



Promoting Linguistic Diversity as an ESL/EFL Professional in Higher Education

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The field of teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) has grown tremendously in recent years. Worldwide, English is the most widely-taught foreign language, resulting in its spread and influence across the globe, potentially to the detriment of other languages (Crystal, 2003). TESOL recognizes this and is cognizant of teachers' roles and responsibilities regarding linguistic diversity. Specifically, although the profession's mission is "to advance professional expertise in English teaching and learning," (<http://www.tesol.org/about-tesol/association-governance/mission-and-values>) TESOL also values individual language rights and respects diversity and multilingualism, as evidenced through its position statements on language rights, multilingualism, native language support, and English-only laws (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Definitions of TESOL Values

Language Rights

"...TESOL advocates that the governments and the people of all countries have a special obligation to affirm, respect, and support the retention, enhancement and use of indigenous and immigrant heritage languages of those members in its society who wish to maintain and express themselves, without fear of reprisal, in diverse public and private settings."

Multilingualism

"TESOL supports and encourages programs that foster skills in both first and additional languages." And "TESOL supports individual language rights for all peoples and strongly encourages governments and countries to promote policies that recognize and value the languages in their population - whether they are indigenous, dominant, or foreign."

Native Language Support:

"Effective education for English as a second or other language (ESOL) students includes the maintenance and promotion of ESOL students' native languages in school and community contexts."

English-Only Laws

"...[T]he United States should treat linguistic and cultural diversity as an asset for all individuals in the United States. Policies should create services and opportunities for English language development as well as competence in other languages."

Figure 1. Quotes from TESOL position statements on language rights, multilingualism, native language support and English-only laws as found in TESOL position statements (<http://www.tesol.org/advance-the-field/position-statements>).

These TESOL considerations should be of particular interest to university ESL/EFL professionals because of the "rapid and drastic change toward monolingualism" (p. 1) in academia discussed by Carli and Ammon (2007) in a recent volume from the International Association of Applied Linguistics. This shift began toward the end of the last century, initially in the "so-called *hard sciences* (natural sciences, medicine, technology, and mathematics) ... and gradually also in the social sciences and the humanities"(p. 1). Further concern is evident in Tardy's (2004) recognition of English as an international language of science and discussion of English's dominant role. Additionally, Wildavsky (2010) reports on universities around the world changing their language of instruction to English, and Ljosland (2011) explores the associated policies and practices of English use in a university program in Norway. Ferguson et al. (2011) acknowledge and critically

examine “a growing output of publications expressing concern over the dominance of English in scientific publication and academic exchange”(p. 41).

Voicing such concerns about scientific publications being dominated by English, Tardy (2004) states that “[b]ecause so many top-tier journals publish in English, meta-analyses and research reviews often exclude non-English language publications from their studies; these language-biased exclusions may have important implications”(p. 251). Some scholars go so far as to say that there is “an English stranglehold on scientific scholarship” (p. 250) in the form of Anglophone gatekeepers on editorial boards and as referees guarding professional communication (Tardy 2004).

Other costs that accompany such a rise in English-dominated academia include the demise of specialized registers in other languages. Swales (1997) addresses this potential loss stating, “[i]f nobody talks and writes any more like a medical professor or a research scientist, or even an avant-garde critic because all of these roles are now occupied by English, then creative national culture is itself impoverished” (p. 379). He also presents an ominous image of English swallowing up other languages around the world in his paper *English as Tyrannosaurus rex*.

Knowing that there are potential issues with English repressing other languages and therefore the knowledge expressed in those languages, the quandary for university ESL/EFL professionals is to respect both TESOL’s mission regarding English and its position statements on other languages. This leaves us with a dual task: fulfilling our professional responsibilities while also *valuing, affirming, respecting, supporting, promoting, and encouraging* languages other than English. To address these potentially incongruous tasks, we offer the following model of examples for the ESL/EFL professional. This compilation targets the individual practitioner, the classroom, teacher education, and professional activities by delineating “how” to support linguistic diversity. This is merely a starting place for discussion and certainly not an all-inclusive list.

A Model for the ESL/EFL Professional Interested in Linguistic Diversity

1. The ESL Professional as an Individual: The Linguistic Global Citizen

- a. Work toward proficiency in other languages. This is especially relevant to monolingual English ESL/EFL professionals. Learning another language not only encourages understanding the uniqueness of languages but also insight into the struggles faced by students.
- b. Study, work, and/or volunteer in non-Anglophone countries through study abroad, exchange programs, Peace Corps, Fulbright, English Language Fellows, Japanese Exchange Teaching Program, and other similar experiences.
- c. Interact in and with another language (e.g., watch Spanish channels on American TV or non-English language movies; watch your favorite DVD with a French or Spanish soundtrack; read foreign literature or listen to foreign language audio books; use social media in another language; consume international internet TV or listen to multilingual radio; go internet shopping at another language’s “Amazon”; learn the other language of bilingual friends, neighbors, spouse, or others).

