

VATESOL Newsletter

August, 2006/ Vol. 9, Issue 1



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VATESOL Officers

2005 - 2006

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President's Message

Barbara Carper

As we all prepare to start another school year, I hope that in your reflections that you spend more time reflecting on your successes rather than failures. I have always placed blame for all the shortcomings that occurred throughout the school year on me—as is the tendency of most teachers. It wasn't until I left the classroom and took on this position that I recognized all the behind the scenes occurrences that affect teacher/student performance. I am a firm believer that the divide between church and state should extend to education and state. When the purse strings of education are tied so tightly to politics, the process of educating our youth, especially

our highly controversial immigrant population, becomes bogged down in policy and protocol. So, as you begin this year's journey with your students, pat yourself on the back, look back on a well-deserved vacation, and appreciate your many successes---in spite of what the tests indicate.

Now, that I have congratulated you for a job well done and encouraged you to enjoy some time for yourself, let me tell you about this fall's, destined to be, best VATESOL Conference ever. I am sure that after I describe what is planned for the Conference, you will want to go ahead and mark it on your fall calendar. So go ahead and write on your calendar VATESOL Conference, October 6 & 7, in Roanoke VA. That's right; we are planning on inviting you to the beautiful Roanoke Valley in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains during the most beautiful season of all and not just for a few hours. You will be invited to spend Friday afternoon and evening socializing with colleagues and since our theme this year will involve all of our school's mainstream teachers, we invite you to invite some of them to attend as well. Instead of "preaching to the choir", we would like the congregation to participate. Vendors will be set up Friday afternoon for you to browse and shop, a speaker will impart words of wisdom to us all, dinner will be provided, and there will be entertainment as well to set the mood for a relaxing, collaborative evening with colleagues, friends, and experts in the field of ESOL instruction. Saturday workshops and forums will be both and informative and collaborative, refreshing and rejuvenating, scenic and comfortable, all on the beautiful campus of Virginia Western Community College which has opened their facility to us most graciously.



**Virginia Western
Community College**

All of

this will still have you back at home for dinner in your own home by Saturday evening. The Conference will be over by early afternoon.

All you have to do now is mark it on your calendars, and once the school year begins, check the website for details, registration, and don't forget that it is your input that makes it a great conference. So, please be willing to share some of your successes with your colleagues--- requests for proposals will be available as well.

Enjoy your remaining days of this summer and think about the difference you made in so many of your students' lives this past year. For no matter how much the state, federal government, your division or university continues to burden you with more responsibilities---the truth of the matter is you provide opportunities for many people. That is what you do best and most importantly. You make a difference, and are appreciated by so many people. Isn't that why we do what we do?

The VATESOL Conference

October 6th & 7th, 2006

**Virginia Western Community College in
Roanoke.**

Theme: *Align, Bridge, Collaborate---
The ABC's of Working with our
ELL Students.*

Hotel accommodations: Quality Inn Tanglewood

3816 Franklin Road
Roanoke, Virginia
Telephone (540) 989-4000

hotelhelp@choicehotels.com

Registration: 4:00-7:30: Friday

Book vendors will be set up at 4:00 p.m.

Dinner w/ live entertainment: 6:00 pm

Keynote speaker: **John Nordmeyer**,
School for International Training, [Brattleboro,](#)
[Vermont,](#) to speak on: "**Listening to the Voices of**

Classroom Teachers"

Registration & Continental breakfast with coffee
8:00 a.m. Saturday

Program begins: 8:30 a.m.

Welcome: **Robert H Sandel**, President of Virginia Western Community College

Outgoing President's Address; **Barbara Carper**,
Roanoke Public Schools

VATESOL Elections for 2006 - 2007

Breakout Sessions: 9:15 & 11:30 a.m.

Breakout sessions will include:

- **VDOE representative** Val Gooss with an update on K-12 issues.
- **New TESOL Standards** by Ann Katz, who helped write the standards and presented at the National TESOL Convention.

