Yours must be much better.

5. Encourage the development of listening strategies. At this level we are interested in taking into account listening to key words, looking for non-verbal cues on meaning and even guessing. When a student cannot clearly hear the preposition in “Natalia is in the house”, one should point out that she need not listen to it. She might take a guess instead. Do you think she would be “on” the house? Although possible, it is less likely. Or if you hear something like “The bomb was placed by the Guerrilla”, well, by realizing that it is passive voice you do not have to actually hear the “by”.

6. Focus on both bottom up and top bottom listening techniques. We have already pointed to many examples previously; a case of bottom-up techniques in the presentation of individual prepositions by understanding the graph that corresponds to each individually. Top-down techniques include the use of, for example, a song such as the one quoted above. By listening to it they will actually understand how -----because they are not stressed----- prepositions, those “little words”, are quite difficult to understand. (IN the song we find for instance these to sentences: “I recommend getting your heart trampled on to anyone” and “I recommend walking around naked in your living room”.)

Let me conclude this section on prepositions by reverting once again to philosophy. Philosophers such as Heidegger have made the analysis of prepositions central to our interpretation of us humans and our world. The notion of “Being” itself has for centuries been understood as static, and it was Heidegger who came to understand our relation to the world in dynamic prepositional terms. His famous analysis of “being-‘in’-the-world” is here to the point. “Being-in-the-world” is to be seen for him beyond a mere occupation of space; it has more to do with our inhabiting and dwelling within a meaningful context. That is why when we are “in the church” or “in Mecca” or “in the synagogue”, we enter a space which goes beyond the physical limiting space of the construction itself. Think of your saying: “I am ‘in’ my house”. What does that mean: that you are in the physical property? That would be odd for your house is with you even when you no longer live in it. Similarly many skilled immigrants are “in” Canada, but in a troubling sense, they truly are not.

QUESTION 4

The consideration of dictation as a tool in the teaching of listening is here our concern. In order to think about the issue one could imagine being an intermediate student whose Spanish teacher dictated the following passage taken from authentic material ----a current newspaper article--- on the fans and critics of Bogotá, capital of Colombia. The paragraph reads:

“Para los otros, viajar es un ejercicio placido siempre y cuando no se prolongue más allá de diez días. A las dos semanas empiezan a ser demolidos por la nostalgia, sienten calor en cualquier parte, recuerdan una y otra vez las calles de La Candelaria, las peregrinaciones dominicales a Monserrate y las palomas de la Plaza de Bolívar, se la pasan metidos en Internet buscando noticias sobre la ciudad, escribiéndose con sus amigos, consultando el correo a cada rato, compran tarjetas telefónicas y llaman a cónyuges o amantes hasta altas horas de la madrugada, salivan cada vez que piensan en un caldo con costilla, una taza de agua de panela con queso o un tamal con chocolate, y cuando regresan hacen lo posible para que sea en Avianca, pues así pueden acelerar el encuentro conversando con algún otro bogotano en la fila del aeropuerto extranjero. Otro bogotano que también, cuando el avión está a punto de aterrizar en El Dorado, se pone a llorar de emoción y de gratitud cuando ve allá, abajo, los potreros exuberantes y las vacas diminutas. Mario Mendoza, **Los dos bandos** (Septiembre 20 de 2003)”

The sheer complexity of the task seems to point to a negative answer regarding the use one might make of dictation as a listening tool. However, if dictation is done in a progressive fashion, maybe one can look at what could be some of its advantages. How would progression be carried out? Let say the teacher: 1. reads the complete passage and discusses it; 2. proceeds to dictate either by focusing on sentences or clauses; and finally, 3. provides the students with a final

reading in which they may try to correct their blanks and mistakes. What could be won thought this more progressive process? Let us see the pros and cons.

Pros

1. In the case of English dictation, even of short paragraphs aids teachers in being able to actually see if students are getting non-stressed words such as prepositions, articles, contractions and modals.
2. I myself early on as a teacher used dictation as a tool. I found students truly enjoyed the exercise every once in a while, but truly disliked it as a means of evaluation.
3. Dictation can aid in the correction of spelling. When one sees students' spelling (e.g., 'runing', 'thruh', and similar ones, one can see the need for the use of some dictation), and finally,
4. Dictation seemingly integrates the skills of listening and writing; but I say seemingly because it does so in a very unrealistic way.

Cons:

1. Students are many times frustrated by dictations. This is so because one needs to ask, what precisely is the purpose of having a dictation? When in the real world will you be copying *verbatim* something a person dictates to you? Are there not too many elements considered which might be better addressed if taken singularly?
2. Dictations are time consuming and since we do not have much time in our classes, only a small section can be dedicated to it. More interest should be placed on exercises which enhance real life listening skills and strategies.
4. Dictation requires a passive student who can do little with language. Of course a dictation can be one in which a very important topic is considered, but however interesting the topic might be, still the student is a mere receptacle and not, as we have argued, an interactor with the message coming her way.

CHAPTER 17 TEACHING SPEAKING

QUESTION 1

When speaking of the teaching of speaking skills the issue of the relation between accuracy and fluency is of central importance. This is so because if the idea of learning a language is to be able

to communicate with others who speak the target language, then, in order to make oneself understood certain minimal criteria of accuracy and fluency must be met. Of course, as Brown points out, this relationship has been historically modified; moving from the excess of the Grammar Translation Method to the anti-grammar tendencies of the 1970's. (pg. 268). This we argued in our previous assignment shows how different areas cannot even question their own presuppositions. However, given what we know about the difference in learning L1 by a child, and L2 by an ESL student, then certainly there is much room for emphasis on accuracy. This is why Brown asks us to consider a more balanced approach. But this is just like saying "well do not drink too much wine or too little". The obvious question is, well how much is too much for you under these specific circumstances. I come from a French family and drinking wine is part of our tradition. In other words, perhaps the key issue to be considered here is, not whether a balance is the most important aspect, but rather too specify when and how a greater tendency towards accuracy or fluency are required. How much wine should you drink? Well if you are a recovering alcoholic, zero. If you are taking antibiotics, zero. If you are at a work meeting, a little. If you are with the love of your life, well it depends. In this sense I believe that the relation between accuracy and fluency is dynamic and not static.

Take the following example. Some langue topics such as tag questions can be considered to have a very simple structure; one of the form:

Subject + affirmative verb + Comp, negative auxiliary + subject pronoun?

(S + V, -A + SP?)

or,

Subject + negative aux + Comp, affirmative auxiliary + subject pronoun ?

(S + -V, A + SP?)

One can give this formal to students and they may memorize it. Moreover, provide them with exceptions such as the more frequent use of "aren't" for "I am" instead of the more polite "am I not". (e.g., "I am quite a good cook, aren't I?") Nonetheless, the difficulty lies in that exercises must be created where this formulation ceases to be a blank formula; where it comes to life and becomes meaningfully appropriated (intaken?) by students. A teacher more interested in fluency at this level could begin by asking a very basic question. When and how often are tag questions used in English? It is clear that they are used quite frequently in normal day to day conversations.

And besides, the student must be able to differentiate the rising or falling intonation which makes each tag question really two different things. It is one thing to say: 1. “I am good teacher, aren’t I?” (intonation ↑) , and 2. another radically different to say the same formal structure but with a lowering intonation: “I am good teacher, aren’t I?” (intonation ↓). In one I am quite convinced I am great; in the other perhaps I have suffered a crisis in my teaching, something quite healthy for over confident teachers who just know what they are talking about and become simply, instructors.

So where does the balance play a role? Well in that tag questions are deceptively easy; you know yourself from doing exercise where students merely have to fill in the blank. The students sees for instance “ he has been” and immediately writes the “hasn’t he”. Sometimes even without reading the sentence at all! However, the grammatical complexity is such that tag questions are in many cases (See *Focus on Grammar Series*), left for the more High-intermediate levels. In other words, tag questions presuppose that students command the tenses. But this can only be done, to a great extent, if teachers have been emphasizing the need for accuracy at all levels. If teachers have not, then tag questions become an almost impossible topic. Maybe you can think of this to try to understand my point. How many of your students, after you have presented tag question in the classroom in a balanced way, can actually use the tag questions? For most of us not many. I truly believe that this is so because in many cases accuracy in terms of the multiplicity of verb tenses is lacking. In other words, you can create as many meaningful exercises for tag questions, but if students do not command their verbs, then, tag questions will become an easy, kind of irrelevant topic, for them. They might end up saying: “Well why say ‘You lost the keys, didn’t you’, instead of merely saying “Did you loose the keys?” They would think something like this, wouldn’t they?

Finally, I will just reiterate what was said in our previous assignment, for questions posed there overlap --- sometimes too much-- with questions posed here. There we said: “An inclination towards meaning clearly becomes central when presenting the functions of a given language. Take for instance the case of introducing the function for ‘asking for the time’. We all know that one can say: “What time is it”, or one can also be more sophisticated and ask, “Do you know what time it is?” Although both focus on the same function, if one started to get into the grammar aspects of the second option, one would drive beginner students absolutely crazy. Imagine explaining; “well, you see it is an embedded question, so therefore you have to change the order of the subject and the verb; this is why it appears inverted as regards a normal wh-

question. So you see we get 'what time it is', instead of 'what time is it'. BY the time your beginner students gets to asking for the time, class time will be over. In contrast, when dealing with sophisticated topics in advanced grammar, an inclination towards a more grammatically oriented presentation should seriously be taken into account. Take the case of the above-mentioned embedded question themselves. In this case it does indeed help most students to understand graphically that subject and verb alter their positions. So you can graphically display it in a summary box such as: "Wh + (aux) + sub + verb" changes to the form "Wh + sub + (aux) + verb". In this sense when a student in a beginner's course asks you why you ought to respond, "Do not ask me why you change the order, later you will understand"; but when a high-intermediate asks the same question one must be quite prepared to respond it."

QUESTION 2

There are at least eight factors which make of the speaking skill one of the most difficult to achieve. As for the question which one is more difficult –speaking or listening---- I will for each of the eight factors provide a very brief comparison.

1. Clustering: Knowing what we do about discourse competence, the issue of clustering becomes crucial. Instead of having student speak in English through a word by word process, teachers must at all costs truly move them to speak at the phrase, clause, or sentence level. And this should be done from very early on. I cannot but recall how in beginner's courses just simply having student say "My name is Pedro" was quite a difficult task (to this we will return below). Or take this example. Grammatically speaking, past progressive is absolutely simple. Just take the verb "to be", and add the "-ing" from of the verb. And students wonder, "Well why did you not tell us this in course 1?" Precisely because past progressive many times requires time clauses involving while or when. To say: "While I was playing soccer in the park, my girlfriend was playing basketball" IS NOT AN EASY AFFAIR for students. Unfortunately, I visited multiple classes where teachers might not have emphasized the need to cluster more often than not. At this level both listening and speaking are equally difficult. Students having difficulties listening must be made aware of here of the interrelation between these two skills.

