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Issues in Teaching Speaking Skills to Adult ESOL Learners

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> Teaching ESL to adults means being awed every day as we witness the tenacity and perseverance of immigrants carving out better lives for themselves and their families.
>
> —Spelleri, 2002

INTRODUCTION

The immigrants Spelleri is referring to in that quote need to acquire a wide range of skills and knowledge to achieve a better life. Chief among those skills is the ability to speak English well. This chapter addresses speaking instruction for nonacademic adult ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) learners in the United States. By nonacademic ESOL learners I mean people who are learning English, but not primarily to obtain a postsecondary degree at a college or university. Adult learners of English in the United States include refugees, documented and undocumented

immigrants, and permanent residents.[1] Such learners may be found in adult schools, community college programs, community-based programs (e.g., at libraries and churches), on-the-job training courses, and some university extension programs.

These adult ESOL learners may reside in the United States permanently, or in some cases for indefinite but long periods of time (in contrast to international university students who are typically expected to return to their home countries). Also included here are the adult children of these immigrants and refugees—children who arrived in the United States late enough in life that their own spoken English is noticeably nonnative and not their dominant language.[2]

The vast majority of second-language acquisition research has been done with elementary and secondary school children or with university-based adult learners with generally high levels of proficiency and academic goals for improving their English. These groups are quite different from adult ESOL learners (e.g., in their use of English on a daily basis, or in terms of types and amount of exposure to English), so findings about their learning cannot readily be generalized to the population of interest here. However, the existing studies must serve as a foundation until research specifically related to nonacademic adult ESOL learners is available.

It is important that four key groups understand the issues related to and challenges faced by adults lacking English-speaking skills. These groups include (a) policymakers who influence the design, funding, and evaluation of adult ESOL programs; (b) researchers who investigate the success of adult education programs; (c) educators who prepare teachers to work with adult ESOL learners; and (d) the teachers themselves.

In this chapter, we first review the demographics of this population and their needs. The components of spoken language and communicative competence are discussed, followed by a consideration of how speaking

[1] This report does not deal with international students who enroll in U.S. universities or 4- or 2-year colleges to pursue academic degrees. Instead, it focuses on adults who are learning English for other purposes, including basic education, vocational ESOL, and literacy skills. It also intentionally excludes international students who have come from other countries to attend proprietary programs that teach EAP (English for academic purposes) to prepare them for college or university studies.

[2] A *foreign language (FL) context* is one where the language being learned is not the society's main language of communication (e.g., learning English as a secondary school student in Korea). A *second language (SL) context* is one where the language is the language of wider communication in the society (such as English in the United Kingdom, Australia, or the United States). Teaching ESOL internationally includes both EFL and ESL.

skills are taught and assessed. Educational standards related to the teaching of speaking and promising curricular developments are reviewed. The chapter ends with a discussion of implications for practice, research, and policy related to teaching speaking skills to adult ESOL learners.

ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

Adult ESOL learners are a subset of, but not analogous to, the adult basic education (ABE) population in the United States. The latter's proficiency in the English language separates the two groups:

> The focus of the majority of ABE students is acquisition of base skills in reading, writing and math, whereas for many adult [English-language learners] who have already mastered those basic skills in their native language, the focus is on the acquisition of a new language, including listening and speaking skills. (TESOL, 2000, p. 10)

The key distinction is that in the United States, ABE students use their mother tongue—English—to improve basic skills, gain knowledge, and handle learning tasks. ABE students communicate easily with their instructors, whereas many adult ESOL learners must struggle "constantly to cope with both oral and written directions, understand conversations laced with idiomatic language, and master not just the language of educational materials but also the culture on which they are based" (TESOL, 2000, p. 10).

Demographics of the Adult ESOL Learner Population

What do we know about the demographics of this diverse population? In 1990, Buchanan estimated that there were approximately 30 million people in the United States whose native language was not English. In 1998, Cheng said that there were 8 million immigrants from Southeast Asia alone. The 2000 United States census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003) reports a total of more than 31 million foreign-born individuals. More than half (51.7%) are from Latin America and more than one fourth (26.4%) are from Asia. The rest were born in Europe (15.8%), Africa (2.8%), Oceania (0.5%), and Northern America (2.7%). These figures represent the total foreign-born population, however, including individuals who have not yet reached adulthood, and some who speak English with varying degrees of proficiency.

The 2000 census also documents the languages spoken at home by members of the population who were 5 years old and older. Whereas 82.1% (more than 215 million people) report speaking only English at home, 17.9% (nearly 47 million people) report speaking a language other than English at home. Of these, more than 21 million people (8.1% of the total U.S. population over the age of 5) report that they "speak English less than 'very well'" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003).

It is difficult to estimate the number of adult ESOL students in the United States because many are highly mobile and some are undocumented. According to the National Center for ESL Literacy Education, "The most recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, show that 1,119,589 learners were enrolled in federally funded, state-administered adult ESL classes. This represents 42% of the enrollment in federally funded, state-administered adult education classes" (Florez, personal communication, 2001). Florez adds, however, that this number does not address the many students who are enrolled in programs that are not federally funded. She says, for example, "Laubach Literacy,[3] in a 1999–2000 report on their programs nationwide, indicated that approximately 77% of their member programs provided ESL instruction to 67,547 adult English language learners. This is just one segment of the non-federally funded services provided" (personal communication, 2001).

Fitzgerald (1995) describes the adult ESOL learner population as "primarily Hispanic (69%) and Asian (19%), with the vast majority (85%) living in major metropolitan areas and residing primarily (72%) in the Western region of the United States" (ESL Profile section, ¶ 1). Fitzgerald notes that:

> Adult education clients in ESL programs are overwhelmingly (98%) foreign born, with most (72%) speaking Spanish in the home. While most all ESL clients (92%) reported that they read well or very well in their native language, few (13%) reported that they could speak English well at the time of enrollment, and most (73%) were initially placed at the beginning level of ESL instruction. Thirty-six percent of the ESL clients were employed at the time of enrollment in adult education, and 11% had been public assistance recipients during the preceding year. (ESL Profile section, ¶ 1)

Fitzgerald adds that, in general, ESOL learners have more formal education than their ABE counterparts: "Half of the ESL clients had completed

[3] Laubach Literacy merged with Literacy Volunteers of America in 2002 to form a new organization: ProLiteracy.

at least high school compared to only 17% of the ABE . . . group" (ibid., ¶ 1).