2. The ESL Professional in the Classroom:

- a. Broaden the focus of language instruction and curricula from “learning English” to “accessing and representing knowledge.” Just as important as nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech is how knowledge is organized (e.g., hierarchical organization) and how non-linguistic representations of knowledge such as photos, drawings, flow charts, graphs, maps, models, and mathematical formulae represent knowledge. The question in language teaching broadens to ‘How is knowledge organized and represented?’ This question takes the language classroom beyond nouns and verbs, but of course does not replace the importance of the linguistic expression of knowledge.

Another way to think about this is to consider a sustained content approach to content-based language instruction. Camiciottoli (2002) characterizes a sustained content approach in the following way. “[S]ustained content instruction has the broader objective of also acquiring content knowledge and expertise” in addition to “emphasi[zing] language proficiency” (p. 169-170). Along these lines, Stoller (2004) reviews models of content-based instruction and places *content-driven* approaches on one end of a continuum and *language-driven* approaches on the other end of the continuum (p. 268). We suggest an emphasis on the “content-driven” side of the continuum.

- b. Encourage the use of the L1 in the classroom when appropriate. For example, Centeno-Cortés and Jiménez (2004) find that the L1 plays an important role in problem-solving activities in the L2 classroom.
- c. Participate in or start up “Languages across the Curriculum” programs at your university to encourage social sciences, humanities, and other disciplines to teach in other languages. This goes beyond the usual teaching of literature in a foreign language department and expands the use of languages in other content areas.

3. ESL Teacher Education: The Basics and Beyond

- a. Contextualize TESL/TEFL within the larger field of language teaching. Language teacher education is not as much about the particular language as it is about (1) language teaching methodologies, (2) learning strategies, (3) second language acquisition theory, (4) skill-based instruction, (5) form-focused pedagogy, (6) the learner-centered classroom, (7) content-based instruction, (8) communicative methodology, and (9) ways knowledge is organized and represented.
- b. Along with the focus on (1)-(9) is a shift in perspective from only being able to teach English to being able to teach *any* language. A language teacher can teach any language s/he knows if that language teacher is grounded in best practices of language instruction. So, TESL/TEFL teacher education is about producing high quality language teachers who only happen to teach English.
- c. Develop teacher education curricula that require study abroad experience, multilingualism, experience in teaching multiple languages, etc.
- d. Emphasize linguistics in teacher education as a way to represent pronunciation, grammar, and meaning through tools that can describe not only English, but also all languages.
- e. Recognize world Englishes and other varieties of English influenced by multilingualism (Sergeant 2012; Caine 2008).

4. ESL and Professional Activities:

- a. Teach other languages.
- b. Participate in heritage language maintenance and indigenous language revitalization projects.
- c. Contribute to language rights projects.
- d. Become politically involved in language policy regarding education or official languages of the government.
- e. Get involved in international education and study abroad programs; faculty exchange programs, and short-term language study programs for faculty and students.
- f. Foster academic intergenerational register transmission, which is the idea that older scholars who are familiar with non-English ways of expressing academic knowledge teach younger scholars these specialized ways of using their language (Swales 1997).

- g. Support journal publication of papers in English *and* the native language of the scholar in order to share the knowledge with more than English speakers. This dual publication approach “will increase worldwide visibility and accessibility” to information (Hamp-Lyons, 2011, p. 2).
- h. Publish on the importance of language beyond functional communication.
- i. Participate in TESOL’s non-native English speakers’ interest section or work with English language teachers whose native language is not English. Native speakers of English who teach English can grow professionally by learning what it means to teach a language that one does not speak natively. This is crucial to our profession because, by one estimate, as much as 75% of ESL/EFL teachers are not native speakers of English (Ma, 2012).

Ways We Personally Support Linguistic Diversity

Like many of the readers of this journal, we have been fortunate to have had various cross-cultural and cross-linguistic experiences in our lives including some of those indicated above. These encounters allowed and continue to allow us to be involved in aspects of promoting linguistic diversity. For example, among other multi-lingual and multi-cultural involvements, Marcellino was an exchange student in Germany, and through his language coursework, living abroad and academics in a foreign language, he is fluent in German and cognizant from a personal, as well as a professional perspective, of the struggles that his AEC students might face in the classroom. Tracy was a Peace Corps Volunteer and Fulbrighter in Nepal which also allowed for rich cultural and linguistic opportunities.

In recent years, we have lent our skills to supporting Native American languages through documentation, revitalization, research, and teacher training sessions. These efforts have included experiences that stretch our role as language teachers. We have been involved with numerous workshops that address areas such as teacher training for language professionals, linguistic approaches to grammar and pronunciation, materials development, lesson planning, grammatical focus-on-form within communicative lessons, literacy, and immersion. We have learned that not only linguistic expertise, but also cultural sensitivity is especially crucial in working with Native communities.

Having honed our skills in teaching ESL, teaching/learning other languages, and training teachers of Native American languages, we feel better able to address language learning and teaching issues in ways that support TESOL’s position on both English and linguistic diversity. We encourage all ESL/EFL professionals to consider how they might address the challenge of fulfilling our English teaching responsibilities while valuing, affirming, respecting, supporting, promoting, and encouraging languages other than English.

Please share with us ways you have encouraged, supported, or otherwise promoted linguistic diversity.

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