2. Redundancy: Redundancy deals wit rephrasing ("what I mean is"...), repetition ("No, you don't understand, she did go!") a and short insertions ("you know", "I mean", "well,") " which

differentiate written and oral language. (see excellent examples on page 252). When speaking, a new sentence may repeat what was said previously, but in a different manner. (“My new job is great. Really, I love it. It’s wonderful. What a job”). Speaking will probably be much more difficult than listening here given that: 1. students have a tendency to reduce what they say and be as brief as possible, a tendency to say for instance. “It was a great weekend” and not continue “You know what I mean, fantastic, truly amazing.”; and 2. this is something native speakers just do and the process of learning how to say it functionally is not easy. For instance in Spanish we say “good” (bueno) instead of “well”. However, by letting students understand that they do it in their own language, might help them understand better what the issue at stake is here.

3. Reduced forms: Among the reduced form of language one finds different kinds: a. phonological (“gonna”), b. morphological (contractions such as “I’ll”), and c. elliptical (such as “Where do you study ? At Los Andes”, instead of the complete sentence) or pragmatic.

In this sense it is important to learn more colloquial forms. Which one more difficult, listening or speaking? Well, maybe, it depends on the category. I will focus only on contractions. Students when they speak learn to place the emphasis on the contractions themselves, a big problem. Either it sounds too much, or rather does not sound at all. First students will say something like “I’ll go” and then “I .. go”. But surely it is more difficult for the student to listen. We need only remember cases such as; 1. “I’ll” and “I’d”, or 2. “I’ve gone” and “I’d gone”.

4. Performance variables. To separate this fourth element from the previous one is close to impossible. Sometimes these Brownian separations can seem highly questionable. But leaving this aside, we are concerned here with learning to pause and hesitate by using fillers for thinking time. These include: “uh, um, well, you know, I mean, like, and others”. In this case it is definitely much easier to listen to them for the pause gives time to concentrate; but to learn to say them is quite more complex because the student is much more focused on saying the complete sentence. So much so that the fillers used are the ones in their own languages! In Spanish you do not say “ummm” but rather “eeehhh”. So a student will say “The dog, eeehhhh, went ehthhhh”, which sounds extremely odd in English. The difficulty is such that Brown argues: “one of the most salient differences between native and nonnative speakers of language is in their hesitation phenomena” (pg. 270) . However something must be added here. Although fillers are interesting

to learn about, they are extremely annoying at times. Just recently I heard someone participating in a radio broadcast. Her speaking went something like this: “Like you know ummmm, well its like, and like she went like..... like”. “Like, be more creative”, one should think. If one believes that there are better speaking performances than others -----as I do--- then certainly students ought to, like, be discouraged, "eehhhh", from using, you know, such fillers. (Finally it is clear that swear words should be included with these fillers.)

5. Colloquial language. This refers to everyday language including idioms, slang and again some reduced forms . Funny sayings such as “drive someone up the wall, smell a rat, let the cat out of the bag, break a leg, go fly a kite, a piece of cake, when pigs fly, hey dude, "whatchamacallit", no can do, etc.”, can be included here. They are difficult to learn both in listening and in speaking particularly if one does not live in the culture .Perhaps we can provide students with lists to learn them, but the sheer quantity added to the constant creation of slang (which is exemplified in that parents do not even understand what their kids are saying), makes it difficult to keep up even for us. But the point is precisely to let students know that language is a life form. It is not an unchanging reality, but rather lives through its own inner struggles and transformations. Students can learn, as well, proverbs which are particular to each language, such as: “Where there is a will there is a way”, “It takes a thief to catch a thief”. Some are truly different. For instance “like father like son” is said in Spanish "de tal palo tal astilla".(“from such branch, such a splinter”). Others do not even exist: “an apple a day keeps the doctor away”. It is my experience that learning proverbs is fun for students if done in a meaningful way. (If required I can provide interesting and concise lists of proverbs). Finally, one must consider here the tough and multifaceted phrasal verbs. (On how to teach idioms see the impressive *101 American English idioms* by Harry Collis.)

6. Rate of delivery. Students seem sometimes not to quite find the adequate balance in their rate of delivery. Sometimes in order to make themselves understood, they drag on like turtles, and sometimes, wishing to sound fluent, they race as if horses. Truly reaching a midpoint here --one which knows itself to be variable under different conditions---- is quite difficult. Suppose you are angry in English. Would you expect your delivery to be slow? Suppose you are speaking on the phone, would you not expect it to be slower given that you have no visual cues? In this sense, it is of extreme importance for students to understand that “the number and length of pauses used

by a speaker is more crucial to comprehension than sheer speed” (pg. 254). In this case preparing students for adequate delivery in both the listening and speaking skills is just as difficult. But learning to speak via adequate delivery, will help in being able to receive various delivery rates.

7. Stress, rhythm, and intonation. By far in the English language this is the single most important aspect of learning to speak. We have said much above in relation to this problematic. Let us just add that here students must be made aware, and must be made to practice frequently the difference between a stressed-timed language (such as English) and a syllable-timed language (such as Spanish). When you say something like “Me voy para mi casa” in Spanish we have 7 stresses of equal value. But when we say the very same idea in English “I’m going home” we only have two. I myself created the following exercise using material from my institution and other texts to help Spanish speakers. Although incomplete, it might be of help to some:

“EXERCISE RHYTHM AND STRESS

A) SYLLABLE-TIMED: SPANISH

Yo me voy a la casa de mi hermano esta noche a las ocho.

Yo/ me/ voy/ a/ la /ca/sa de/ mi/ her/ma/no / es/ta/ no/che /a /las / o/cho.

B) STRESS-TIMED: ENGLISH

My sister’s friend will be running to the corner with Maria and me.

My sister’s friend/ will be running/ to the corner/ with Maria/ and me.

C) RULES FOR ENGLISH:

C.1. STRESSED WORDS = CONTENT WORDS

NOUNS (Carlos, friend, house)

VERBS (talk, run, painting)

NEGATIVE AUXILIARIES (don’t, hasn’t, can’t, won’t, didn’t)

ADJECTIVES IF ALONE (She’s beautiful)

C.2. UNSTRESSED= FUNCTION WORDS

AFFIRMATIVE AUXILIARIES (have, do, does, is, can, will)

ARTICLES (a, an, the)

CONNECTORS (and, but, while, when, after, before)

PRONOUNS (I, me, my, mine, he, him, his, hers)

PREPOSITIONS (in, on, at, above, up, down, around)

ADJECTIVES WITH NOUN (She’s a beautiful woman)

VERB TO BE (is, are, were, was)

D) EXAMPLE:

DOGS EAT BONES.

THE DOGS EAT BONES.

OUR DOGS WILL EAT THE BONES.

OUR DOGS WILL EAT THE BONES.

OUR DOGS WILL HAVE EATEN THE BONES.

MY FRIEND'S DOGS WILL HAVE BEEN EATING THE BONES.

E) EXERCISE: (underline the stressed words and then pronounce them out loud.

1. Mary is a good friend.
 2. Steve is tall and handsome, but he is not polite.
 3. It is really early in the morning.
 4. The baby caught a cold last night.
- Jump to 10
10. I am going to buy more than thirty bottles of wine for my sister's wedding.
 11. When the phone rang in the dark room, we all jumped and ran quickly to the other one.
 12. After I borrowed the statistics book from our neighbor, I lent it to my girlfriend who has an exam next week.
 13. How long is it going to take to finish the course seven exam?
 14. While Carolina was driving to her office in her new car, her two children were having a food fight in the apartment's kitchen.
- Jump to 19
19. If I had seen you at the station, I would have certainly said hello to you.
 20. The young woman who is sitting next to the old overweight man in the brown sofa is the most beautiful woman I have ever known.
 21. Carlos had already left the theater by the time that my sister and I arrived to meet him there.
 22. The little cat went around the table, climbed up the curtain, got on top of the sofa, jumped over my leg, went to the front garden, walk through the brown fence and died under the fast-speeding car's tire.
 23. I bought a six-pack of beer, a bunch of bananas, three cartons of milk, two boxes of cereal, a loaf of white bread, a pack of cigarettes and four bottles of wine to celebrate my 26th birthday at my girlfriend's house."

The exercise is not intended to be dialogical, but rather to provide some exercises for students so that they can begin to understand the differences between both languages. What I found to be amazing and disillusioning at the same time, was that many students had never even heard of the importance of this difference; even at quite high levels. Here again both listening and speaking reveal their dynamic interaction; both are equally challenging not only for learners but also for teachers.

8. Interaction . Although all skills are interactive by nature, it is of speaking that we truly say that its very nature is to allow us to interact with others and the world. We begin the day at the office by saying “Hi.” We are there to interact with each other, and for sure, many times, against each other. For our ESL and EFL students in particular this is a primary goal, to be able to keep a conversation going. By learning about negotiating, clarification, interruptions, topic nomination, maintenance and termination (pg. 254) students can start to make these function their own, thereby becoming truly functional in the target language. A personal story, which I take it may teach us much about this issue. When I arrived in Montreal (aged 18), I went up to a group of people playing frisbee at the university campus. Approaching them I noticed that there were both women and men in the group. Not having lived here before, I knew that in order to begin a conversation one would say things like. “Hey guys”. I said that, of course. But since I saw men and women in the group, I thought: “Well ‘guys’ refers to men, and therefore ‘gals’ refers to women”. I went on to say not “Hey, guys”, but instead “Hey, guys and gals”. To my surprise I found out ----by quite unfriendly stares----- that this was not the way to get the interaction going. No frisbee for me that day. Or take the following example which makes me blush. While living in Montreal my sister-in-law who lived there at the time once asked me how you said “repollo” in English. She was taking care of two kids and wanted their mother to buy some “repollo” to put in the salad. Now, “repollo” is the word in Spanish for “cabbage”, but "pollo" is also the word for “chicken”. Jokingly I said to her that the word for “repollo” was not “cabbage” but rechicken”! I forgot to correct her because we started interacting about other stuff. To make a long story short. She asked her boss for some “rechicken” and of course the interaction was absolutely lost. I truly believe she does not like me much after this!

Similarly, Brown provides examples where interaction became quite strange:

American: “Would you like to read”

Russian: “No. I would not” (pg. 258 of Principles)

If interacting in our own language is sometimes absolutely difficult, imagine how it must be for our students who not only have to learn the structures, the functions, the stress, the pronunciation, the spelling, but besides be able to employ them adequately under varying situations and varying interlocutors. Sometimes we should take off our hats for them.

QUESTION 3

The three features of conversation from Richards (1990) that need to be attended to in oral communication skills, and some examples on what and how to teach it, are:

1. Strategies for managing turn-taking in conversation; including such functions as taking a turn, holding a turn and relinquishing a turn. Take the crucial case of storytelling strategies. Stories are universal and reflect our narrative character, be they oral or written. Perhaps by allowing students to see which types of functional structures are used in these cases, they may be better equipped to manage turn-taking in a conversation. We could signal at least three aspects; openers, responses, and closers:

a. Openers

Did I ever tell you about the time.....
Have I ever told you about the time....
I'll never forget the time
Do you want to hear something funny ?

b. Responses/Expressions of surprise.