12:30 p.m. **Closing speaker:** Judy O'Loughlin

2:30 p.m. **Conference Ends**

The main presenters will give follow-up sessions in the second round of sessions.

A representative from the Center for Applied Linguistics will be presenting session on the **Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol or SIOP.**

Proposals will be accepted from K-12 teachers, adult educators, teacher trainers & university instructors.

****Please invite mainstream teachers, administrators, and anyone else with vested interests in the education of these students. Bring at least one other teacher or administrator with you!****

Proposals are due September 15!!

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Jen Kuchno

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Welcome back! As we return to our TESOL posts this fall and our ESL populations continue to swell in Virginia, I want to remind you that membership in VATESOL offers its members the professional support of experienced ESL teachers and administrators, networking opportunities, and opportunities for leadership and volunteer activities.

However, the strength of VATESOL is all about you. Yes, you! Consider taking an active role in VATESOL by seeking out leadership and volunteer opportunities within the organization and in your Special Interest Group (SIG). Tell your colleagues about VATESOL and encourage them to join. VATESOL wants to be a more user-friendly association. We welcome and encourage comments, suggestions, and active participation from all members, new and returning. VATESOL is YOUR professional association!

An updated 2006-2007 Membership Form for new and renewing members can be found on our web site, www.vatesol.org. Membership dues remain \$15.00 for regular members and \$7.50 for students. On our new form, please indicate your preference to be included in a VATESOL Membership E-Directory. The E-Directory will be e-mailed to all participating members, and serves to connect and build a stronger TESOL community in Virginia.

I look forward to seeing you at the annual VATESOL conference in Roanoke this fall! Membership dues, as well as the conference fees, can be paid at the registration area for your convenience. See you in Roanoke!

TESOL 2006

Happenings

Judy Marlow

ESOL teacher, Roanoke VA

VATESOL vice president

In March VATESOL sent Barbara Carper and Judy Marlow to the TESOL Convention in Tampa. The dynamic duo had a terrific time! The theme of this year's convention, DARING TO LEAD, turned out to be just what was needed to get Judy focused on her role as your vice president. She went to every leadership training session possible and has become much more informed, if not yet confident, as your future president. Barbara did a great job of going to workshops and meeting people who might want to participate in our fall VATESOL conference. Stay tuned for more information about that.

The greatest part of any national conference is always the people we meet. I enjoyed seeing a classmate from my graduate school days who is now leading the special interest group on refugees. I heard other people's experiences with Somali Bantu students like mine, and learned new ideas for teaching reading by singing books from a woman who works for the Center for Applied Linguistics. Walking the 4 blocks back and forth from the hotel to the Convention Center gave us wonderful opportunities to get fresh air, exercise and to share ideas. Most evenings were taken up with leadership training workshops, but the occasional dinner with colleagues from around our state helped me know more about whom we are and who we teach.

I still feel like a very small person in a huge organization of people who know so much more than I do; but I also know that this huge organization would not exist without all of the small folks. I love to teach children and don't really like to do political action. What a wonder to discover that there are people in our organization who like to do political action so that I can enjoy teaching! Other people plan conferences, or write books or train teachers. We are truly blessed to be in an organization whose members are diverse and differently gifted. What we all have in common is a strong interest in teaching English to students who are often highly motivated and in great need of what we can teach. The challenges were not ignored but the energy was good. Thank you VATESOL for sending us to the 2006 TESOL Convention.

EPIPHANY AT THE GATE:

Age and SLA

By Jo Tyler

Associate Professor of Linguistics and Education at the University of Mary Washington and Chair of the VATESOL Teacher Education and Program Administration SIG.

If you're familiar with the expression "bathroom epiphany," you know that it refers to the experience of getting a brilliant idea or insight at a time and place that you least expect it. This happened to me recently while I was waiting at the airport to board a flight. At a moment when I least expected it, I developed a perfect explanation for how age affects second language acquisition (SLA).