According to TESOL (2000), the adult learner population has a wide range of educational backgrounds. Some have no education, whereas others arrive in the United States with doctoral degrees. The introduction to these standards, citing data from Wrigley (1993), states that in federally funded programs:

> . . . 32% had fewer than nine years of education, and of those, 9% had fewer than five years of schooling (Fitzgerald, 1995; NCLE, 1999). Another study, focusing specifically on participants in adult ESOL literacy programs, found that most of these ESOL literacy learners had only a few years of schooling, whether they came from literate societies, such as Mexico and El Salvador, or from preliterate societies, as in the case of the Hmong. (TESOL, 2000, p. 11)

Thus, adult ESOL learners in the United States are linguistically and culturally heterogeneous.

The Oral Communication Needs of Adult ESOL Learners

Given the diversity of the adult ESOL population, these learners clearly have varying needs for English language use (Weddel & Van Duzer, 1997), specifically in terms of their oral communication. The Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative asked adult learners across the United States to respond to Goal 6 of the National Education Goals: "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (Merrifield, 2000, p. 4). More than 1,000 adult learners, some of whom were ESOL students, responded to an essay prompt about what this goal meant to them. EFF staff members analyzed this corpus and derived four macro goals, which they called "Four Purposes for Learning":

1. ACCESS: To gain access to information and resources so that adults can orient themselves in the world.
2. VOICE: To express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account.

3. ACTION: To solve problems and make decisions without having to rely on others to mediate the world for them.
4. BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: Learning to learn so that adults can be prepared to keep up with the world as it changes. (Merrifield, 2000)

These four purposes provide a framework for describing the oral communication needs of adult ESOL learners. First, adult ESOL learners need *access* to information and resources. For example, the needs of newly arrived immigrants and refugees include obtaining housing, medical care, and sustenance. They must also develop the speaking skills to find work and subsequently to carry out the responsibilities of their employment. All of these access-oriented needs require spoken English.

Numerous social needs for spoken English are related to the EFF categories of *voice* and *action.* These include adult ESOL learners being able to communicate with their employers and neighbors in mixed-language environments, deal with their children's teachers and other school authorities, obtain ongoing social services and medical care, advocate for their own rights and those of their children, and participate in political and recreational activities in the community.

Adult ESOL learners also need ongoing education to build a *bridge to the future.* They may wish to participate in English-based vocational training or literacy programs. They may want to complete their secondary education or may aspire to receive higher education in the United States (Ignash, 1995). Whatever their goals, adults whose spoken English is inadequate have few opportunities for educational advancement in this country.

Challenges Facing Adult ESOL Learners

Immigrants and refugees who do not speak English well face obvious challenges. First, the lack of interactive language skills sustains a pattern of *high enclosure* (i.e., the tendency to live in neighborhoods with people from one's home culture and to interact almost exclusively in the native language). Early second-language acquisition research (Schumann, 1976) suggests that high enclosure contributes to social distance between the language learners (in this case, adult ESOL learners) and the host culture. This isolation—whether intentional (to maintain the home culture and mother tongue) or as the result of economic pressures—limits access to opportunities to practice English in meaningful communicative situations, and thus leads to a poor environment for learning English.

Research on an analogous population in Canada—adult immigrants learning French as a second language in Quebec—studied the communicative skills of two cohorts of learners at the end of a 900-hour instructional program and again 6 months later (d'Anglejan, Painchaud, & Renaud, 1986). The first cohort consisted of 36 Southeast Asian immigrants whose average age was 27 years, and the second included 45 Polish and Latin American immigrants (average age, 34 years). Using the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Oral Proficiency Interview as the criterion measure, these authors found that after 30 weeks of instruction, half of Cohort 1 placed at FSI Level 2, which means they had "acquired the minimal knowledge of French necessary for limited functions in a workplace setting" (d'Anglejan et al., 1986, p. 191). The remaining half of Cohort 1 was rated at FSI Level 1, indicating that their French was "barely adequate to fulfill their personal needs . . . [and was] not considered adequate for the workplace" (d'Anglejan et al., 1986). Cohort 2 fared somewhat better, with 20% scoring at Level 1, 64.4% rated at Level 2, and 15.6% at Level 3 after the instructional phase. When the two groups were tested again 6 months later, "results for both cohorts improved significantly over the six-month period" (d'Anglejan, 1986, p. 192). The authors conclude that these immigrants "are not equipped with the language skills necessary to enter into competition with native speakers in the job market—other than in low-status jobs with little language" (d'Anglejan et al., 1986, p. 199).

These authors summarized earlier Canadian research by Mastai (1979, in d'Anglejan et al., 1986), which showed that "while finding suitable employment ranked as the most critical task facing the newcomer, success in doing so was largely contingent upon second language skills" (d'Anglejan et al., 1986, p. 185). In the United States, employment opportunities for adult ESOL learners who lack speaking proficiency may be limited to those that entail no public contact and thus do not require spoken English skills, such as assembly line work, construction, or manual labor in agriculture. Other adult ESOL learners find jobs in dishwashing, janitorial services, and housekeeping—positions that Burt (1995) called "back-of-the-house jobs" (p. 2) in the public service sector.

Even immigrants who have had professional or vocational training in their own countries may be seen as lacking employability skills if their spoken English is weak. *Employability skills* are defined as "transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace" (Overtoom, 2000, p. 1). The ability to speak English is certainly one such enabling skill in the United States.

Finally, there is a less obvious but perhaps more pervasive result of adult ESOL learners' limited English-speaking abilities. Initial perceptions of individuals are often based on very brief speech samples. For the past four decades, sociolinguistic research has consistently shown that people's accents and speech patterns influence others' perceptions of the speakers' intelligence, trustworthiness, and social status. For instance, Zuengler (1988) found that the pronunciation of English vowels by Mexican speakers of Spanish led to stereotypical evaluations of those speakers by Americans. (See Fasold, 1984, for a cogent review of the early literature on this topic.)