No!
relay!
What did you do?
No way!

c. Conversation closers:

To make a long story short
So finally,
Anyway, what happened in the end...

Of course many other forms exist to interrupt and respond to in a story, but the point is that by knowing some, and having them practice them meaningfully, learners may become more capable of following through in the area of speaking.

2. How to use a conversation in different social settings and for different kinds of social encounters such as on the telephone and in informal and formal social gatherings. Throughout an ESL student's learning life we must be quite explicit in differentiating the diversity of contexts in which the multiplicity of language forms is usually used. For instance, more advanced students

might find it odd for us to teach them how to make embedded question. Why say “I’d like to know where you are from” instead of just simply saying “where are you from?”, or further still, “you from Colombia?”. Well, of course, because learning a language is learning among other things its multiple levels of politeness. One that I find important is that of requests and all functions using modals (advice, permission, ...). It is quite different to say “Will you pass me the salt”, “Would you pass me the salt” or “Would you mind passing me the salt”. Only the first would you use with a close friend or close relative. Do not say to your boss, “will you pass me the report.”

3. Strategies for repairing trouble spots in conversation, including communication breakdown and comprehension problems. Such strategies we have dealt with before extensively in Assignments 3 (Chapter 5 Question 4), and Assignment 5 (Chapter 9 Question 2). What else could we add? Perhaps that teachers must do everything they possibly can to provide student with the skills required to continue communicating without being fully bilingual. In a sense one could go so far as to say here that “the end justifies the means”. You need to communicate (the end), well do everything you possibly and intelligently can to do so. You need to make faces, to point, to ask for time, to shake your head, to ask someone to speak slowly, to ask several times. Whatever it takes, do it. (well, not really)

QUESTION 4

The interesting yet complex final section on error correction provides us with many ideas. But instead of focusing on the models for correction of speech errors provided there, I will instead focus on what seem to me to be 3 basic error correction maxims, considering in each whether we should correct if at all, and how we should do so.

Maxim No. 1. Correct more often than not. Although we have come to understand that learning a language involves understanding that the process involves making errors and feeling at ease with their occurrence, still language teachers are there to provide information on student production. If not, we would all be self-taught. Students I had would be frustrated when teachers would not provide ANY kind of corrective feedback. Would you not like to know yourself what you could do better in any area of your life? I sure would, though many times we do not have the time or skill to provide interesting feedback for others. Be this as it may, students’ corrections must

have as their absolutely central goal, that of self-correction. By learning to correct themselves, students become autonomous and will then learn truly to be able to grow dynamically by criticizing themselves. Teaching themselves they might teach others.

Maxim No. 2. Correction differs according to the of exercise; however one ought to provide feedback on ALL exercises. Having stated maxim No. 1, it must be further developed by saying that correction is not carried out by reading a textbook on correcting. Experience will teach us that it is one thing to correct at the beginning of a lesson plan, another to do so towards the end. It is one thing to correct while doing controlled exercises, quite another to do so during free-practice. During controlled-practice one would generally be able to correct immediately, during free-practice correction subverts the very idea of freedom. In the same manner, correction varies according to different types of exercises and skills. It is one thing to correct a written exercise where the author might not even be present, quite another to correct a pronunciation error in a classroom of 25 students. One ought to be careful, but still provide some kind of feedback. Learning to take in feedback and corrections is not easy as we ourselves know as teachers when we are told about our own misgivings and lacks. This we should remember when confronting our students.

Maxim No. 3. Correction differs according to the type of student; however all student must learn to **self-correct**. One of the most awful experiences for a teacher is to see a student frightened by being corrected. The first time one experiences this can be quite shocking. Some people just are not good at taking criticism, whether constructive or not. Specially so if your teacher is your friend; specially so if your classroom is that space where you go to leave the difficulties of life “behind”. As teachers we must learn to deal with such situations. Many times we will lose out --- I have myself several times---- but that is quite all right because we teachers must learn to self-correct as we bid our students do themselves.

Having said this it is no wonder Brown concludes by saying:

“After one very quick deviant utterance by a student, you have made an amazing number of observations and evaluations that go into the process of error treatment. New teachers will find such a prospect daunting, perhaps, but with experience many of these consideration will become automatic” (pg. 294)

And definitely a healthy sense of humor aids much in learning this. Some errors are so big , so huge, so appalling, that I cannot help but laugh out loud. Students, if you earn their trust, will appreciate being able to learn to laugh a little at themselves in our times, ridden with absolute stress. Take for instance the following mistake. Once while teaching in a multinational laboratory on Colombia I held two flashcards in order to practice connecting time clauses in the past progressive. One of the flashcards had the stick picture of a baby being fed by a mother; the other that of a man cutting a loaf of bread. Connecting both one would get something like: "While the mother was feeding the baby, the father was cutting a slice of bread"; or something to this effect. But listen to what my student Claudia Patricia came up with. Very seriously she said: "The mother was eating the baby, while the father was cutting the brain". Would you be able not to laugh out loud? I promptly provided feedback. I told her that it was quite correct if she were speaking of the Adams family.

CHAPTER 18 TEACHING READING

QUESTION 1

The interrelation of reading and writing is set out clearly in this question. It asks us to center our attention on two contrasting genres of "written" language with their distinctive features. What we read is written down for us, what we write is there ----for the most part—to be read by others. Having said this, I have decided to select the following two genres in order both to consider their formal characteristics and to devise techniques to aid students understand and produce them. They are: 1. essays on short stories (a combination which brings together fiction and nonfiction categories), and this might sound odd, 2. maps. (Brown includes them on page 303).

1. Essays on short stories: I have already spoken of my first difficulties writing in English in an academic setting when I started my first career at McGill University in Montreal when I was 17. Although I was quite bilingual, the process of learning to write in another language required a very long process of self discovery and dedicated tenacity. Complete books have been written to aid students on how to write their essays. I believe this is helpful to a certain extent; as it is helpful to provide paintings to someone who desires to paint. But the actual writing, the actual painting, that no one can do for another. Facing blank pages to scribble letters on, or to sketch some lines on them, is quite a destabilizing experience at times. Students will regularly say: "you

mean I have to write a 15 page essay? Are you serious? What am I going to write about?” Moreover, some people just do not like, or want to like, to write; many students and acquaintances are of a much more oral nature. Why this may be so reflects itself the difficulties involved in writing, in facing yourself through blank pages which should reflect what you are (if writing is more than just simply fulfilling a written assignment). But listen to what you are reading write now. Are we not supposed to be speaking of reading and not about writing. Is this chapter not on the former and not on the latter? We will return more fully to writing below.

What could one say to students in terms of formal aspects for the reading of short stories and the writing of essays on them? First of all, reading short stories in a second language is quite difficult. Teaching the advanced Literature course at the CCA I had to deal with these issues up close. Similarly I had to face these issues with first year university students trying to grapple with Aristotle, among others. Their first reaction is of panic. “You mean we are going to read Gabo in English? What do you mean, I do not even get him or want to get him in Spanish? What do you mean we are going to read the original Aristotle?” (“Why the originals?”, one should answer, “because they are the true gold”).

But be that as it may, patiently encouraging students, they began the slow daunting process of becoming capable of learning both how to read and how to write. They began the process of trying to articulate who they are and where they stand on relevant issues. But how exactly do you do it? Perhaps this will help somewhat. I provided them with a very sketchy and brief outline which might aid them in the process of reading short literary stories. It looks something like this in its first version:

LITERATURE COURSE: Outline for the Draft

1. UNIT AND TEXT TO BE ANALYZED:(if a different text, please consult with me)
2. FIVE INTERESTING/PUZZLING/PROBLEMATIC/ENIGMATIC QUESTIONS ABOUT OR RELATED TO THE READING: (e.g. Why does the author write/use/name? Why does the character say/remember/shout/repeat/**not say**/.....? Why is the atmosphere closed/violent/open/relaxed.....?) **USE YOUR IMAGINATION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.**

A
B
C
D
E

3. TOPIC/MAIN IDEA TO BE **DEVELOPED/DEFENDED/ATTACKED**: (ONE PARAGRAPH. MINIMUM FIVE COMPLETE SENTENCES)

4. TWO POSSIBLE/PROBABLE/IMAGINARY CONCLUSIONS (OR “WHAT INTERESTING THING, IF ANY, **WILL YOU LEARN BY WRITING THIS PAPER?**”):

A
B

5. POSSIBLE **REFERENCES** TO THE TEXT: (MINIMUM THREE **EXACT** QUOTES)

A
B
C

What could one take out from this draft outline? Perhaps the single most important thing a reader must learn to do is to read by questioning what is read. Writers do not simply write in order to fill us with their knowledge. Rather, writers who want to be read interactively, fill us with puzzles, with those questions which literally burn the writers themselves. They do so to jump-start our own process of self-discovery through self-reflective questioning. And this can and usually is a painful process of rupturing preconceived paradigms and schemata. In other words, a reader who does not puzzle over what he reads is a very poor reader; reading interesting writings generates a certain puzzling activity, that is to say, a dis-centering of oneself trying to understand how what we read alters us and makes us another person altogether. Or, more exactly, reading is like falling in love. It seems odd to say this, puzzling perhaps. But if you are a reader you sense what I am getting at. You just cannot let go of the book(s). Why is that? Here again we can turn to philosophy for some ideas. Anne Carson in her beautifully written and pleasurable read *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton University Press, 1986) shows, by looking at how the Greeks read (those for whom we need the Grammar Translation method as we argued in our last assignment). First of all she traces the transformation wrought by the appearance of writing and reading in the Greek sense of the “self”. Read what she writes, and puzzle a bit about it:

“When people begin to learn reading and writing, a different scenario develops (note: different than speaking and listening). Reading and writing require focusing the mental attention upon a text by means of the visual sense. As an individual reads and writes he gradually learns to close or inhibit the input of his sense, to inhibit or control the responses of his body, so as to train energy and thought upon the written word. He resists

the environment outside him by distinguishing and controlling the one inside him” (pg. 44)

And this makes a lot of sense; for it takes much self control to be able to sit down for hours upon hours and read, just read? Have you puzzled about it? You there yourself on your own, reading page after page of something which does not even speak to you and which makes it impossible to eat, or to jog, and even in some cases to listen to music at the same time. You cannot even have a conversation while you read. Reading is demanding of you, you must learn to focus intensively, to redirect your strengths and focus them on scribbled passages on a white sheet of paper. And this is why reading and writing can be quite dangerous for they seem to be static in time, in need of good readers to make them come alive again changed anew by new readings lovingly generated. (To Plato’s *Phaedrus* we will return when we consider writing).

