

TESL Canada's Six Principles Position Paper and an Optimal Time for ESL Training*

Eleanor Adamowski

The position paper of TESL Canada's Action Committee, *The Provision of ESL Training to Adults: Six Principles Toward a National Policy* (1982), recommends early access to English language training, and this paper looks for linguistic justification for it in the theories of Schumann (1974, 1976), Brown (1980), and Krashen (1976, 1977, 1982). Considered together, these theories may complement one another in pointing toward a theory that there is an optimal *time* for immigrants to learn a language. They may help to explain the phenomenon of

certain language errors (fossilized errors) which seem to become immune to correction after a certain period of time. While the TESL paper stresses the practical necessity of learning English for employment and social adaptation, these theories and some recent research may suggest that the time when immigrants learn English is critical for satisfactory progress. Tollefson's (1981) paper on the role of planning in second language acquisition is also examined to see if it has relevance for immigrants learning English.

TESL Canada's Action Committee (1982) has prepared a position paper recommending a national ESL training policy. The paper points out the present lack of a co-ordinated program based on a sound and fair policy of English language training in Canada. At the present time, some adult new Canadians know English before they arrive here in Canada; some study English intensively soon after they arrive, but as the TESL paper states:

... we must recognize that—largely because of the inadequacies and gaps in [the current] provision—there are hundreds and thousands of Canadians of recent and not-so-recent immigrant background, who are severely handicapped in their ability to participate in Canadian society as fully as possible or to advance on the labour market to their fullest potential because of a language handicap. (TESL Canada Action Committee, 1982, p. 9)

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the TESOL Convention, Toronto, Ontario (March 1983) and the TESL Ontario Convention, Toronto (November 1983). I am grateful to Carlos Yorio, Nick Elson, and Peter Avery who commented on earlier versions of the paper.

Despite their ability to adjust to a way of life that includes some comprehension of the English language (and probably some dependence on others who speak their native language), these not-so-recent immigrants come to our classes recognizing that the structure of their English does not conform to the structure of those who are Canadian-born and educated. They speak non-standard English, and they do not feel it is accepted as equal to standard English. They have what teachers call fossilized errors which often seem immune to permanent correction.

THE CRITICAL PERIOD AND SOCIAL DISTANCE

While the position paper stresses the practical necessity of learning English for employment and social adaptation, recent language learning theory may support the contention that there is a critical time when adult immigrants need to study English in order to make satisfactory progress. The notion of a critical period for second language learning has been looked at by reference to the age of the learner; biological, developmental, and cognitive reasons have been offered to explain why most adults find it more difficult than children to learn a second language. This paper looks at theories and research which examine the variation in success among adult learners, and they appear to offer interesting hypotheses from which one may extrapolate an optimal situation, and possibly, an optimal time for success. These theories take into account affective variables and social distance, areas explored by J. H. Schumann and H. D. Brown, among others.

Schumann's survey (1975) of research into affective variables lists factors of attitude, motivation, and empathy as significant in second language learning. What will affect all these personal variables is what Schumann (1976) calls social distance. The best social distance for learning will exist where: (1) the second language learner group is non-dominant in relation to the target language group; (2) both groups desire assimilation for the second language group; (3) low enclosure (social and institutional separation) is the goal of both groups; (4) the two cultures are congruent (have some similarity); (5) the second language group is small and non-cohesive; (6) both groups have positive attitudes towards each other; and (7) the second language learner group intends to remain in the new culture for a long time. Newcomers to English Canada fit some of these criteria but not others.

The learner groups here will obviously be non-dominant in relation to the new language group (English). Canada's policy of promoting multicult-

turalism says to an immigrant that this country considers him a valued member, and both groups desire him to fully integrate. The cultures are non-congruent in some cases, but Canadian policy says it does not matter. The person from China is as welcome to retain his heritage as is the Englishman. In fact, according to Reitz (1980), group cohesion is high among such groups as the Chinese, Southern Europeans, and Eastern Europeans. While attitudes may be positive, the learner no longer fits the model. Schumann's model (1976) specifies that the degree to which a person is assimilated to the new group will determine the degree to which he acquires the second language: "[S]econd language learning is enhanced by assimilation and hindered by preservation. Acculturation falls in the middle.... [I]f the 2LL group is cohesive, then its members will tend to remain separate from the TL group, thus producing social distance" (p. 137). Schumann distinguishes between assimilation (adopting the new group's values) and acculturation (also maintaining one's own cultural patterns). Canada clearly encourages acculturation. Immigrants are to learn English while maintaining their own cultural patterns. Multiculturalism requires immigrants to "acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society," according to Prime Minister Trudeau (House of Commons speech, 1971, cited in Reitz, 1980), but Canadian policy has also promoted the growth of cultural groups which can support a newcomer in his first language. How does this support affect the learning of the new language?