A landmark study in Canada established the matched guise technique as a viable procedure for eliciting stereotypical responses based on speech (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960). In the matched guise, one bilingual speaker is presented to respondents as two different people, speaking different languages or varieties of a language. Respondents then evaluate the speech samples on different personal attributes, and the same speaker is evaluated lower when he or she speaks the less prestigious language or variety (including an accented version of the standard variety). The Canadian research influenced research on accentedness in the United States. For example, in California, Ford (1984) had 40 teachers respond to the speech samples of children whose academic ability had been predetermined to be equivalent to one another. She found that "the Spanish-influenced speakers were rated lower than the non-Spanish-influenced speakers in intelligence, effectiveness of communication, confidence, ambition, pleasantness, and relative quality as students" (p. 33). Based on her review of the literature, Pennington (1994) concludes that "teachers should train early and most intensively those features of the nonnative's phonology that cause the most negative reactions in the relevant native-speaker population" (p. 104).

WHAT IS SPOKEN LANGUAGE?

This section examines the components of spoken English, drawing on a model proposed by van Lier (1995). It is not necessary for learners to have metalinguistic awareness of these components in order to use them effectively. However, it is necessary for teachers to understand fully these interrelated components in order to help adult learners improve their speaking skills. The components of spoken English are discussed here to illustrate the complexity of the adult ESOL learners' task.

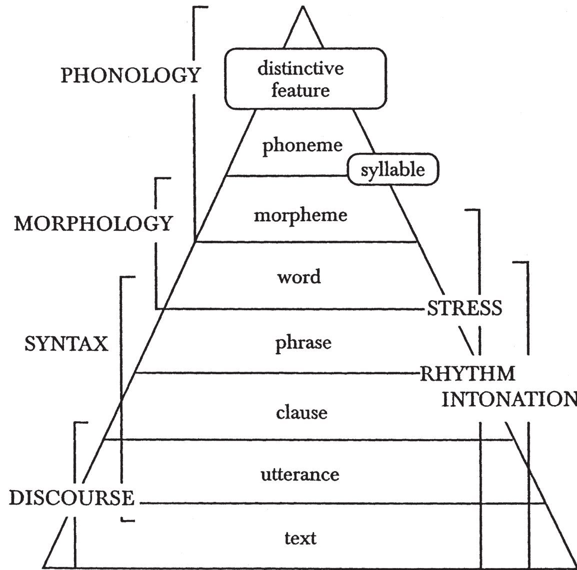

FIG. 5.1. Units of spoken language (van Lier, 1995, p. 15). Adapted with the permission of the author.

The Components of Spoken English

Speaking is perhaps the most fundamental of human skills, and because we do it constantly, we do not often stop to examine the processes involved. Yet having a simple conversation is anything but a simple process—particularly if someone is speaking a new language.

Figure 5.1 depicts the many elements involved in teaching speaking to adult ESOL learners. The left column lists four traditional areas of linguistic analysis (which teachers must understand), and the center column labels the units of spoken language (which learners must master). All of these units, or levels of language, must function together when adult ESOL learners speak English.

Beginning at the pyramid's base, *text* refers to stretches of language of an undetermined length. Texts can be either written or spoken, but here the focus is exclusively on spoken discourse. Spoken texts are composed of *utterances:* what someone says. An utterance may not always be a full sentence, as it would be if written. For example, if two friends are talking about what to eat, one might ask, "Would you like to have pizza for supper?" This utterance is a fully formed grammatical sentence, but such sentences are not typical of casual conversation. If it is clear that the topic

of the conversation is what to eat, one person might simply ask the other, "Pizza?" Although this is not a grammatical sentence, it is an utterance that would certainly be understood in context.

A *clause* is two or more words that contain a verb marked for tense and a grammatical subject. *Independent clauses* are complete sentences that can stand alone ("Juan went to work"), whereas *dependent clauses* cannot ("While Juan was going to work . . ."). In contrast, a *phrase* is two or more words that function as a unit but do not have a subject or a verb marked for tense. These include prepositional phrases ("in the hospital" or "after school") and infinitive phrases ("to drive" or "to move up"). Clauses and phrases do not usually appear alone in formal writing, but they are quite common in speech. Both clauses and phrases can be utterances, as can individual words, the next level in the pyramid.

A word is called a *free morpheme*—a unit of language that can stand on its own and convey meaning (*bus, apply, often*). In contrast, *bound morphemes* are always connected to words. These include prefixes, such as *un*- or *pre*-, as well as suffixes, such as -*tion* or -*s* or -*ed.* Often, during the pressure of speaking, it is difficult for English learners to use the expected suffixes—especially if their native language does not utilize these kinds of morphemes as grammatical markers.

A *phoneme* is a unit of sound that distinguishes meaning. Phonemes can be either consonants (like /p/ or /b/ in the words *pat* and *bat*) or vowels (like /I/ and /æ/ in *bit* and *bat*). Phonemes differ from one language to another. Some of the sounds that are common in English are quite unusual in other languages and are therefore difficult for adult ESOL learners to pronounce. For example, the "th" sounds in *think* and *the* are relatively rare in the phonemic inventory of the world's languages, even though they are pervasive in English. Adult ESOL learners often approximate or replace the "th" sounds with "s" or "z" or "d" or "t," which contributes to a notably foreign accent.

In the top levels of Fig. 5.1, the word *syllable* overlaps the levels of morphemes and phonemes because a syllable can consist of a morpheme or simply one or more phonemes. The structure of syllables is referred to as being either open (ending with a vowel) or closed (ending with a consonant). Many languages use the open syllable structure, in which a syllable consists of just a vowel (V), or of a consonant (C) followed by a vowel. Spoken English, in contrast, allows both open syllables (C-V, or just V) and closed syllables (C-V-C, or simply V-C), as well as consonant clusters, where two or more consonants occur in sequence (as in the words *stretched* or *jumped).* For this reason, the spoken English of adult

ESOL learners often sounds ungrammatical to native speakers. Learners whose native language is Vietnamese, for instance, may omit word-final consonants, thereby eliminating the sounds that convey important linguistic information, such as plurality, possession, or tense.