But besides the recognition that reading generates a reflective stance such as mere conversation does not, it is of crucial importance to signal out to students that a good reader ----and in this sense a true writer---- permeates his pages with the eroticity of words. This may sound weird, but think about the following. Do you remember loving to read love or other kinds of stories when you were young? Why did you love them so much? It must be a powerful power which makes you not let go of a book? What is it? Again Anne Carson again provides a thesis and a possible answer to a very peculiar human puzzle in her writing on eros and symbolic language. In her analysis, the written text --specially those concerned with eros itself--- generates a triangular relation which is inherent to erotic desire. There is you and you book; but there is also a mysterious third party which provides the necessary voltage required to go on reading. I cannot here go into details. Let me just say that we gain much from reading the following passage from her book:

“There is something paradoxical in the relations between a novelist and his lovers. As a writer he knows their story must end and wants it to end. So, too, as readers we know the novel must end and want it to end. “But not yet!” say the readers to the writer. “But not yet!” says the writer to his hero and heroine. “But not yet!” says the beloved to the lover. And so the reach of desire continues. What is a paradox? A paradox is a kind of thinking that reaches out but never arrives at the end of its thought. Each time it reaches out, there is a shift of distance in mid-reasoning that prevents the answer from being grasped” (pg. 81) (see also page 91 “Letter (grammata) can mean ‘letter of the alphabet’ and also ‘epistles’ in Greek as in English. Novels contain letters of both kinds....”)

Remember the last good book you read; did you want it to end? Why not? What happened when you did? Why is the end so frustrating, though you know you can read it again? Or just think of

those sometimes embarrassing letters you received and wrote as a youngster to your loved one(s). Why write them, if you could in many cases have said it to him or her? What is the deal with writing to a lover? Why write when whom you love is actually not there? Who are you loving then?

But leaving this aside, I want to end this section by pointing out that I myself created another outline so that students not only were capable of reading more intelligently, but also of write more passionately. Here is the outline, though of course it needs much constant revisioning. It is quite concise, not the typical 200 page writing on how to write which in and of itself makes writing quite daunting:

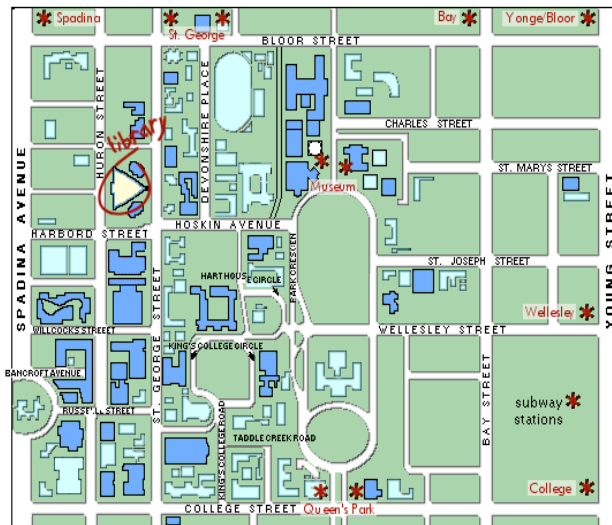
“LITERATURE COURSE: FIRST DRAFT FINAL PAPER

1. **INTRODUCTION:** (FIVE SENTENCES IN WHICH YOU TELL THE READER OF YOUR PAPER: WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO BE TALKING ABOUT AND WHY, AS WELL AS THE PROCESS OF YOUR ARGUMENT. (TRY, FOR EXAMPLE, TO STATE YOUR MAIN IDEA, AND THEN THE THREE SECONDARY IDEAS TO BE DEVELOPED. **REFER TO THE TEXT.**)
2. **IDEA No.1** (FIVE SENTENCES DEVELOPING YOUR FIRST IDEA, FOR INSTANCE, **ONE (ONLY ONE BUT IN DEPTH!!!!!!)** OF THE QUESTIONS YOU FOUND INTERESTING/ PUZZLING/ ENIGMATIC, ALWAYS **WITH REFERENCE TO THE TEXT, OTHER TEXTS** AND YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCES. DEVELOP YOUR IDEAS ON THIS SPECIFIC QUESTION AND **RELATE** TO THE COMPLETE PAPER, THAT IS TO SAY, TO THE MAIN IDEA.)
3. **IDEA No. 2** (DO THE SAME AS THE PREVIOUS BUT FOR YOUR **SECOND IDEA**, DEVELOP **IT ALONE** AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, AND CONNECT TO THE MAIN IDEA IN YOUR PAPER.)
4. **IDEA No. 3** (DO THE SAME AS THE PREVIOUS BUT FOR YOUR **THIRD IDEA**, DEVELOP **IT ALONE** AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, AND CONNECT TO THE MAIN IDEA IN YOUR PAPER)

CONCLUSION: (TELL THE READER WHAT YOU HAVE **DISCOVERED/ LEARNED/ DISCUSSED** IN YOUR PAPER. ANSWER THE QUESTION: **WHY** WAS IT VALUABLE TO READ YOUR PAPER????? RE-STATE YOUR MAIN IDEA AND SEE HOW IT WAS TRANSFORMED FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE FINAL ANALYSIS”

Nonetheless, as teacher you may provide these formal aids in order to read and write more efficiently, but I truly believe that reading involves a different kind of love and desire, a total desire to find yourself and others through silent written words whose appearance we take too much for granted.

2. Maps. It would seem to be an odd choice to select maps as my second category. What does it mean to read maps? Well one might think that it just means to be able to read the coordinates. You arrive to Toronto. You have no idea where University of Toronto is. Well you get a map and seek out the main streets and close-by metro stations. You use the map to orient yourself and get to places. If you have read it adequately you get there, if you do not you will be lost. Being lost in a new city ----a city whose streets contours and details we know anything of----- is quite scary. Arriving in a new city, as we immigrants do, means not having a North, a South , an East or a West. Benns International Schools is at Eglinton and Younge. You do not even think about it, you go. But we ask ourselves, “Where is that?” So much so that I know of some immigrants who, before going to their workplaces, would trace the travel route on the map itself so that they would not miss an exit in the Highway. You see, we do not have as many, or as big, Highways as you do; you may not understand how terrifying it is to miss the correct exit. Maps are nice because we read figures with our eyes. The best thing to do is actually to look at one. Our modern maps look in general something like this. You want to get to Roberts Library to get you PhD material; well, look, read, analyze and act:



Get off at St. George station and walk south for three blocks. The spaceship-like building, that’s where you can read your heart out. What are the formal structures to understand? This is where it gets tricky. Our modern maps are set out in a Cartesian plane, they represent the world as two dimensional. But if as we said before all reading creates self-understanding, then we are led to ask, what self-understanding do we seek here?

In our last assignment we argued that we are held to a great extent by our schemata. Now looking at the previous map of UFT, it is odd to realize that our world does not actually look

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anything like that. I mean are the streets so straight; is Robarts really like an arrow tip? Or let me put it this way. Maps seem to have a history. Look at this other map and try to read it with our Cartesian plane:



<http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/EMwebpages/205FF.html>

This map is a medieval one. It was created prior to the scientific revolution of which Descartes is a famous philosophical exponent. What difference do we see that make us think that these Medieval people were quite illiterate in terms of map making? Well, look at the horses! They are even larger than Robarts itself! Is this the horse from Troy, or what? And look at the castles and churches. Boy, they were really big, weren't they? What is the point then? That however inexact this map may be it was used as a kind of map, but one in which what we take for granted was not of importance. The castles and churches appear big because they have a meaningful role to play. What is important goes beyond the Cartesian plane. Our modern maps in this sense are entirely lacking. They are truly lifeless and some have argued that there spatial arrangement reveals our

modern desire to dominate our environment, to make us square into our scientific paradigm (See for instance Charles Taylor's "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophical Arguments*)

Well fine, but what can our ESL student learn from all this? Well that when we start to give students exercises which involve the very important exercises on giving directions ----which in many cases involve maps----- we ought to be careful. The way our student orient themselves need not be our Western one. An immigrant living in the country side orients herself through brooks and trees and mountain passes. Many immigrants have a tough time with Canadian maps, in many other countries it is actually quite strange to use these maps at all. But further still, students can learn that even reading a map involves an interactive relation in which our schemata are displayed and can come to be questioned. Reading in this sense moves us towards puzzlement and self-discovery.

QUESTION 2

Given the length of the previous question, I will try to be as brief as possible here. I will do so by setting out skimming and scanning separately, and by signaling major differences between them as we move along.

1. Skimming: when one skims a reading one searches quickly for its general purpose in order to be able to predict what will happen further on, namely, at the time when you actually begin reading. It provides a head start on being able to understand what is coming up ahead. Skimming provides us with a very general framework with which we guide our more concrete reading. It provides us with a kind of general map; but a fussy one for the details are not our at this point in time our main goal. I myself can provide an example of my having skimmed though this course. Before even starting to write these assignments I went over the different modules and although I mentioned the issue of the Grammar Translation method in Assignment No. 3, I knew I should postpone dealing with it until Assignment No. 5 where there was a direct question regarding its alleged "theorylessness". In other words, we distance learners ----whatever distance means here, as if the written word were somehow less valued than the oral one (why, otherwise, would TESOL Ontario not accept a distance program for certification?)----- actually do skim our modules when preparing to write these assignments. You look at some of the titles "methodologies", "foundations" and if you have had previous training you get excited by some ("foundations") and terrified by others ("lesson planning", again?) . At first, skimming gives you

a fussy blueprint, but as you start tackling each module you realize how important it was to be able to see the whole prior to looking at the specific sections. Or one can take Browns book itself. You skim his book and see, for instance, that he will treat the four skills on chapters 16 to 19. And when skimming one sees that although for this specific assignment we do not read Chapter 15, it is quite important for it is entitled: “Integrating the four skills”. And one is lead to puzzle, about certain things. Why if the four skills are to be integrated then, after saying so, they are split up again? Or further still, why treat the skills in that order? Are all the skill equally important? What is the relation between the pair listening and speaking and the reading-writing couple? Is this not crucial to understand the difference between oral cultures, and literate ones? Is a person who does not write “illiterate”? Should we force writing on such a person? Perhaps there is a very important reason for not learning to write at all. Or on the other hand, do not people truly dislike to write because as we have argued above reading and writing reunite a displacement which many times our conversations do not get at. Of course, some conversations turn out to be reflective, but is not reflection bound up with the studying of important life changing texts? As you can see, by skimming, we predict and question what we are about to read.

2. Scanning: In contrast, scanning means looking for specific information quickly. You do not want to focus on the overall outline, but rather rapidly seek very detailed information. Do you remember you favorite restaurant? Do you want to look at the whole menu, or scan directly for favorite delights in your favorite section? Reading the whole menu is a big mistake, you might never finish. Besides the waiter is there waiting for you, pushing you to scan quickly. So you look for all the plates which include chicken or only those which are vegetarian. By scanning we extract specific information without reading the whole text. Writing this assignment I have had to scan several times. One could scan Browns book itself. How would you do it? The best way is by looking at the subject index at the end of the book. Finally, think of what you do when you look at the yellow pages. You do not read it whole! If you do, you will turn yellow. As for ESL learners; when they realize that we are not walking dictionaries they must learn to scan a dictionary. You want to know what “guanabana” is in Spanish. Please do not start with the ‘A’!