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL GROUPS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The help of a cultural group reduces the disorientation that Schumann (1975, in summarizing Larsen and Smalley's work of 1972) says can produce fear, anxiety, and depression. The group can provide a sense of identity and help an immigrant cope. Consequently, while immigrants to English Canada do not fit every category of Schumann's model of a good learner, they do have the advantage, theoretically at least, of help from their cultural groups. However, Schumann (1975) says this cultural group "must be willing to correct the alien's mistakes, provide him with access to the community at large, and serve as conversation partners and, where possible, language teachers" (p. 214). Now, what happens if the newcomers are not helped to gain access to the wider community and not helped to learn the new language? What if they simply learn English informally, by exposure?

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Krashen (1976) summarized several studies which attempted to test whether learners of languages learned better by exposure to the environment than by formal instruction. The results seemed to show that exposure had no consistent positive effect on proficiency and that years spent in formal instruction could predict higher proficiency. (Thinking of Schumann's Social Distance theory, it may seem surprising that years in the environment did not mean increased proficiency since presumably they would get closer to the new culture the longer they were here.) In trying to explain the results, Krashen (1976) suggested that "informal environments must be intensive and involve the learner directly in order to be effective" (p. 165). Mere exposure (heard language) is not enough. Krashen said in 1976 that adults learn languages by acquisition (exposure to meaningful input) and by learning (conscious rule isolation and feedback). His Monitor Model for adult second language learning meant that adult learners supplement their usually imperfectly acquired competence "by means of consciously learned linguistic knowledge in a definite way... altering the output of the acquired system when time and conditions permit" (p. 163). For Krashen, this monitor had limited usefulness; it required conscious knowledge of a rule, and the time it took to stop and think could interfere with fluency. However, Krashen (1977) pointed out that the Monitor Model allows for acquisition to serve as a monitor as well since when "native speakers self-correct in their first language, conscious rules are not called upon" (p. 145). Consequently, we might assume that self-correction need not always take too much time and interfere with fluency. Some have studied Krashen's ideas about the monitor, and expanded or disagreed with his definition of how it works.¹ Shuldsberg (1981) has suggested that the monitor operates even when focus on form is weak, and Stevick (1980) suggested there may be stronger connections between learning and acquisition than Krashen will allow. Certainly it has not yet been possible to prove how a monitor or self-correcting mechanism might work. In order not to confuse the ability to successfully self-correct or revise with Krashen's narrow definition of a monitor (and its problem of determining the line between acquisition and learning, conscious and subconscious learning, etc.), we might say that these students who come to classes with fossilized errors have not developed an awareness of the language sufficient to allow them to revise their language when they want to, even when they have time to think. We may hypothesize that without the classroom, they were exposed to the language but did not have sufficient input for either learning or complete acquisition to

take place.

More important than helping with a monitor, suggests Krashen (1982), is the opportunity in a classroom to get comprehensible, appropriately simplified input which can lower the affective filter and trigger the latent acquisition device. This, he says, could explain the results of the studies which show higher proficiency for those with formal instruction rather than longer exposure. Perhaps the classroom is one of the few places where students can learn in some other ways which Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) say are helpful, that is, allowing for a silent period to mimic the silent period of first language acquisition; practicing what the authors call the here-and-now principle of providing concrete referents for the learners, and arranging opportunities to provide language slightly beyond the students' present repertoire (elsewhere called *i + 1*, Krashen, 1980).