Consonants and vowels are called *segmental phonemes.* Sometimes a spoken syllable consists of one phoneme (/o/ in *okay*). Syllables also consist of combined sounds (the second syllable of *okay*), and of both free and bound morphemes. For instance, the free morpheme *hat* consists of three phonemes but only one syllable. The word *disheartened* has three syllables, four morphemes (*dis* + *heart* + *en* + *ed*), and nine phonemes.

A smaller unit, the *distinctive feature,* relates to how and where in the mouth a sound is produced when we speak. These minute contrasts contribute to adult ESOL learners' accents. For example, the distinctive feature that makes /b/ and /p/ separate phonemes in English is *voicing.* When /b/ is pronounced the vocal cords are vibrating, but when /p/ is pronounced, they are not. For adult learners whose language does not have this contrast (Arabic, for example), failure to master this distinction can lead to being misunderstood.

The three other labels in Fig. 5.1—stress, rhythm, and intonation—represent the *suprasegmental phonemes.* When we speak, these phonemes carry meaning differences "above" the segmental phonemes. For instance, the sentence "I am going now" can convey at least four different meanings, depending on where the stress is placed. The differences are related to the context where the utterances occur. Consider these interpretations:

> *I* am going now. (You may be staying here, but I choose to leave.)
> I *am* going now. (You may assert that I'm staying, but I insist that I am leaving.)
> I am *going* now. (I insist that I am leaving, rather than staying.)
> I am going *now.* (I am not waiting any longer.)

Sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that adult second-language speakers can be misunderstood and even receive poor job evaluations because of their misuse of the English suprasegmentals (see, e.g., Gumperz & Tannen, 1987).

How do these levels of spoken language relate to the speaking skills of nonnative-speaking adult immigrants? Two key points derive from a substantial review of the research on foreign accent by Major (2001). First, he says that really learning the sound system of a language entails mastering (a) the individual segments (the vowel and consonant phonemes), (b) the combinations of segments, (c) prosody (stress, intonation, rhythm, etc.),

and (d) “global accent, or the overall accent of a speaker” (p. 12). He adds that a global foreign accent is the result of a nonnative combination of (a), (b), and (c).

Second, Major (2001) notes that “both the learner’s age of arrival (AOA, to the country as a resident) and the age of learning (AOL, when the learner was first exposed to the language) have been found to be important variables in governing whether and to what degree a learner can acquire a nativelike accent” (pp. 6–7). He concludes that “the vast majority of the research indicates that the younger the learner the more nativelike the pronunciation” (p. 11).

Adult ESOL learners must make themselves understood by the people they are speaking with, and this is not an easy task, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels. For less-than-proficient speakers, managing the multiple components of language that must work together as they speak is very demanding indeed, as shown by the numerous and complex components in Fig. 5.1. The ability to use these components to produce and understand language is known as *linguistic competence.*

An important element of successful speaking that is not addressed in this model is fluency—the extent to which a speaker interacts with others with normal speed, apparent confidence, and freedom from excessive pauses or vocabulary searches. Hammerly (1991) notes that laypersons use fluency to mean “speaking rapidly and well” (p. 12), but in this chapter fluency is used with its specialist meaning: “speaking rapidly and smoothly, not necessarily grammatically” (p. 12).

Contrasting Spoken and Written Language

We describe the four traditional skills of language use (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in terms of their *direction* and *modality.* Language generated by the learner (in speech or writing) is *productive,* and language directed at the learner (in reading or listening) is *receptive* (Savignon, 1991). *Modality* refers to the medium of the message (aural/oral or written). Thus, *speaking* is the productive aural/oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. Speaking is “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information” (Florez, 1999, p. 1). It is “often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving” (p. 1), but it is not completely unpredictable.

Spoken language and written language differ in many important ways (van Lier, 1995). Spoken language is received auditorially, whereas written language is received visually. As a result, the spoken message is tem-

porary and its reception by the learner is usually immediate. In contrast, written language is permanent, and reception by the learner typically occurs some time after the text was generated (sometimes even centuries later). Meaning in spoken language is conveyed in part through the suprasegmental phonemes (including rhythm, stress, and intonation), whereas punctuation marks and type fonts convey such information in writing.

For adult ESOL learners, speaking English can be particularly difficult because, unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in “real time.” That is, the person we are talking to (the *interlocutor*) is listening and waiting to take his or her own turn to speak. Spoken English “is almost always accomplished via interaction with at least one other speaker. This means that a variety of demands are in place at once: monitoring and understanding the other speaker(s), thinking about one’s own contribution, producing its effect, and so on” (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 103). In addition, except in recorded speech, verbal interaction typically involves immediate feedback from one’s interlocutor, whereas feedback to the authors of written texts may be delayed or nonexistent. Finally, because spoken communication occurs in real time, the opportunities to plan and edit output are limited, whereas in most written communication, the message originator has time for planning, editing, and revision. Except when audiotaping a letter or dictating a memo, when we speak we cannot edit and revise what we wish to say, as we usually can in writing.

Being able to speak English is clearly important for adult ESOL learners in order to get their needs met. However, speaking is also significant in terms of ongoing language acquisition. By communicating orally with others in English, adult ESOL learners can experience *modified interaction*—“that interaction which is altered in some way (either linguistically or conversationally) to facilitate comprehension of the intended message” (Doughty & Pica, 1986). Such modifications occur through repetition of the spoken message as well as through three types of conversational moves: (a) *clarification requests,* “when one interlocutor does not entirely comprehend the meaning and asks for clarification,” (b) *confirmation checks,* when “the listener believes he or she has understood, but would like to make sure,” and (c) *comprehension checks,* in which “the speaker wants to be certain that the listener has understood.” These modifications are important because in both research and theory, “such modified interaction is claimed to make input comprehensible to learners and to lead ultimately to successful classroom second language acquisition” (p. 322).

In discussing current second-language acquisition research, Swain (2000) states that generating output (i.e., speaking or writing) “pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—

than does input" (via listening and reading; p. 99). Swain suggests that output promotes noticing: "Learners may notice that they do not know how to express precisely the meaning they wish to convey *at the very moment of attempting to produce it*" (p. 100; italics in the original). It is through interaction that learners confront the gaps in their knowledge and skills. Speaking is thus both the product and the process of second language acquisition.