But one thing is for sure, scanning and skimming are very practical techniques which can prepare you to read. But to read is quite another thing, and to learn to let yourself be transformed

by what you read, quite another still. Teaching scanning and skimming is relatively easy; teaching the rest, that I am not so sure how you do.

QUESTION 3

Brown provides 10 reading strategies. These are to a certain extent exemplified in Lesson number 2, beginning on page 319. In order to briefly respond this question, I will merely list the ten strategies and provide some examples found within the reading lesson plan provided by Brown.

1. identify the purpose: found in “The second reading before you read : Knowing your purpose” by thinking of specific questions. Pg 325. Also in related area in “On Guided Writing: Considering Audience and Purpose” (pg. 329)
2. use graphic rules and patterns to aid bottom up decoding (usually beginners): Not really touched upon in the lesson. Could be taken into consideration by students in a much more beginner’s stage.
3. Efficient silent reading techniques Found in section “As you read” where we are told “Don’t worry about vocabulary!” page 320.
4. skim for main ideas: found in “anticipating the topic” by looking at pictures and subtitles. (pg. 319) and section entitled “looking for general ideas” pg. 320.
5. scan for specific info: found in section “Becoming an Efficient reader: Scanning” by answering questions such as “what is the date of this article?” pg. 327
6. use semantic mapping or clustering: Perhaps the section entitled “Understanding the Author’s plan“ (pg. 325) is trying to get at some semantic clustering by having student take notice of the relation between the different parts of the article being read and focusing on the arguments for the different paragraphs.
7. guess when you are uncertain: found in “Guessing Vocabulary from context” pg. 323.
8. analyze vocabulary: This technique can be seen exemplified in the section entitled “Guessing vocabulary from context.” Take for instance sentence number 1. By looking at the word “scarcer”, and coming to realize that it bears the ending characteristic of comparatives. students can better prepare themselves to respond. (pg. 323)
9. Distinguish between literal and implied meaning: This strategy can be seen in the section entitled “A deeper look: Discussion Questions” (pg. 326) where students are asked to go beyond the words found in the article. The article sees as unquestionable the need for the

industrialization of “Third” World countries. (pg. 320); but this section leads to question this rather troubling premise. Question four asks: “Have the technological advances mentioned in this article affected your nation or area?” (pg. 326) Just to see how deep industrialization has affected some countries, one ought to read books such as Eduardo Galeano’s. *The open veins of Latin America*. It might have a questionable approach to politics, however, it is full of examples about how technology transfer affected whole towns in Colombia, Brazil, Chile, etc.

10. Capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships: Although no specific section of the reading plan copes with this strategy, one could ask student to find diverse types of relations by trying to find and underline the different discourse markers used by the author. Some of these will include “by contrast” (pgs. 320 and 322) which shows a contrastive relation. Students could search for other discourse markers including those used whose notional meaning is: 1. Enumerative (first..), 2. Additive (reinforcing, ‘the again’; Similarity, ‘likewise’; and transition, ‘now’), 3. Logical Sequence (summative, ‘altogether’; and regulative, ‘in consequence’) 4. Explicative (‘namely’), 5. Illustrative (‘for example’), and finally 6. Contrastive (relative, ‘rather’; antithetic, ‘by contrast’; and concessive, ‘though’.)

QUESTION 4

Page 309 provides several compensation strategies for reading. In answering this question I will merely list them, provide a brief example, and ponder how they might be taught. They are many but can make our student better guessers of meaning of words, of grammatical or discourse relationships, of implied meanings, and of. They include:

A. linguistic clues:

1. word analysis. By letting student know about prefixes, suffixes and roots for words. An example from Philosophy; the word “cosmos” means order, but since the Greeks correlated holistically this word also meant “beauty”. This is why we have the word “cosmetics”. Or take the negative prefix “–un”. One thing is to be fortunate, another to be unfortunate. Another current example in English is the formation of adverbs together suffix “-ly” and the creation of nouns out of verbs though suffixes such as (“-er”/“-or”/“-ness”/“-tion”).
2. textual structure: look at discourse connectors in particular such as those specified above in point 10 of the last question.

B. non-linguistic clues:

1. context. Many a time a student will blurt out a word and ask for its definition. This is a way of knowing that students have not understood that reading involves compensation strategies such as looking for the context within which the word appears. Even when one looks at a dictionary it might not help us; there we find several definitions. In this sense a good reader reads holistically, that is to say, she avoids getting stuck –particularly in a first reading—in very specific details which may hamper understanding. Take for example the difference between: “He is such a wise man”; “He is such a wise guy”.

2. situation. Student must be able to relate their understand to specific situations. The very same word can be used many times in a positive and in a negative way. Suppose I say to you: “You are quite a character”. I have no idea what you have just said to me unless I know something about who you are, what our relation is, and how you said it. Similarly consider the use of the words: “Yeah great!”. Depending on your intonation, you are saying totally opposite things.

QUESTION 5

To briefly answer this question I will focus on the eight principles of designing interactive techniques set out by Brown. But given that we used Lesson 2 in answering question number 3, I will provide my own reading text which I have already quoted before. Brown’s is, to me, utterly boring. My text is the one used when talking about listening skills. It is a poem by Salvatore Quasimodo entitled *A Refuge of Nocturnal Birds* and which was part of my teaching literature to Advanced Students at the CCA. It reads as follows:

High on a cliff there’s a twisted pine;
Intently it listens into the abyss
With its trunk curved down like a crossbow.

A refuge of nocturnal birds,
In the deepest hours of night it resounds
With the swift fluttering of wings.

Even my heart has a nest
Suspended into the darkness, and a voice;
It, too, lies awake listening at night. (pg. 184)

Now let us look at the interactive strategies. I will not do a full scale interpretation of the poem. This must be left for another meeting.

1. Interactive curriculum: this poem is quite interesting in that the written word, which is read by students actually speaks about what listening is all about. And this strange voice actually says nothing, it merely listens. And these words, do they not sound rhythmically construed, as if providing refuge by their very intonation? Where else could one integrate the four skills more?

2. intrinsically motivating: Although students have a sense of poetry as quite irrelevant to their lives, once one gets young students interested in finding in poetry and philosophy possible answers to their deepest conflicts and fears, they might even decide to study the humanities themselves! How more precisely could we gage the relevance of this poem? Well think about this. How come what starts out as a twisted pine out there in the world (line 1) ends up by being related to my heart which “even has a nest”. (line 7). In other words, if, as we have argued above, reading is a transforming of the self, then this poem exemplifies this transformation as few others. What was out there, has been made our own. A truly great reader is one who not only reads a bunch of books, but actually embodies in herself what these books have granted her. Or to put it in ESL terminology, we have moved from “input” to “intake” through a poem which gives us a new voice.

3. authenticity and readability: In order to provide some basic ideas on this complex issue I will retake Christine Nutall’s triad for choosing reading texts, namely:

a suitability: reading poetry requires enjoying words. And learning a language is precisely this. In this sense poems can be used to encourage students to enjoy learning for learning’s sake. And the very simplicity of a poem is deceptive. Few words can be much more challenging than hoards of sentences thrown at you.

b exploitability: This particular poem can be exploited for students to understand the simple present. (listens, resounds, ...). Intermediate students and high-beginners are truly impressed when they come to realize that they can understand a poem in another language. Perhaps they cannot understand poems in their OWN.

c readability: This poem has lexical and structural complexity appropriate for intermediate students. But what is more important still is the fact that it points student to move beyond mere grammatical structures. For I can understand the words “Listen to the abyss”, but understanding them really makes us move beyond the words themselves. What do you mean one listens to an abyss? Is not an abyss because of its depth quite silent and overwhelming? Again, I can understand that there is a voice which appears. But why refer to it by using the pronoun “it”, and

how come this voice, instead of speaking, rather listens? But it cannot listen for it is merely written there, to be read by us silently!

4. Encourage development of reading strategies: Perhaps students can here try to use semantic mapping in order to see how the poem has a certain movement. This mapping could look something like this if one were to consider key nouns:

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Stanza 1 ----- pine /external, vegetative; abyss/ distance silence, fall

Stanza 2 ----- refuge / tranquility, home, close to us, refugees seeking refuge; birds / animal movements, soaring, flying over the abyss, bridge the space

Stanza 3 ----- my heart/ only possessive in the poem, human; voice/ language, articulation, identity, authenticity,

STANZA 1: VEGETATIVE WORLD –EXTERNAL WORLD

STANZA 2: ANIMAL WORLD --- INSIDE THE TREE

STANZA 3: HUMAN SPHERE –INSIDE US, LISTENING TO THE WORLD

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Or something of the kind, which would later be developed into a short essay of some sort.

5. Include both bottom-up and top-down techniques: Looking at essentials, students might be able here to remember the different categories for the pronunciation of the simple present tense third person. As we know well we have three categories: /s/; talks , /z/; loves, and /Iz/; dances. In the poem students could be made to find the adequate groups for all of the simple presents they find: lies /z/, sounds /z/, listens /z/, and has /z/. In the case of Spanish speaking students this would greatly aid them since no words in Spanish end with this /z/ sound, and therefore their pronunciation is simply than of an ‘s’.

6. Follow the SQ3R sequence:

a. survey; Survey for the main characters of the poem. A tree, some birds, a voice.

b. Question; some such question may include; who speaks in this poem? To whom does he/she/it speak? Why does Salvatore use birds and trees? Whose is that voice? Why three stanzas? Why not 5?

c. read; By checking the semantic map provided above, one could find plausible responses to the previous questions. For instance, why has Salvatore selected a pine tree? Is it because he could not have chosen any other, an oak tree, an apple tree? Well perhaps it is because he sees it as the arrow of the crossbow. Only pine trees truly have this shape which send us out to the distance; a distance which truly is no distance at all, for trees, we should remember, do not actually move. Perhaps in a sense WE are those trees and the movement of the poem has gone nowhere except inwards.

d. recite; Take a painting by the Great Seven, for instance Franklin Carmichaels' Mirror Lake (1929) painted just north of Toronto. There you find pines as arrows projecting us, teaching us, to move while remaining static.



And verily those of us who have cannot readily move physically can all to well understand how words and poems move, even more so, than our legs.

e. review; For long term associations ask students to remember their favorite trees, those of their youth. Why do children love to climb trees, build their house on trees? And why do we adults prefer to live on the all too safe ground where we rarely listen to birds and abysses?