I had struck up a conversation with an earnest young woman named Shelly who began by asking me what I did for a living. This question always gets linguists into trouble, so with some hesitation I said, "I'm a linguistics professor."

Linguists sometimes joke that this kind of statement is often followed by the question, "How many languages do you speak?" Most of us have to admit that we don't speak more languages than anyone else, and then go on to explain that linguistics doesn't mean learning to speak different languages; it means the study of language in general. And of course we then have to explain what *that* means. It gets very boring very fast.

So I was pleasantly surprised when Shelly exclaimed, "Oh, I've always been fascinated by language! But I have a question for you, if you don't mind. Why is it so hard to learn a foreign language?"

Now I was really on the spot, because this question has no simple answer. My mind was racing with different possible responses. I could have started with, "Well, there's a difference between foreign and second language learning." But I rejected that, knowing it was not an answer to the question she had really asked.

I could have said something glib like, "Maybe you just didn't have a very good teacher." But I definitely did not want to open that subject—teachers get a

bum rap as it is, and most language teachers are really very good.

I could have just told her that it was a complicated subject and that I didn't want to bore her with a lot of technical jargon. But that would have made me seem like an intellectual snob. In short, my pride got the better of me, and I quickly found myself trying to explain, in layman's terms, a subject that has puzzled language scholars since the time of Plato.

To my surprise, instead of getting bogged down in technical jargon, I gave one of the best linguistic explanations I have ever uttered, even after more than 10 years of teaching the subject!

"Well," I began, "learning a language is different at different ages. Obviously, little children learn their native language very easily. The human brain is equipped with a facility to acquire language, so it comes naturally, like an instinct. In fact, you can't prevent a child from learning a language."

"But," I quickly added, "children only acquire spoken language this way. No one is born with the mental facility to acquire reading and writing through exposure like speaking. Kids have to go to school and have instruction to be able to learn to read and write. Not only that, but the language they learn in school is different from the language they use out of school. Would you believe that a typical high school graduate knows three times as many words as Shakespeare used!?"

At this point, I was really getting into it, but I noticed that Shelly's eyes started to glaze over, and I realized that I still had not addressed her question about the difficulty of learning a foreign language, so I had to make a connection fast.

"Anyway," I continued, "learning a foreign language is not the same as acquiring a native language. Every human being acquires a native language, but not all of us learn a foreign language or become bilingual. What makes this so complicated is the age when you learn a second language."

Now I was getting somewhere! Shelly's eyes started to focus again, and I had her attention. Meanwhile, I found that my original opening about the difference between oral and literate language

learning created an important framework for explaining how age affects SLA. What follows is the gist of the rest of my discourse on the subject.

PRESCHOOL & ELEMENTARY

If children are exposed to two languages from birth, they can acquire both languages naturally, and in most cases learn to speak each language equally well. The difficulty comes when they reach school age and are taught reading and writing. Children who arrive at school knowing only one language are lucky if that language is also the language used in school. But children who are bilingual usually learn to read and write in only one of their languages, and never develop literacy skills or advanced vocabulary in the other.

However, the biggest difficulty is for children who are learning how to read and write in a language that is foreign to them, because the symbols in writing are based on the sounds of the language. If kids don't know how to speak the language before they get to school, they have a hard time learning to read and write the language while at the same time learning to speak it. On top of that, they have to learn a lot of new vocabulary in all the courses they take in school and most of that is supposed to be learned through reading.

Young children up to the age of about 10 or so can acquire a second language in the spoken form quite well if it is widely used in their environment. Lots of children who speak a minority language at home pick up everyday conversational English with little or no accent within 2 or 3 years once they get to school. This gives us the impression that children learn foreign languages very easily. But these children are usually behind their English speaking peers when it comes to vocabulary, reading and writing.