This brief discussion of spoken language has not even begun to address cross-cultural differences in discourse patterns, such as the rules for taking turns in English and how they differ from those of other languages. As Florez (1999) notes, "Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary . . . but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language" (pp. 1–2). Knowing how to use the linguistic components of English is part of an adult ESOL learner's communicative competence, the topic of the next section.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

For many years, teaching language was viewed as developing *linguistic competence*—that is, providing students with the phonemes, morphemes, words, and grammar patterns—so that students could eventually put them all together and communicate. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, language teaching in the United States underwent a significant shift in focus, influenced by developments in linguistics and pedagogy from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, by sociolinguistic research in the United States and elsewhere, and by the social pressures of refugees and immigrants resettling from Southeast Asia, Latin American, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

In particular, many refugees from Southeast Asia were semiliterate or had only rudimentary literacy skills in their home language. Others came from cultures whose languages lacked written systems. Like all immigrants, these new Americans had immediate needs for housing, food, employment, medical care, social services, and education where they relocated. With large numbers of semiliterate or nonliterate adult ESOL students in their classrooms—students with immediate survival needs for interactive English skills—teachers could no longer rely on written tests or textbook exercises. They had to get right to the heart of the matter: spoken communication in English.

The Components of Communicative Competence

In the mid-1970s the notion of linguistic competence came to be viewed as part of the broader construct of *communicative competence*—"the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge" (Savignon, 1991, p. 264). Being communicatively competent "requires an understanding of sociocultural contexts of language use" (p. 267).

There are various models of communicative competence (see especially Canale & Swain, 1980), but in addition to *linguistic competence,* communicative competence includes *sociolinguistic competence,* or the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. Sociolinguistic competence entails register (degrees of formality and informality), appropriate lexical choice, style shifting, and politeness strategies. Another component of communicative competence is *strategic competence*—the ability to use language strategies (such as circumlocution and approximation) to compensate for gaps in one's second-language skills. A fourth component is *discourse competence,* which includes "rules of both cohesion—how sentence elements are tied together via reference, repetition, synonymy, etc.—and coherence—how texts are constructed" (Lazaraton, 2001, p.104; see also Bachman, 1990; Douglas, 2000).

These four components of communicative competence have several practical implications for teaching adult ESOL speakers. For example, given their significance, they were selected to be the guiding framework in determining goals of workplace ESOL instruction for adult learners (Friedenburg, Kennedy, Lomperis, Martin, & Westerfield, 2003). Because communicative competence is a multifaceted construct, it is important that curriculum planners, materials writers, teacher educators, researchers, test developers, and teachers working with adult ESOL learners understand the complexity involved in speaking English.

Transactional Versus Interactional Communication

For adult learners in particular (as opposed to school-aged children), being able to use both transactional and interactional speech is important, as is the ability to negotiate English speech acts in a variety of speech events. Outside of language classrooms, people usually use speech for interactional

or transactional purposes (Brown & Yule, 1983; Pridham, 2001). Broadly speaking, *interactional speech* is communicating with someone for social purposes. It includes both establishing and maintaining social relationships. *Transactional speech* involves communicating to accomplish something, including the exchange of goods and services.

Most spoken interactions "can be placed on a continuum from relatively predictable to relatively unpredictable" (Nunan, 1991, p. 42). Interactional conversations are relatively unpredictable and can range over many topics, with the participants taking turns and commenting freely. In contrast, Nunan states that "transactional encounters of a fairly restricted kind will usually contain highly predictable patterns" (p. 42). So for example, the communication between a customer and an adult immigrant working in a fast-food restaurant would be more restricted and predictable than would a casual conversation among friends.

According to Nunan (1991), interactional speech is more fluid and unpredictable than transactional speech (such as telephoning for a taxi cab), which is shaped in part by the needs of the parties involved to successfully accomplish the exchange of information, goods, or services. Teaching materials and speaking activities in the classroom must address both interactional and transactional purposes, because adult ESOL learners will have to accomplish both.

Speech Acts and Speech Events

As the contrast between transactional and interactional speech indicates, people speak to accomplish specific purposes. The linguistic means for accomplishing those purposes are called *speech acts.* These utterances include seeking information, asking for help, ordering people to do things, complimenting, complaining, apologizing, inviting, refusing, warning, and so on.

Adult ESOL learners must be able to accomplish these and other speech acts effectively in order to function successfully in an English-speaking society. "A good speaker synthesizes [an] array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act" (Florez, 1999, p. 2). Language teachers, curriculum designers, and materials developers, therefore, must understand speech acts and how they work.

Communication typically occurs in recognizable discourse contexts called *speech events.* Examples include sermons, lectures, job interviews, eulogies, dinner-table conversations, and so on. As these examples sug-

gest, speech events are typically associated with particular social purposes and places. For instance, we would expect a job interview to occur in a place of business rather than a church. Speech events can involve very few speech acts (such as ordering food in a fast-food restaurant), but more complex speech events can consist of many different speech acts. A lecture might include defining, describing, exemplifying, telling a joke, encouraging, apologizing, and so on. In order to participate in complex speech events, adult ESOL learners must understand and be able to use a wide array of speech acts.

Successfully executing speech acts involves both sociocultural choices and sociolinguistic forms (Cohen, 1996). The term *sociocultural choices* refers to "the speaker's ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in the given situation" (p. 254). This decision requires the speaker to be familiar with a wide range of contexts and power relationships. The speaker must select among the various *sociolinguistic forms* available—that is, "the actual language forms used to realize the speech act (e.g., *sorry* vs. *excuse me, really sorry* vs. *very sorry*)" (pp. 254–255). Selecting appropriate strategies is complicated because "speech acts are conditioned by a host of social, cultural, situational, and personal factors" (p. 255). Adult ESOL learners, particularly those living in high-enclosure areas where their native language predominates, may have little opportunity to encounter these forms used in context, except in English classes.