7. Subdivide your techniques into pre-reading, during reading ad after reading phases.

a. pre-reading; Take photographs of trees and famous paintings as well. Question students as to their relation with trees. In a multicultural classroom try to compare the diversity of trees.

b. reading; in order to give students a sense of reading, tell them you are about to publish an electronic magazine with all the best short essays on the analysis of the poem. (as I did as part of the advanced courses on reading and writing I taught)

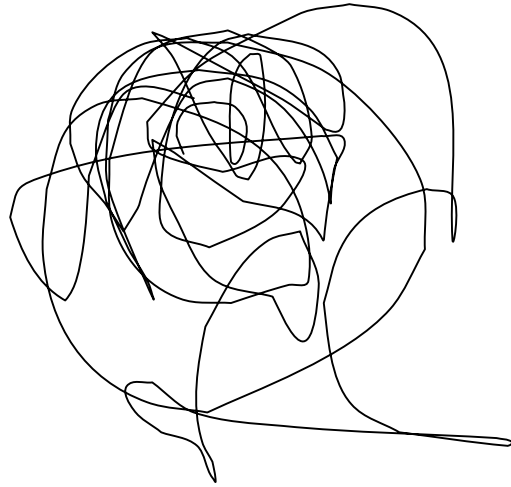
c. post-reading; Have student write a poem to their own trees, using cinquain poetry if need be. (See Assignment No. 3)

8. Build in some evaluative aspect to your techniques: Out of the various ways of indicating comprehension, one could here develop students ideas through “extending”, that is to say, by providing an ending to this poem; or as I did with some of my Grammar Through Composition students ----- quoted on the last assignment---- ask them to write what it is to be a tree.

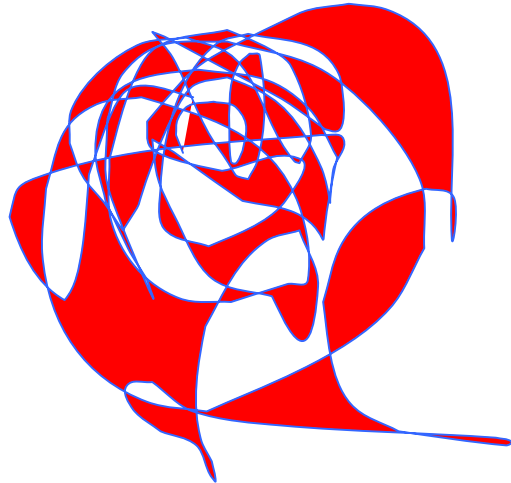
CHAPTER 19 TEACHING WRITING

QUESTION 1

One way of focusing on teaching someone to write in a second language would be to do it by centering on the final product itself, the final essay, the completed story, the finished report. A good final product would have had to meet certain standards, including accurate grammar and conformity to conventions. Brown quite rightly points out that “there is nothing inherently wrong with attention to any of the above criteria” (pg. 335). This is so because, in the end, you have to have a finished product which you present to others so that they might tread it. But given the move towards learner centered strategies, then it is clear that the teaching of writing can be seen as well by emphasizing not simply its end product, but rather by looking at the dynamism which precedes this difficult end. In this sense one centers on the process itself of what goes on prior to achieving the finished product. What happens in the interim, the multiplicity of stages and strategies undertaken by good writers, becomes the main focus of attention. One could put in terms of an analogy. We all love the end product of painting; but we pay less attention to what goes on in its production. This is the reason why I keep, unlike many other, all my sketches. By doing so I am constantly reminded of the process itself and how what were a few lines drawn in, for example, a classroom setting (oddly, an excellent space for creation for multiple reasons), can become modified, altered and redrawn beautifully into more self-sufficient paintings. When teaching students about the writing process I would do the following in class. I would draw something like this on the blackboard:



I would then ask if they liked these lines. They would in general say no; they would correctly see nothing but a big mess. But let us take that mess and develop it just a bit instead of throwing it away. For example;



Or something of the sort. Perhaps student might come to see that what were just a bunch of lines, in the very process itself of creation, can be seen as a reddish flower or a dynamic galaxy.

The point is this. BY focusing of the process itself, students learn to be more relaxed as they begin to write. They come to understand that writing is something which takes time and that this process requires creativity and patience. Brown puts it well:

“The process approach is an attempt to take advantage of the nature of writing (unlike conversation it can be planned and given an unlimited number of revision before its “release”) to give students a chance to think as they write,. Another way of putting it is that writing is indeed a *thinking process*.” (Brown pg. 336)

Though we must emphasize, it is not simply a thinking process; for although many writings can indeed be quite boring in that they are absolutely rigid, “letting oneself go” while writing becomes central to creativity as well. How better to understand this process? I will take up some of the issues presented as part of my reading circle in Colombia where we focused quite a lot on Omaggio's *Teaching Language in Context*.

One of the principal components to even begin understanding this process, is to understand that spoken language and written language are extremely different in nature. Some people, including some of my students, believe that writing is simply a matter of transcribing what one speaks into some more or less sophisticated arrangement of letters. If this were so, then through dictations and transcriptions students would quickly develop writing skills in the classroom. But as anybody who has written different texts knows, writing is by no means an easy task. It is rather a process famous for its being quite slow and, particularly when you start writing, maybe even painful. That you can say something does not at all mean you can write it down; some of my best speakers in class would be some of the worst writers. Even in their native language people do not at all know how to express themselves; we ourselves many times lack the capacity for developing written coherence and cohesiveness, linguistic clarity, adequate use of grammar structures, punctuation and even spelling.

What then are some of the principal differences between saying something and writing it?. Speech is, given its nature, usually less accurate, more redundant and much more interactive than writing. Writing requires time, choice of wording and the text itself lies there without an author to answer for its gaps and difficulties. The written text cannot answer back to you. Therefore, given that there are no external contextual cues, then it must be clearer, more elaborate, more detailed, have greater organization and present some formalization of style. The difference between these two communication channels lies not simply in the channel of delivery. Take for example border cases such as talking books for the blind; or a speech which was carefully written but was delivered orally; or notes to friends which are really oral in content, but written in form.

Teaching the process of composition involves making students conscious of elements such as: prewriting gestation, planning with or without outline, getting the composition started, making ongoing decisions on word and syntax choice, developing a rhetorical style, reviewing what has been written in draft mode, anticipating and rehearsing, reformulating, stopping to rethink and clarify, contemplating the finished piece, and finally, revising. But why is this so important? Because our classes seem to set aside writing skills. What is most shocking of all, is the fact that out of all the language skills, it is writing which remains completely unattended for. Although writing seems to provide important aspects for personal development, in a study on foreign languages it was found that only 2% of class time was dedicated to writing. And of this reduced time 73% of it was spent in writing at the sentence level! The study found 1 instance, 5 full long minutes, of free composition in 864 classes! According to Omaggio (*Teaching language in context*, 1986: Unit 6 “Becoming Proficient in Writing”) this neglect has been caused by different circumstances: 1) the emphasis placed on speaking and listening in the audio-lingual method, 2) some claims that writing is non-productive, and takes really too much time to correct, and 3) the belief that there is no real need for students to write in the 2nd language. That this lack of attention to writing is quite evident can be seen by the way we do not even use pencils to write our essays any more! Or take Brown’s example: “I was recently consulted by a friend who is studying to be certified as realtor. Part of this verification exam involved a simple one or two-page written essay. The prospect frightened him” (pg. 339). This is troubling if indeed reading and writing are those skills which greatly enhance the roads to self-discovery and self-fashioning.

But precisely what the writing process can really teach our students is something about themselves, about the change which occurs from drafting to final execution. The writer knows not the answers of what he is to write about until he starts writing and tackles a puzzling issue. For a writing to be interesting, the writer must be able to question herself, to become discentered, to allow herself to become another who re-makes herself through hard won words. Writing, when we believe that words can actually transform who we are and what we do, generates self understanding through a crisis of meaning. Brown puts it well:

“writing is a way to end up thinking g something you couldn’t have started out thinking, writing is in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel and perceive. You make available to yourself something better than what you’d be stuck with if you’d actually succeeded in making your meaning clear at the start. (pg. 337)

Brown himself is a good writer, not in that he organizes topics well (sometimes it seems that everything is too organized for my taste), but rather in that he provides us with the means to question ourselves and the written text itself. His writing is such that we feel in a sense that we are having a conversation with him, as if he were there, though he is not.

But it is once again Plato who has given us the ideal configuration for the connection between the four skills. His writings are dialogues, that is to say words written down which are there to be heard. No wonder many marvel at this achievement. We have quoted Plato previously seeking to bridge the languages of philosophy and ESL teaching and training. We have quoted before as well the *Phaedrus* which concerns one of Socrates' positions on eros (which we connected, besides, to reading). But what we have not said is that this specific Platonic dialogue concerns writing itself. Too many points are argued by Socrates and his beautiful friend Phaedrus, but let us just end this section by pointing out that writing is dangerous. Socrates tells the following tale:

SOCRATES: At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; the bird which is called the Ibis is sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days the god Thamus was the king of the whole country of Egypt; and he dwelt in that great city of Upper Egypt which the Hellenes call Egyptian Thebes, and the god himself is called by them Ammon. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he enumerated them, and Thamus enquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. It would take a long time to repeat all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and for the wit. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. **And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.** (Phaedrus; my emphasis)

In other words, a good writer actually goes through the process of self discovery, but most of us - ---who may do little writing--- may turn to written words so as not to get involved in the process

of discovery itself. We might read so as to avoid ourselves. We might read/write so as to repeat rather than to re-create and re-articulate. (Other philosophers concerned with the issue of articulation and self discovery include Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur with texts such as “What is a text? Explanation and understanding”; and “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation”)

QUESTION 2

It is a difficult task to review the comments on cross cultural differences, on contrastive rhetoric and on Kaplan’s diagram. This is so, I must confess, because I am too much of a Westerner. As I once had an Israeli girlfriend, I dedicated about 4 months to learning Hebrew. Writing backwards, “what is that all about?”, I would ask myself. I truly was disoriented. That being said, the majority of the comparisons and comments I will provide will deal with languages closer to home, namely, to differences between English and Spanish which reflect many aspects of the differences of writing styles in each.

Cultural differences are laid out for us in language. Language permeates different forms of life, and it would be odd then that only the written language would not be affected by this. Nevertheless, Kaplan’s theory has its serious problems, for example; how would intercultural understanding even come about –and it does--- if we were THAT different? Or, how simplifying are his interesting and appealing graphs? Leaving this aside, I take it that Kaplan’s general idea is that we bring with us as writers certain predispositions and schemata about how to organize our writing, about the connection between ideas, about the structure itself and the movement of the words which make up a composition. To the strange composition of historically diverse maps we have already alluded above.

The single most shocking experience I have found in this respect is reading the poetry of Wang Wei. This is one of his poems:

渭城曲
渭城朝雨浥輕塵
客舍青青柳色新
勸君更盡一杯酒
西出陽關無故人

Do you see what he is doing? If you have a mathematical intelligence you must be marveled. His writings, all of them, create self-sufficient, beautifully enclosed, rectangles. Now look at the translation of one of his other poems, one relevant to our current experiencing Autumn:

“The autumn hills hoard scarlet from the setting sun.
Flying birds chase their mates,
Now and then patches of blue sky break clear --
Tonight the evening mists find nowhere to gather.”

It seems as though our writing, in contrast to Wang Wei's, lacks something. It lacks the beauty of a painting, the beauty of a coherence beyond the coherence of syntax. (On this issue see Rousseau *Essay on the Origin of language*.)