COMMUNICATIVE VS. INTEGRATIVE ENGLISH

Another hypothesis of Schumann's (1974) may help to explain why the language of some students may deviate from the standard. When Schumann looked at the processes of simplification and reduction in pidgins, languages that develop "to meet the communication needs of two or more groups of people who speak different languages and who are in a contact situation" (p. 137), he found similarities to the languages of those learning English in the early stages. At this time the function of the language is communication, as in pidgins, and the forms are similarly simplified:

It is only when a language learner develops an integrative motivation such that he wants to use his language to mark his social identity within the target culture or to express subtle psychological stages or needs to native speakers of the target language, that the need for redundancy, alternate forms and stylistic variation, becomes important.... [S]ome never acquire a complicated... interlanguage which eventually conforms to the target culture.
(p. 149)

This seems to describe the learners under discussion. The fact that they can identify with those Canadians in their cultural group (who may or may not themselves use this integrative English) may result in a lack of close identification with the community-at-large, and they may need only communication or pidgin English in their dealings with Canadians outside their group. Their simplified forms may therefore fossilize. But if they later decide they need more integrative English, why are they often unable to change their grammatical forms?

OPTIMAL DISTANCE MODEL OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Brown (1980) tried to solve the problem of fossilization with his Optimal Distance Model of second language learning. He looked at Schumann's theories on affective variables and social distance with respect to the stages in an immigrant's assimilation: "Second language learning within the second culture is inextricably intertwined with culture learning. The interaction of language and culture produces a syndrome which gives rise to a certain stage during which language learning achieves an optimal level" (p. 158). The four stages of Brown's model are (1) initial excitement, (2) culture shock (meaning feelings of estrangement, frustration, etc.), (3) anomie or culture stress, when there is vacillating recovery, and (4) either assimilation (adopting the new group's values) or adaptation (keeping one's old values as well as gaining the new values—akin to Schumann's use of the word acculturation). The optimal time for learning the language occurs at the beginning of Stage three, the anomie stage. According to this hypothesis:

...language mastery might not effectively occur before the third stage, and... might not be successful... if they have proceeded beyond early Stage three without accomplishing... mastery. Stage three may provide not only the optimal distance, but the optimal cognitive and affective tension to produce the necessary pressure to acquire the language—pressure that is neither too overwhelming... nor too weak. (Brown, 1980, p. 161)

Brown says that adults who have achieved non-linguistic means of coping will pass through Stage three with an undue number of fossilized forms; while they may have acquired a sufficient number of functions, they have not acquired correct forms. This theory may support Schumann's second language pidgin theory. If our students begin formal study after Stage four, assimilation or adaptation, they have missed the optimal period, and this may explain their difficulty. If they have already learned to communicate, they may not be able to master forms which are integrative or expressive. The government policy of multiculturalism encourages cultural groups to maintain their first language; therefore, one's cultural group may be the only group to help one go through culture shock and culture stress with the result that the need for formal study may not be perceived until after the student has settled into Canadian society (Brown's Stage four), if at all. Then the dependent, childlike stage when language learning is easiest is past. Thomas Scovel (1978) theorizes that a certain amount of anxiety is necessary for good language learning; probably Stage three holds the proper amount. After Stage four, assimilation or adaptation, there is either no anxiety or too much.

OPTIMAL TIME MODEL

The Optimal Time Model (Figure 1) describes the possible linguistic development of students who have missed the optimal period. It begins with Brown's four stages of acculturation, with an added Stage five: stress from the English-speaking community. It then suggests the linguistic adjustment of our problem learners, incorporating the inability to revise, proposing the pidginization process and fossilization, and ending with a stage when the learner attempts formal classes and more integrative English. They have gone through the first two stages Brown refers to—initial excitement and culture shock—without English language instruction. During these stages they were probably exposed to English through public signs, news media, and possibly instructions at work; but they did not have the opportunity to attend English classes. They continued to express themselves in their first language to other speakers of that language, shopping at stores run by their cultural group, finding medical services in their language, etc. During Brown's critical period of culture stress, when they were vacillating between the two cultures, they had no instruction in the standard forms of the language, did not develop an ability to revise, and used non-linguistic means of coping with English speakers (gestures such as pointing when shopping). Another way of putting it would be that, without specific language help, they were overwhelmed by the new language and either avoided using it or used simplified forms which communicated without being structurally correct. They moved to Stage four, past Brown's optimal period, with Schumann's pidgin English, no effective way to self-correct forms, and insufficient pressure and/or opportunity to effectively acquire the language. The theories considered in this paper seem to suggest that these learners have missed the optimal period and that their English has fossilized before it could conform to standard English.²

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR THE OPTIMAL DISTANCE THEORY