In classroom settings learners are exposed to the grammatical structures (the forms) of English, but they also need to learn the functions. For example, learners may be taught the modal auxiliaries (*can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might* and *must*) and may quickly master the forms. However, it takes time and a great deal of exposure to contextualized interaction to learn when and how to use these forms appropriately to make and deny requests, issue warnings, give advice, and so on. For many adult ESOL learners, opportunities for interaction with native or proficient speakers of English can be rare, so learning the function can lag behind learning the form. As a result, the spoken English of adult ESOL learners can sound inappropriately (and unintentionally) aggressive or tentative (Gumperz & Tannen, 1987).

For all these reasons, it is important that adult ESOL programs provide learners with instruction and opportunities to develop their communicative competence. The next section provides a brief historical overview of how speaking traditionally has been taught.

HOW SPEAKING SKILLS HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

Although several language-teaching methods have been used to teach speaking in a second or foreign language (see Murphy, 1991, for a review), three methods have dominated language teaching in the United States in the past 60 years. This section first briefly reviews each method, focusing specifically on how the method treats the speaking skills of adult ESOL learners, then addresses language awareness and the issue of *intelligibility*—the extent to which others can easily understand a person's speech.

The Grammar-Translation Method

In the grammar-translation method, students are taught to analyze grammar and to translate (usually in writing) from one language to another. The key instructional goal is to read the literature of a particular culture. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the main characteristics of the grammar-translation method are that (a) reading and writing are the major focus; (b) the vocabulary studied is determined by the reading texts; (c) "the sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice" (p. 4); (d) the primary emphasis is on accuracy; (e) teaching is deductive (i.e., grammar rules are presented and then practiced through translating); and (f) the medium of instruction is typically the students' native language. Richards and Rodgers note that although the "grammar translation method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates; it is a method for which there is no theory" (p. 5).

The grammar-translation method does not prepare students to speak English, so it is not appropriate for nonacademic adult ESOL students who want to improve their speaking skills. The method is not consistent with the goals of increasing fluency, oral production, or communicative competence of adult ESOL learners. In grammar-translation lessons, speaking consists largely of reading translations aloud or doing grammar exercises orally. There are few opportunities for expressing original thoughts or personal needs and feelings in English.

The Audiolingual Method

For many years, the audiolingual method dominated English-language instruction in the United States. In this method, speaking skills are taught

by having students repeat sentences and recite memorized textbook dialogues. Repetition drills, a hallmark of the audiolingual method, are designed to familiarize students with the sounds and structural patterns of the language. The theory behind the audiolingual method is that students learn to speak by practicing grammatical structures until producing those structures has become automatic. Then, it is thought, the learners would be able to engage in conversation. As a result, "teaching oral language was thought to require no more than engineering the repeated oral production of structures . . . concentrating on the development of grammatical and phonological accuracy combined with fluency" (Bygate, 2001, p. 15).

The behaviorist concept of good habit formation is the theoretical basis of the audiolingual method. This theory proposes that for learners to form good habits, language lessons must involve frequent repetition and correction. Teachers address spoken errors quickly, in hopes of preventing students from forming bad habits. If errors are left untreated, both the speaker and the other students in class might internalize those erroneous forms. There is little or no explanation of vocabulary or grammar rules in audiolingual lessons. Instead, intense repetition and practice are used to establish good speaking habits to the point that they are fluent and automatic—that is, the adult ESOL learner would not have to stop and think about how to form an utterance before speaking.

The language laboratory is the central technological component of the audiolingual method. In addition to attending classroom lessons and doing homework, students are expected to spend time in the lab, listening to audiotapes of native speakers talking in rehearsed dialogues, which embody the structures and vocabulary items currently being studied in the curriculum. The taped speech samples students hear in the lab are carefully articulated and highly sanitized. They typically present neither realistic samples of the English that learners would hear on the street nor accurate models of how adult learners should try to speak in order to be understood and sound natural. In addition, when learners do speak in the lab, it is often to repeat after the tape-recorded voice, with no opportunity for constructing their ideas in English or expressing their own intended meaning. "While audiolingualism stressed oral skills (evidenced by the amount of time spent in the language laboratory practicing drills), speech production was tightly controlled in order to reinforce correct habit formation of linguistic rules" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 103). This sort of tightly controlled practice does not necessarily prepare learners for the spontaneous, fluid interaction that occurs outside the classroom.

Audiolingualism "rapidly lost popularity in the United States, partly as a result of the strong theoretical arguments that were advanced against it, but also because the results obtained from classroom practice were disappointing" in several ways (Ellis, 1990, p. 29). Many learners lost interest in language learning because the pattern practice and audiolingual drills were boring. Adult learners often felt hampered because the method downplayed the explicit teaching of grammar rules. In addition, the memorization of patterns "did not lead to fluent and effective communication in real-life situations" (p. 30).

Communicative Language Teaching

During the 1970s and 1980s, language acquisition research (and dissatisfaction with the audiolingual method) made TESOL professionals reconsider some long-standing beliefs about how people learn languages. People do not learn the pieces of the language and then put them together to make conversations. Instead, infants acquiring their first language and people acquiring second languages learn the components of language through interaction with other people. (For summaries of research on interaction and language learning, see Ellis, 1990; Gass, 1997; and Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991.) This realization has several interesting implications, the most central of which is that if people learn languages by interacting, then learners should interact during lessons. As a result, communicative language teaching arose.

In some language teaching methods, such as Total Physical Response (Asher, Kusodo, & de la Torre, 1993), beginning learners undergo a period of listening to English before they begin to speak it. In these methods, the focus is on input-based activities. For instance, in Total Physical Response, learners initially respond to spoken commands from the teacher, rather than speaking themselves.

In contrast, communicative language teaching methods, particularly from the high beginner to more advanced levels, feature more interaction-based activities, such as role-plays and *information gap tasks* (activities in which learners must use English to convey information known to them but not to their classmates). Curricular choices, such as task-based and project-based activities (see Moss & Van Duzer, 1998), also promote interaction. Pair work and group work are typical organizational features of interaction-based lessons in communicative language teaching.

In this method teachers often downplay accuracy and emphasize students' ability to convey their messages (Hammerly, 1991). Accuracy is the

extent to which the adult ESOL learners' speech matches the (local) native speaker norms (in terms of their speech being free of notable errors). Fluency is the speed, ease, and naturalness with which ESOL learners communicate orally. Proficient speakers are both fluent and accurate, but at the lower levels, fluency and accuracy often work against one another. That is, to be accurate and apply learned rules, adult ESOL learners may speak hesitantly or haltingly. To be fluent in conversation, they may overlook the time-consuming application of rules. The instructional implications are that teachers should not focus only on accuracy, but should use both form-focused and fluency building activities in adult ESOL classes.