Let us then move back to a comparison of Spanish and English. It would seem that in contrast to the previous example, they are quite similar. And yet in my own case there are some things I write only in Spanish, others mostly in English. It could be that I am failing to learn about each, but perhaps it might also be that they are quite different. What are some salient differences between Spanish and English? For one economy; as you might already know after having read this assignment! But more seriously, when one does a translation in English one gets paid less because by some “kind of magic” less pages come out as the final product! You are better off, consequently, translating into Spanish. You will get a few more bucks. Or take the famous example of possessives. In Spanish “la novia del hermano de Pedro” uses six words; written in English you end up with three: “Peter's brother's girlfriend”. Or take the case of abbreviations. There is a joke in English which says: “Don't abbrev.” And it is true, English speakers love to reduce, to compact, to eliminate superfluity, to simplify and minimize. Take the very abbreviations used by Brown; LAD, SLA, or by far the most amusing and unintelligible of all SQ3R. My God, Wang Wei would curl in his grave at this one. Or take the ones used in our classroom, the famous ROPES for lesson planning. You might think these abbreviations are extremely helpful, I sincerely do not get it. “Why not just say it”, I ask myself quietly reminding myself of how Spanish I am.

But the differences are even greater and more important than these. As I taught several times writing courses to Spanish speakers, I would certainly have to remind them once and again that they were writing as Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Gabo) –Colombia Nobel Prize winner--- does. I believe that one should see what one is talking about. So here it goes, take a deep breath, as the

English speaker you are, and try to get this concluding passage from Gabo's *The handsomest Drowned Man in the World*:

“But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their house would have wider doors, higher ceilings and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go anywhere without bumping into beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal and they were going to break their backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers in the cliffs so that in future years at dawn the passengers on a great liner would awaken, suffocated by the smell of gardens on the high seas, and the captain would have to come down from the bridge in his dress uniform, with his astrolabe, his pole star, and his row of war medals and, pointing to the promontory of roses on the horizon, he would say in fourteen languages, look there, where the wind is so peaceful now that it's gone to sleep beneath the beds, over there, where the sun's so bright that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn, yes, over there, that's Esteban's village.” (*World Writers Today*, pg. 132)

Are you out of breath? And while rereading it please do remember Esteban's village is Colombia; “where the sun's so bright that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn”. But further still. Let us say you were a teacher in ESL writing and received this sample without being told you were the famous Gabo. Would you accept it? Certainly not. And I am almost sure that my own essays are sometimes “troubling” to you as well. Well how can he write so much? Perhaps my own writing has become itself kind of bilingual. But then again, perhaps not. (And of course, what I have said is definitely not true of all English or Spanish speaking writers; take Faulkner or Joyce in English or the absolutely daunting economy of our Borges)

QUESTION 3

For this question we are asked to pick an ESL audience. I will select the following: that of those immigrants who struggle not merely to survive in another country, but to present difficult and questionable exams such as the TOEFL. Not passing the TOEFL at times even hampers many people's possibilities for a better life. I myself have had to write the TWE section (Test of Written English). Likewise I have had to present the TOEFL two times; it is as though one left Canada and suddenly became English deprived. However, I was lucky to present it as an English teacher. I did well in the exam, but that was not my main interest. I placed myself “realistically” in my students' shoes. I understood how difficult it is to sit down and in thirty minutes have your writing abilities tested after such a difficult exam as the basic TOEFL is on its own. The TOEFL

seems, many times, to contradict everything we have said up to now about writing; that it requires time, that it requires rethinking oneself. And yet universities believe ---and seem to defend--- the use of such troublesome exams. Moreover, that something is necessary does not make it good.

This being said, the reasons for taking the TWE for this specific audience include at least two:

1. Getting into a program in the humanities or related fields.
2. Passing this exam for work related purposes.

The best we can do as teacher of writing is to prepare students to understand what they will be expected to do in order to pass such exams. But why did we select this example? Because Brown himself points to the fact that the major consumer of writing techniques is EAP (English for Academic Purposes). Usually the audience involves literate students whose educational background and personal grades are such that they might have a chance of being accepted in an overseas university.

We are asked to assess how to get students to do as much real writing as possible for this purpose. This is troubling for the audience I have selected. This is so because the exam itself is unrealistic! And yet we must help students to present it. At the very least we ought to focus on all of what has been said previously in questions 1 and 2. But moreover, it is of great importance to have students understand the difference between real writing and display writing. The first is one in which “the writer doesn’t know the answer and genuinely wants information” (pg. 340) while the second ---display writing--- is one in which the purpose of writing is to show one’s knowledge such as in a test situation. Writing for the TOEFL is in this respect writing for display.

But for this specific audience, what would real writing be concerned with? At this level perhaps the most realistic concern is that of getting to articulate who you are and where you stand on certain issues. This ultimately links the written process with the creation of identity. This is why Charles Taylor writes ----using visual metaphors--- about what articulation is all about:

“ when I still do not know how to describe how I feel, or how it looks and so on, the object concerned lacks definite contours; I do not quite know what to focus on in focusing on them. Finding an adequate articulation for what I want to say about these matters brings them into focus. To find a description in this case is to identify a feature of the matter at hand, and thereby to grasp its contour, to get a proper view” (page 257) (“Theories of meaning” in his *Human agency and Language*)

Perhaps the single most important motivating factor for this specific audience is to remind them that in writing the page they write themselves producing the narrative of who they really are. You cannot get more real than this. (On the role of narrative in philosophy and ethics see: Ricoeur Taylor and MacIntyre, or the beautiful text on Nietzsche by Alexander Nehamas *Life as Literature*)

QUESTION 4

According to Brown some of the practices undertaken by good writers include:

1. Focusing on main idea.
2. Gauging the audience.
3. Planning, which takes time.
4. Free-writing the first ideas.
5. Following a general organization plan.
6. Soliciting feedback.
7. Revising willingly and efficiently.
8. Patiently, making revisions (as many as needed).

If one seeks to understand writing, it seems that a good point to start from is by looking at the characteristics which make someone a good writer. Apart from the above, in general terms a good writer must understand the basic and more complex conventions of compositions in the language dealt with. In the case of English think for example of sentence structure (subject + verb) and length of sentences (English follows a particular organization which Spanish speakers sometimes abuse). A good writer likewise has vocabulary depth and the capacity to replace words with near synonyms which fit more adequately a given train of thought. Moreover, she must have the capacity to select from a variety of syntactic structures which can provide varying degrees of precision. Finally, a good writer does adopt a style which will not only be her own, but as well one which will have the greatest rhetorical effects.

And more importantly still is the fact that the good writer becomes acquainted with the writing process itself. This is to say that she becomes conscious of the different moments involved in composing a given piece. In general terms one finds three basic stages: 1) planning and organizing the first draft, an activity in which flexibility becomes very important; good writers

“do not feel compelled to stick to their original ideas if they see a reason for changing the course of their thinking while in the process of composing”, 2) rescanning and rereading what the author has already accomplished before proceeding with the rest in order to have some grasp of the process as a whole, 3) revising frequently not only in terms of form, but particularly in terms of content (i.e., seeking, constructing and strengthening a line of argument). While developing these stages the good writer is characterized for her being recursive, that is to say, she can stop and go back as many times as considered necessary. In contrast, a poor writer cannot see the value in revising. Likewise the good writer understands the audience which she writes for; the good writer is reader-centered rather than writer-centered.

But is this all? Certainly not. To understand the point I will defend, I will present the following letter without telling you who wrote it. Bear with me while reading it:

“Dear _____!

In a most generous and humane manner you, Mr. _____, plead the cause of those members of the Jewish people who were once compelled, by the requirements of universal military service, to serve in the war. I entirely understand these lofty sentiments, Mr. _____. But, with the greatest respect, may I point out that members and supporters of my movement, who are Germans, for years were driven from all Government positions, without consideration for their wives and children or their war service.... Those responsible for this cruelty were the same Jewish [political] parties which today complain when their supporters are denied the right to official positions, with a thousand times more justification, because they are of little use in these positions but can do limitless harm... Nevertheless, Mr. _____, in consideration of your noble motives, I had already discussed the preparation of a law with Minister of the Interior Frick which would remove the solution of these questions from arbitrary individual action and provide a uniform law. And I pointed out to the _____ Minister of Interior the cases for which you, Mr. _____, wished to see exceptions made. The law in question received preliminary discussion at several meetings last week and will provide consideration for those Jews who either served in the war themselves, were disabled in the war, have other merits, or never gave occasion for complaint in the course of a long period of service. In general, the primary aim of this cleansing process is only to restore a certain sound and natural balance, and, secondly, to remove from official positions of national significance those elements to which one cannot entrust [the choice between] _____x’s survival or destruction. For it will not be possible to avoid, in the next few years, [the need] to make sure that certain processes which must not be communicated to the rest of the world for reasons of the highest national interest, will indeed remain secret. This can only be guaranteed by the inner homogeneity of the administrative bodies concerned.

I beg you, Mr. _____, to believe that I will try to do justice to your noble feelings as far as is possible. I understand your inner motivations and myself, by the way, frequently suffer under the harshness of a fate which forces us to make decisions which, from a human point of view, one would a thousand times rather avoid.

Work on the law in question will proceed as quickly as possible, and I am convinced that this matter, too, will then find the best possible solution.

I am, in sincere and profound respect,

Your ever devoted,”

I am quite sure that by now you know who wrote it. It was signed by Adolph Hitler, dated April 5, 1933. (<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Holocaust/hindlet.html>) What is quite troubling is that it seems to fit quite perfectly all the characteristics that Brown argues are fundamental to a good writer. But what about this troubling letter? Certainly there is a focus on the purpose, albeit, a dark one; Hitler is famous for having gauged his audiences; it must have taken him time to prepare such a formal letter; he might have drawn some basic sketches later to connect ideas through complex discourse connectors, etc. Perhaps the only one he might not have undertaken was that of soliciting feedback which may have greatly reduced the chance of his ever actually bringing into effect such policies which come about precisely because people write so well, that they are able to convince others.

So what is your point, you might ask? Well that if a good writer is simply he who carries out the previous techniques, then Adolph Hitler is quite a good writer after all. There is something terribly missing in Hitler, something which a good writer who is as well a reflective person, something to which Plato alluded when he said that one can write and be left absolutely untouched by what one writes and/or reads. In this sense what Hitler lacked and which Brown himself points to again and again, but not in the previous list, is this. Good writers are risk takers who in writing not only dis-center themselves, but their audience as well. Brown quotes Elbow: “Think of writing, then, not as a way to transmit a message.. writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn’t have started out thinking. Writing is, in fact, a transaction with words whereby you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, perceive” (pg. 337). If only Hitler had come to understand this.