Some recent research seems to lend tentative support to the Optimal Distance theory. Acton (1979) studied ESL students' professed perception of differences in attitude among self, countrymen, and Americans. The results showed the most successful learners to be intensely interested in finding out about the new culture but not "interested in 'mixing with' or becoming like the natives" (p. 64) as Schumann's social distance theory might predict. A longer time in the culture did not predict greater success. Acton found that the successful learners seemed to have arrived at a state

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Proposed Stage 5
Brown's 4 Stages of Acculturation (and proposed Stage 5)	Excitement, Euphoria	Culture Shock, Estrangement	Culture Stress (vacillating recovery)	Adaptation or Assimilation	Stress in English-speaking community
Linguistic Adjustment (Problem Learner)	Limited exposure Dependency on NL speakers	Limited exposure Dependency on NL speakers	Exposure, informal acquisition No ability to revise	Communication English, non-standard No ability to revise	*Formal classes, fossilized forms Able to revise?

Figure 1. SLA Optimal Time Model (expanding Brown's Optimal Distance Theory). *Note:* The unfinished box (*) represents the tentative nature of the results of English study.

of equilibrium in between the two cultures. This stage resembles Brown's optimal distance Stage three (culture stress) and complements the other theories that say there is a time *before* adaptation that is best for language learning.

Avery (1982) took Acton's professed difference in attitude questionnaire and tested permanent residents in Toronto's night classes to see if his results would be similar to Acton's. Avery found that his results did point to an optimal period which seemed to close after approximately two years in the culture. He looked for perceived social distance, just as Acton did. He also noted that, although Schumann hypothesized that length of residence would decrease social distance, as contact with the target group increased, other research has found that the longer people live in a place, the less positive their feeling may be.

Brown's Optimal Distance theory does not indicate how long this optimal learning period is, but Avery's results suggest it ends after two years, and Acton found it to begin after four months. Avery notes his experience of working with students who arrive in intensive English classes too soon to benefit from them, perhaps while they are still in culture shock.

THE EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT PLANNING ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Tollefson (1981) has added another wrinkle to thoughts on variables which affect second language learning. He suggests that a major weakness of second language acquisition (SLA) models is that they do not account for the impact of government planning on SLA. Tollefson points out that language policy is part of language planning and "involves choices by officials of particular courses of action based upon resources available, expert advice, and the circumstances of the particular language situation" (p. 338). He refers to Swain's (1979) model of SLA, based on Schumann's social distance model referred to above, and notes that while four sets of variables are included (input, learner, learning, and learned variables), planning variables are not included. Nevertheless, many of the variables in the learning process may be directly affected by planning efforts. That is, "such variables as the nature of input, approach to curriculum, attitudes, motivation and age of learners, content of curriculum (and what is learned), and the nature of the learning process may be determined, to a large extent, by a conscious, deliberate language planning process" (Tollefson, 1981, p. 339). Governments commit funds to different projects. Their commitment to the necessity of learning a language determines how

much of society's resources will be directed toward that goal. Tolleson (1981) says, "Motivation can be manipulated by government decisions to reward language proficiency" (p. 345), and he cites instances of various countries' government policies affecting language situations. What implications does this obvious point have for Canada?

TESL Canada Action Committee Recommendations

The affect of government planning may mean that Canada can give more emphasis to the aspect of multiculturalism which stresses the immigrant's need for one of Canada's official languages. We can do this by providing a situation whereby newcomers have early access to classes, whether or not they need English for employment or immediate daily living. Providing access to classes gives the message that what the classes teach is important. Of course, individual differences of age, education background, and socio-economic status affect learning. However, if our experience points to an optimal time when newcomers learn a new language best, then it is important that we provide accessible, well-advertised classes for all adults soon after they arrive. In order not to compound the present problem of settled immigrant adults with limited English skills, the Action Committee position paper recommends a two-stage approach for future integration of newcomers: (a) a full-time three-month (300 hour) native language orientation program available to all on demand, and (2) referral to a selection from a range of Manpower-vocational ESL options (including English in the Workplace and ESL for Home Management). If Brown is correct in suggesting that learners go through certain stages of acculturation before they are ready to learn a second language, a program such as that mentioned in the TESL paper could support the newcomer during the initial stages of excitement and culture shock, then allow time for intensive study in an atmosphere that takes into account the information we now have about how language learning progresses.