ADOLESCENCE

Older children, on the other hand, may struggle more with speaking a foreign language than with reading and writing, especially if they have already learned to read and write in their native language. When you took a foreign language in high school, you

already knew how to read and write English and you had a lot of knowledge and vocabulary background, so you could transfer that knowledge to reading and writing the new language. In addition, older children have more sophisticated cognitive skills than younger children, so they can figure out subtle rules of spelling and grammar more quickly.

If children at this age—teenagers—are learning a foreign language in a place where the language is widely spoken, they can acquire the spoken language through social interaction, but usually with some degree of foreign accent. However if these students only have exposure to the language during class hours, and their only contact with a speaker of the language is the teacher, then they may learn to read and write better than they learn to speak. I studied French this way from middle school through college, and to this day my French vocabulary is great, but I've always struggled with making conversation.

One of the challenges for teenagers in acquiring oral skills in a foreign language, even if it is spoken in their community, is inhibition. You know teenagers can be really self-conscious and easily embarrassed if they make a mistake in front of their peers. When young people are at the age when they are trying to establish their own identity, it can be a difficult time to try to learn a second language, because language itself is part of one's identity. Learning a new language is in some ways like acquiring a new identity. So, while the teenage years are usually considered the best time to start learning a foreign language, that age also poses difficulties.

ADULTHOOD

Most people think adults have the hardest time learning a foreign language, but that's not necessarily the case. For one thing, like teens they have well-developed cognitive skills for learning a new grammar, but adults are usually better risk-takers compared to teens, and not so inhibited. And English speaking adults have the added advantage that a lot of our vocabulary is similar in many different languages as a result of linguistic borrowing, especially of specialized and technical words. Most adults can learn to read and write in a foreign language with a little bit of motivation and some good instruction.

For adults, though, learning to speak a second language is pretty difficult. I think identity is the key, because adults already have a highly developed sense of self—after all, that’s what being an adult means. They are more sure of who they are and may not need or want to change their linguistic behavior in order to fit into a new social group. Also, adults are self-sufficient and can accomplish a lot of things independently without a lot of interaction with others. So adults, even if they are living in a country where the second language is spoken everywhere, can have a difficult time picking up conversational spoken language. And even if they do acquire conversational skills, they often maintain a strong foreign accent.

BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line on the affect of age on second language acquisition is that it depends on which aspect of the language you are talking about—pronunciation, conversation, vocabulary, grammar, or reading and writing. It also depends on the kinds of language skills you already have in your native language before you begin to learn a second language. And finally it depends on how much exposure you have to the language you are trying to learn.

The next time someone asks you a question about age and SLA, you don’t have to use a cop-out or resort to technical jargon. Yes, the relationship between age and SLA is complicated, but it becomes a bit clearer when you remember that even learning one’s native language has different stages at different ages.

Eric’s Essay

By Eric Chong

This day was making me nervous. Different languages, different cultures at this new school. “I can do it well. I can do it well.” I repeated this sentence several times. Finally I arrived at school. Although the day was not cold, I felt really cold. I followed my cousin. He went into the hallway. Everything felt new even though I already had the experience of a United States school. He stopped and many friends hugged him and stared at me. I just

stood by my cousin, and I hoped that the time would go faster so that I could go home. At that time, one boy tapped me, and asked to me some questions. I just answered the questions and was quiet. My cousin introduced him; He is the best friend that I have ever met.

I asked his name. He said, “I’m Tyler.” Actually, I haven’t lived here long so I had trouble with remembering names. If you would hear my Korean name, you would feel weird. It was like that when I was hearing the English names. I got confused. I stared at him, He hugged lots of people and said hello. I thought, “He is so popular.” The bell rang, so I went to my homeroom. After school, I met him again. He smiled at me, so I smiled back at him.

Time has passed. I met with Tyler often. We went to his house, just played, went ice-skating, etc. I knew he was really awesome. He was kind and different from the other friends that I have ever met.