And in this sense –as I have argued again and again in the previous 3 assignments—ESL teachers and trainers have MUCH to learn from philosophy. Or just listen to what Paul Ricoeur

says in his beautiful essay “The hermeneutical function of distancing” on what it is to understand oneself through written words:

“henceforth to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed. So understanding is quite different from a constitution of which the subject would possess the key. In this respect it would be more correct to say that the self is constituted by the “matter” of the text (pg. 143-4, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*; Brown himself interestingly alludes to hermeneutics in the concluding pages of his text on Principles where he bids us understand our teaching in more of a poetic fashion; pg. 291)

Letting yourself be opened by words which hearken you to re-place yourself. A writer does much with his words. But what he can do is to a great extent a reflection of the kind of person she is. Some writers ---including Wordsworth’s poetry---heal both themselves and others. Good writers struggle with words so that we readers, who barely write, can deal with our inmost struggles which for the most part remain dangerously hidden and allegedly, forgotten. (ON Wordsworth healing see H, Abrams *The mirror and the lamp*)

QUESTION 5

I have previously mentioned how writing can be compared to sketching in art. What at the beginning free flows and seems quite haphazard, irrelevant, incoherent and lacking any cohesiveness whatsoever, through working and reworking begins to take some kind of shape. And at all times the final form is for the most part unknown. One way of looking at the issue of drafting, is by drafting about drafting itself. While writing this assignment this is what I came up with in my first try:

“drafting includes brins toming and freewriiing, you oghtu to think of it as in apainitng, it is a sor of sketch, do not worry about what you write there, even if it sounds crazy, brin gin all the relevan t corelaterd inforaiton which you can bering to bear, you rown oespeinceis, beinr the experiences of tets you have read, of famous songs... , weite questions of what you are reading if it is an aassigemtn, aske many wqeusiotns, why the the author say x, and not y,, why did he do it a=in page 3 and not 4. right now I am think oabout The Damsk Drum and its complexity, how many drafts did Myshima do??? Or remebr the one by Boges and his crossing out what were ALREADYy beausiifl poems???? How anm I going to answer this weauesiton.. Boy I have to hand this in soon”

As you can see, the drafting process is quite disorganized. At this level spelling is quite irrelevant and concern for discourse connectors absolutely lacking. Yet this is the time where crucial ideas to be further developed may spring forth without our even knowing it. In this sense Elbow, is absolutely right in saying that: “what looks inefficient –a rambling process with lots of writing and lots of throwing away—is really efficient since it’s the best way you can work up to what you really want to say The real inefficiency is to beat your head against the brick wall of trying to say what you mean ...well before you are ready” (pg. 337 Quoted by Brown) In other words, if we knew the answer to the multiplicity of question which trigger writing in us, we would not write at all. But precisely because writing takes time, we need be patient to let that which is to be written, at certain key junctures, flow of itself.

And what then is revising? Well working through one’s original incoherent and messy ideas. For instance in the above case of drafting there appears in the middle of the mess -----which no one would ever really read----- a concern for questions at the level of drafting. Revising implies getting at this questions from different angles; tackling them head on, from the sides, from underneath. And it implies as well bringing the different positions generated when composing on a given question as far as possible together; this, so that what appeared as the product of a truly incapable madman becomes a form unto itself which provides the reader with multiple eyes to try to comprehend the dynamic of a given puzzle. Puzzling provides the impetus to writing, placing some of the pieces together –as far as we can--- provides the impetus for revising. But no puzzle will be fully answered for each composition will itself generate in others newer puzzles which themselves generate further need for clarification, expansion and defense. I myself have the following puzzle to solve: Does looking at Aristotle provide the key to understanding and criticizing the exciting philosophy of Charles Taylor? I will get back to you when I know the answer. But I can tell you this, this PhD thesis will involve a lot of drafting and revising. Of that, I am quite certain.

QUESTION 6

When looking at the guidelines on responding to written work (pg. 355-56), I will merely list some of them and provide a brief commentary. These commentaries come from my having corrected both ESL and Philosophy students at different levels.

A. First draft

1. Resist the temptation to treat minor (local) grammatical errors and focus rather more on global ones. This is an important concern because, as we have said, the importance of a first draft is its fluidity rather than its absolute accuracy. This is why as part of the Advanced Writing Course following the quite good text *Writing Clearly: an Editing Guide* (Lane, Janet, and Lange Ellen; Heinle and Heinle Publishers)” we used the following differentiation between errors:

“ESL/EFL GRADING SYMBOLS

GLOBAL ERRORS --- more serious errors

VT - INCORRECT VERB TENSE
VF - VERB INCORRECTLY FORMED
MODAL - INCORRECT USE OR FORMATION OF A MODAL
COND - INCORRECT USE OR FORMATION OF A CONDITIONAL SENTENCE
SS - INCORRECT SENTENCE STRUCTURE
WO - INCORRECT OR AWKWARD WORD ORDER
CONN - INCORRECT OR MISSING CONNECTOR
PASS - INCORRECT FORMATION OR USE OF PASSIVE VOICE
UNCLEAR - UNCLEAR MESSAGE

LOCAL ERRORS --- less serious errors

SV - INCORRECT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT
ART - INCORRECT OR MISSING ARTICLE
NUM - PROBLEM WITH THE SINGULAR OR PLURAL OF A NOUN
WC - WRONG WORD CHOICE, INCLUDING PREPOSITIONS
WF - WRONG WORD FORM
NONIDIOM - NONIDIOMATIC (NOT EXPRESSED THIS WAY IN ENGLISH)

OTHER ERRORS

CAP - CAPITALIZATION --- CAPITAL LETTER NEEDED
COH - COHERENCE --- ONE IDEA DOES NOT LEAD TO THE NEXT
CS - COMMA SPLICE --- TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES JOINED BY A COMMA
DM - Dangling Modifier --- PHRASE OR CLAUSE WITH NO WORD(S) TO MODIFY IN A SENTENCE
FRAG - FRAGMENT --- INCOMPLETE SENTENCE
LC - LOWER CASE --- WORD(S) INCORRECTLY CAPITALIZED
P - PUNCTUATION --- PUNCTUATION INCORRECT OR MISSING
PRO REF - PRONOUN REFERENCE/AGREEMENT --- PRONOUN REFERENCE UNCLEAR OR
PRO AGREE AGREEMENT INCORRECT
RO - RUN-ON --- TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES JOINED WITH NO PUNCTUATION
SP - SPELLING ERROR --- WORD INCORRECTLY SPELLED"

2. Resist temptation to rewrite the students’ sentences. If one does the rewriting, the student will not feel the need to see what is problematic about her own structures and styles. In this sense by placing the former abbreviations students feel the need to discover their own errors and self-correct.

3. Comment holistically clarity of overall theses and general structure. Perhaps this is the single most important commentary we can provide at this stage for we can guide the student to

understand that his writing (e.g., in the case of an essay) must seek to develop and defend or question a particular thesis. And here students might get lost in the process.

6. Questions clearly inadequate words choices and awkward expression. in relevant passages. Gross errors which create confusion and lack of understanding are to be corrected; let me rephrase that, pointed out whenever they appear. Students may believe that what they have written is absolutely clear, but we must let them know that what is clear to them may not have transpired into the paper which cannot defend itself orally.

B. Second draft:

7. Minor and mechanical errors indicated but not corrected. Again, by using the previously mentioned list of abbreviations. In particular by pointing out those areas which remain “unclear” and those which are “non-idiomatic” given that these hamper understanding the most.

10. Check cohesiveness across paragraphs: The strength of a written piece lies in the interconnection of its parts. An interconnected whole flows as it is read; it makes references to what has previously been said, it has a certain fluidity to it which makes it pleasurable to read. In a sense, the words become alive; a piece of paper speaks to us, makes us listen intently, pushes us, alters us, makes us weep, makes us desire. This is precisely what the Platonic dialogues do to us who read them, and cannot help but read them over and over again.

12. Comment on adequacy of conclusion and its strength. Rather than simply comment or agree with a conclusion a student provides, a teacher should pose a minimum of three question in each correction which may move the student to continue with the revising later on when she will not simply have to display her knowledge to us. That is precisely when writing seem to matter truly. For, can you imagine if we wrote simply so that our teachers, institutions and universities thought better of us for that?

QUESTION 7

On page 357 we find some categories for evaluating writing. It is indeed a pretty exhaustive list (content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, mechanics). However, two points must be made; 1. not only does it lack precision as to what are the most important elements to be considered; likewise, 2. it is quite analytically oriented. As to my first concern Brown provides a differentiation of values for each area on page 358 (e.g., content 24%, etc.) Not only do I not

agree with the percentage given to content, but more fundamentally believe that a teacher cannot realistically consider the different elements in such a neatly separated fashion. The content of a written composition IS the composition itself. Other elements fade to the background in comparison. One cannot view the content without actually getting a sense of the organization, the discourse, and others. A bad composition truly cannot get its content across, and then the other elements such as organization, discourse, etc., do become of paramount importance. However when they do, the written composition has already lost its ultimate purpose. This is why writing is so demanding, because if it were merely a matter of getting the elements correct (using discourse connectors, using sophisticated vocabulary) then we would all be able to be great writers. But we are not, and we feel this when we read the great writers such as Mann, Joyce, Faulkner, Wordsworth, Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare.

My second question concerns not the division of areas in terms of percentages, but rather the idea that all writing can fit into these analytical paradigms. Let us return to Salvatore Quasimodo's poem *Refuge of Nocturnal Birds*. What is of central importance here is, again not only the content, the organization and the discourse. Rather what is of utmost relevance is that the poem transforms us by pointing to realities which in the end go beyond any analysis. In other words, can you imagine asking Quasimodo to write poetry by focusing on the content, on the organization, the syntax and the vocabulary. Of course, he does. But that becomes to a great extent "secondary" in the actual execution of the poem. Again, if this were not so, then a lot of us would be creative wonders. Let me put it this way. We might learn to make writing reach higher levels of complexity, however the creation itself, well I must confess I do not know how that is taught. But however it is done, it is certainly not done through analysis such as the one present on page 357. Read it again and you will see that the word creation ----or any of its synonyms---- has no place in it. This is quite troubling, to say the least. Writing is an art, and artists learn to write in many occasions against the tenacity of paradigms incapable of change. And for some, creativity goes hand in hand with an understanding of our desire to understand. Do remember what we said about the strange connection of writing and eros when we dealt with reading skills in our previous section. Perhaps this is why Professor Thomas Pangle says of the great classical books, exemplars of what writing is all about:

"In the final analysis, Socrates suggested, all human love seeks and needs a glimpse of truth as its foundation. The quest for the truth, in the humbling awareness of how far short we will inevitably fall in our erotic or needy pursuit of it, can be the foundation for

the firmest attachments and for a truly common humanity – that emerges as the natural expression on the common love of the truth. **The great books may be said to be the products of such love; they may be understood as the gifts –handed down to us— from such lovers.**” (*The Ennobling of Democracy* pg. 217)

And we continue writing ----mentioning Socrates (who wrote nothing) as in all our previous assignments--- we continue writing as lovers do, trying (and too many times failing) to make the written word go on and on; much as we wish our loves could go on and on.