For planners of ESL programs, consideration of an optimal distance and time model could mean changes in placement procedures to reflect the stage of the learner's acculturation rather than just his linguistic ability. We would expect those who have been here a short time to advance more quickly than some students who have been here for a long time, and therefore not put them in the same classes. As the TESL paper recommends, in the orientation stage, when the learner needs a lot of support and little pressure, bilingual classes could be helpful, as could methods that develop independence gradually, such as Counselling-Learning, Suggestopedia, and Total Physical Response. Brown suggests that classes for students who may be in culture shock not expect the learner to deny the frustration and homelessness that is often felt.

For teachers, an optimal time for learning English means that when some students who have been here for a long time progress very little, it is no one's fault. The challenge is to find a way to get around their handicap. For students who come to English classes at an optimum time, their teachers may represent the entire English community; it is up to them to ensure that the students do not give in to the temptation to rely solely on their first language and culture group for too long.

Further research is needed, of course, to fully define this handicap of fossilization which some students bring to English classes. Our present stage of understanding indicates a direction we might take to try to avoid continuing the problem with future generations of Canadians.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Long (1983) recently reviewed the research which examines whether instruction makes a positive difference. He looked at studies of all categories of ESL learners, including those cited by Krashen (1976). Long concludes that the more positive results for groups with more instruction indicates, among other things, that a redefinition of learning, in the acquisition/learning distinction, is in order, i.e., "upgrading the importance of learning, and thereby, of instruction" (p. 379). Long notes the obvious need for more research in this area.

² In an experiment by Chun et. al. (1982), conversations were taped between ESL students and native speaker friends, and it was found that the native speakers corrected facts, discourse rules, and word choice, but they seldom corrected syntax or pronunciation. The authors recommend therefore that teachers focus on teaching vocabulary and discourse rules, but one may hypothesize instead that the classroom may be the only place where students can focus on form and pronunciation.

REFERENCES

- Acton, William R. *Perception of lexical connotation: Professed attitude and socio-cultural distance in second language learning*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1979.
- Avery, Peter. *Socio-cultural distance and the optimal distance model: An empirical study of adult immigrant learners of English as a second language*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1982.
- Brown, H. Douglas. The optimal distance model of second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 1980, 14 (2), 157-164.
- Chun, Ann E., Day, Richard R., Chenoworth, A. Ann, & Luppescu, Stuart. A study of native-nonnative conversations. *TESOL Quarterly*, 1982, 16 (4), 537-549.
- Dulay, Heidi, Burt, Marina, & Krashen, Stephen. *Language two*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Krashen, Stephen. Formal and informal linguistic environments in language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 1976, 10 (2), 157-168.
- Krashen, Stephen. Some issues relating to the monitor model. In H. Douglas Brown, Carlos A. Yorio, & Ruth Crymes (Eds.), *On TESOL '77*. Washington, D.C.: TESOL, 1977.

- Krashen, Stephen. The input hypothesis. In James E. Alatis (Ed.), *Current issues in bilingual education*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1980.
- Krashen, Stephen. *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982.
- Long, Michael H. Does second language instruction make a difference? A review of research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 1983, 17 (3), 359-382.
- Reitz, Jeffrey G. *The survival of ethnic groups*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1980.
- Schumann, John H. Implications of interlanguage, pidginization and creolization for the study of adult second language acquisition. In J. Schumann & N. Stetson (Eds.), *New frontiers in second language learning*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1974.
- Schumann, John H. Affective factors and the problem of age in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 1975, 25 (2), 209-236.
- Schumann, John H. Social distance as a factor in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 1976, 26 (1), 135-143.
- Scovel, Thomas. The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, 1978, 28 (1), 129-142.
- Shuldsberg, H.K. An examination of the importance of focus on form for monitor function. Research note in *TESOL Quarterly*, 1981, 15 (1), 81.
- Stevick, Earl W. *Teaching languages: A way and ways*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1980.
- TESL Canada Action Committee. The provision of ESL training to adults: Six principles toward a national policy. In *TESL Canada Newsletter*, 1982, 2 (1).
- Tollefson, James W. The role of language planning in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 1981, 31 (2), 337-348.

THE AUTHOR

Eleanor Adamowski teaches ESL in the School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto, and at Glendon College, York University. She has taught in various community programs in Toronto and is currently President of the Toronto Affiliate of TESL Ontario.