The other friends tried to learn Korean, but just a few words. At first time, I thought he would be the same as the other friends. But I was wrong. He showed enthusiasm to learn Korean. The other friends took a long time to remember one word, but he remembered it right away. Also, he bought a Korean book and he studied it hard. I was very impressed with that. The best thing was that he always taught me many English expressions. So I could talk to him with nervousness, like “What expression do I have to use?” or “Do I have the right pronunciation?” But Tyler fixed it like the ESL class teacher, so I think that I have improved my English ability since the first day.

Tyler reminds me of my friends in Korea. I didn’t expect that I would meet a friend like Tyler. Going to school is much better because of Tyler.



Reflection on the week: Discipline -- what does F*** really mean anyway?

By Margaret Whitt, Roanoke County Schools
mawhitt@vt.edu

Notes from Eric's Teacher

Gretchen Curreri

Eric is such a great kid to work with, and certainly doesn't fit the demographic profile of my largely Hispanic population. He is the grandson of a South Korean general. He lives here with his mother and his aunt (his mom's sister) and his cousin Daniel whom he mentions in his essay - also in 10th grade at Goochland High School. They live in a large home here in the county and neither mom works. The dad is in Korea sends money. The boys are here because the family feels that the educational opportunities here outweigh the difficulties of separated families. Both boys have all A's and study all the time. Eric often sleeps only a few hours a night. I have a fairly good grasp of grammar and the structures of language, but he certainly challenges me to dig deeper into my knowledge to explain things to him. He asks incredibly perceptive questions. He picks up on little phrases that he hears, and bursts into the room in the morning asking about them. He just makes me laugh. He is a brilliant math student, and never uses a calculator.

In English, he has begun Julius Caesar. That will be a challenge for both of us!

What a ride it has been to work with him.

Capturing the essence of native language is difficult even for native speakers; however, when one is asked to translate or interpret in a second language, that communication effort is made more difficult. Determining denotative and connotative meanings of words in another language can often lead to mistakes, even among the very best communicators. This idea leads me to reflect on a recent turn of events.

I truly believe that how teachers respond to standard and non-standard language in the classroom has a tremendous impact on our ESOL learners. There definitely needs to be some consistency in how we deal with what we consider acceptable and non-acceptable use of vernacular in the classroom; otherwise, our ESOL students perceive that we have set up unjust classroom principles. This distrust that there will be a consistent application of class rules may in turn lead ESOL students to lose confidence in us as instructors. It may rouse in them feelings of insecurity, not unlike the ones they had in their home country, where arbitrariness seemed to be the determining factor in the day-to-day fates of humans. Due to recent circumstances, now all my Somalis and Bantus know there is injustice here in their schoolrooms.

I can imagine the thought processes my students are unable to articulate.
"Some students say F*** and nothing happens."
"Some students say F*** and the teachers gets angry and yells."
"One Bantu said F*** and she has to go home."
"Mrs. Whitt says F*** is a bad word."
"Some students say Suck and nothing happens."

“Some students say Suck and the teacher gets angry and yells.”

“Mrs. X says suck is a bad word.”

“Mr. S told Mr. G that he sucks. Nothing happened to him.”

Verbal Expressed Corollary: “Somebody say me suck. I tell principal he say me F***. Now I go home.”

After imagining how this all must appear to that student, her family and all their Bantu neighbors, I paused to think about my own unenviable task. I was assigned the task of explaining (again) why F*** is a “bad word.” What are the connotations we assign to this word that make it vile above all other expletives (not counting blasphemies)? How do I explain this? Definitely a job for the translator! Unfortunately, the translator didn’t understand the negative connotations that are attached to this word either. There is, after all, a hierarchy of swearing, and this word tops it at the public school level. So again we were reduced to explaining that F*** is a bad word, which lumps it, with all of its power, in with words like “suck” and “crap”.

I think I will bring back my mother’s favorite swearword, “PIE” as my new catchall for bad words!



For a look at our past VATESOL Newsletters, go to our website: www.vatesol.org

Treasurer’s Report

Kathleen Cahoon

kathleen_cahoon@yahoo.com

We have \$6,357.56 in our treasury.