Intelligibility, Pronunciation, and the Language-Awareness Movement

As already noted, producing accurate speech in a second language is demanding because there is limited time to plan and edit speech during conversations. However, some attention to accuracy is needed in order to communicate effectively. One important aspect of intelligibility is pronunciation (see Florez, 1998). Historically, the teaching of pronunciation has changed with the dominant teaching method. Florez (1998) reviewed the literature on improving adult ESOL learners' pronunciation and reported:

> In the grammar-translation method of the past, pronunciation was almost irrelevant and therefore seldom taught. In the audio-lingual method, learners spent hours in the language lab listening to and repeating sounds and sound combinations. With the emergence of more holistic, communicative methods . . . pronunciation is addressed within the context of real communication. (p. 1)

Unfortunately for adult immigrants to the United States, studies have shown that the earlier a person arrives in a new country, the more likely it is that he or she will develop native-like pronunciation (see, e.g., Piper & Cansin, 1988). However, intelligibility and nativeness are two separate constructs. (For further information, see Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Goodwin, 2001; and Morley, 1991.)

Morley (1991) identified five groups of learners "whose pronunciation difficulties may place them at a professional or social disadvantage" (p. 490). Three of those groups are among the adult ESOL learner population addressed in this chapter. These are:

> (1) adult and teenage refugees in vocational and language training programs; . . . (2) immigrant residents who have passed through the educational system

> and graduated into the workplace only to find that their spoken language and particularly their intelligibility prohibits them from taking advantage of employment opportunities or from advancing educationally; [and] (3) a growing population of nonnative speakers of English in technology, business, industry and the professions. (pp. 490–491)

(See Morley, 1991, p. 502, for an example of an intelligibility scale that can be used with adult ESOL learners.)

The language-awareness movement is a pedagogical development that began in the United Kingdom in the early 1980s (van Lier, 2001, p. 161). *Language awareness* has been defined as "a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life" (Donmall, 1985). It consists of "an understanding of the human faculty of language and its role in thinking, learning and social life" (van Lier, 1995, p. xi; however, see Stainton, 1992, for a discussion of the problems in defining language awareness).

Language awareness is not a method of language teaching per se; rather it is a focus that transcends methods and can be used in the teaching of any language skill. The language awareness movement recognizes the importance of learners' metacognitive knowledge and processing. It represents another pendulum swing in the focus of language teaching—the field moved away from the highly form-focused days of grammar-translation and audiolingualism to an emphasis on communication (sometimes at the expense of accuracy), but now attention to form is being emphasized once more. The language-awareness movement offers adult ESOL teachers procedures with which to build meaningful attention to form into language courses based on adults' communicative needs and goals. In university ESOL programs and teacher education contexts, language learners and teacher trainees systematically collect speech data and analyze the way native speakers express their ideas. Lazaraton (2001) notes, "One of the more recent trends in oral skills pedagogy is the emphasis on having students analyze and evaluate the language that they or others produce" (p. 108). For instance, in a unit on the speech act of complaining, a student might record and analyze examples of how people complain when they return items to a department store. (See van Lier, 1992, 1997.)

Although communicative language teaching often downplays explicit attention to form, in the language-awareness approach, attention to form (and to the meaning it conveys) is very important. Citing research by Sharwood-Smith (1981, 1994), van Lier (1995) states, "Many researchers and teachers argue that awareness, attention and noticing particular features of language adds to learning" (p. 161). The instructional emphasis is on

noticing and understanding speech as much as it is on accuracy of production. The key characteristics of teaching driven by language awareness are that it "must be *experiential* (based on teachers' [and learners'] knowledge and expertise), *task-based* (based on real-life concerns and projects), and *critical* (examining the roles of language in life)" (van Lier, 1992, p. 91).

One potentially important application of language awareness lies in the use of technology to help improve the pronunciation of adult ESOL learners. Although research by Moholt (1988) involved a different population, his results are promising. Moholt used two different forms of computer display to help U.S.-based university students (native speakers of Chinese) to see the differences between their own English pronunciation patterns and those produced by native speakers. Moholt notes:

> With a computer display of pronunciation comparing a native speaker's model with [the learner's] attempt to match it, we can instantly show students objective information about the location, extent, type and significance of the error, as well as the progress made in correcting the error. (p. 92)

Computer-generated feedback may be useful in helping adult ESOL learners become aware of their pronunciation patterns and improve their intelligibility. (See also Pennington, 1989.)

It is not clear whether the language-awareness movement has influenced the teaching of speaking to nonacademic adult ESOL learners yet, although Graham (1994) has discussed four procedures she used to raise language awareness in a course for professional adult ESOL learners:

> (1) give brief, targeted explanations of language patterns, accompanied by examples; (2) teach students to mark written texts for various suprasegmentals such as intonation, emphasis and pauses; (3) provide listening activities that focus on form rather than on meaning; [and] (4) teach students to analyze their own recorded voices. (pp. 27–28)

To summarize, ESOL teaching methods have evolved over the years to encompass the broad goal of communicative competence. Both accuracy and fluency are important, and adult ESOL learners' speech must be intelligible to their interlocutors. Procedures for assessing learners' spoken English are the topic of the next section.

ASSESSING THE SPEAKING SKILLS OF ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

The evaluation of speaking skills is an important concern in adult ESOL programs (Van Duzer, 2002). In addition, the concept of communicative

competence presents interesting challenges for evaluating speaking skills. When linguistic competence was the primary focus of instruction, tests could focus on learners' abilities to apply grammar rules, produce and recognize vocabulary, and interpret spoken or written texts. When the focus shifts to communicative competence, however, testing speaking skills is a much more complex undertaking.

First, it is important to recognize the distinction between formal testing and other forms of assessment. A test can be defined as a "measurement instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual's behavior" (Bachman, 1990). In instructional settings, adult learners' spoken English may or may not be formally tested, and there is little research on assessing the spoken English of this population. Adult classes tend to be rather large, which makes it difficult for teachers to utilize oral interviews or other speaking tests that require one-on-one administration. This practical issue is embodied in the distinctions among *direct, semidirect,* and *indirect* tests of speaking.

Direct, Semidirect, and Indirect Tests of Speaking

The testing of speaking skills is normally thought of as direct, semidirect, or indirect (Clark, 1979). In a *direct test,* a learner interacts with the test administrator and actually produces spoken utterances. The oral component of the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), which was designed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (1982) specifically for nonnative-speaking adult refugees and immigrants to the United States, is an example of a direct test of speaking. The oral interview portion is administered to one person at a time, and the administrator evaluates the learner's speaking skills on a three-point scale by rating the learner's communication, pronunciation, and fluency, as well as by estimating his or her listening ability (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982; see also Eakin & Ilyin, 1987).

In a *semidirect test,* the evaluation of learners' spoken English is based on tape recordings of their speech in response to tape-recorded stimulus materials. Semidirect speaking tests are very practical because several students can be tested at once and the evaluator does not need to be present to score the tape-recorded speech samples. However, sometimes test takers find it awkward to carry on a conversation with a tape recorder. Semidirect tests of speaking can be criticized for generating unnatural language samples.

An *indirect test* of speaking is one in which the learners do not speak. Instead, they perform nonspeaking tasks that are statistically related to scores on actual speaking tasks. For example, a *conversational cloze test* is a written passage based on a transcript of a conversation. Words are systematically deleted (e.g., every ninth word of a text is replaced by a blank line) and the student's task is to fill in each blank with an appropriate and grammatically correct word. Scores on conversational cloze tests have strong correlations with scores on direct speaking tests (see Hughes, 1981), even though the learners do not speak at all while completing the assessment tasks.

There is typically an inverse relationship between the directness of a speaking test and its practicality. Although several hundred students conceivably could take a conversational cloze test at one sitting, only one person can take the oral interview portion of the BEST at any given administration. Some direct tests of speaking involve small groups of learners (e.g., the British Cambridge Advanced Examination has two examinees talk with a test administrator and with each other), but this procedure is not commonplace in the United States. Semidirect tests are more practical than direct tests in terms of time efficiency and number of students tested, but less practical than indirect tests. In addition, the semidirect tests have the added disadvantage that learners have to speak into a tape recorder to a disembodied interlocutor, a process that many native speakers find artificial. Although indirect tests are highly practical, their face validity is always in question. Underhill (1987) explains this notion:

> On the face of it, does it look like a reasonable test? Do the people who use the test think it's a good test? If either the testers or the learners are unhappy with it, then it won't yield good results. Clearly the best way of researching this form of validity is to question the different people who come into contact with the test. (pp. 105–106)

Learners may feel that their speaking has not been adequately or fairly tested if they do not actually speak during the test.

Validity Issues in Testing the Spoken English of Adult ESOL Learners

Although test practicality is certainly a legitimate concern, validity concerns are equally important. There are many types of validity (see Cumming, 1996), but the basic issue is whether or not a test measures what it claims to measure. Another concern is *washback,* or the influence of a test on teaching and learning (Hughes, 1989). As Buck (1988) explains:

> There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as *washback* by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful. (pp. 257–258)

Although the washback effect of several tests has been studied in many different countries (see Alderson & Wall, 1993 for a review), the washback effect of tests used with adult ESOL learners in the United States is not clearly understood.

The two main standardized tests used with adult ESOL learners in the United States are the BEST and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, or CASAS (Burt & Keenan, 1995; Van Duzer & Berdan, 2000; Weinstein, 2001). Other standardized tests[4] are used with adult ESOL learners, but if they were not written for and normed on this population, they can be problematic in a variety of ways (Van Duzer & Berdan, 2000).

Given the number of adult ESOL learners and the open-enrollment policies prevalent in many programs, it is not surprising that the speaking skills of adult learners in such programs are seldom formally tested. Funding requirements for accountability do mandate the use of some testing mechanisms, such as CASAS. However, although it claims to test a "student's ability to speak and understand English" (CASAS, 1993, p. 6), the CASAS item bank consists of more than 5,000 multiple-choice items and "does not test oral skills" (Burt & Keenan, 1995, p. 1). At best, the CASAS provides an indirect test of speaking. An important question remains: "Can we bridge the gap between what we teach and test in the classroom and what the state tests with CASAS?" (Price-Machado, 2000, p. 1).

An interesting new development that will soon influence the formal testing of adult ESOL learners' speaking skills is computer-adaptive testing. In fact, a computerized version of the BEST is currently under development (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2000). In this system "the prompt and response are both oral, [so] the examinee is not required to read any items or type any answers" (p. 5). This is an important consideration in evaluating the speaking skills of ESOL adults, whose literacy level may lag

[4] Here the term *standardized test* refers to codified, systematically developed examinations that are consistently administered. In addition, their scoring procedures and score reporting are standardized across locations and testing occasions.

behind their speech development in English. It is hoped that the computer-adaptive BEST will maintain its validity as an actual speaking test (albeit a semidirect one), with increased practicality of administration.

Alternative Assessment and Adult ESOL Learners

Formal tests such as the BEST and the CASAS are typically used for *general assessment,* which "allow comparisons across programs" (Weinstein, 2001, p. 182). In contrast, *program-based assessments* "reflect the approach of the program and the content of the curriculum" (p. 182). Such procedures may include formal tests or more informal types of assessment, which are often seen as alternatives to formal tests.

Alternative assessment is a catchall phrase that covers a range of procedures. Brown and Hudson (1998) identify "checklists, journals, logs, videotapes and audiotapes, self-evaluation, and teacher observations [as well as] portfolios, conferences, diaries, self-assessments, and peer-assessments" (p. 653) as examples. Bailey (1998) juxtaposes traditional and alternative assessments in language learning along nine dimensions: (a) one-shot tests versus continuous, longitudinal assessment; (b) indirect versus direct tests; (c) inauthentic versus authentic tests; (d) individual projects versus group projects; (e) absence or presence of detailed feedback provided to the learners; (f) speeded exams versus untimed exams or tasks; (g) decontextualized versus contextualized tasks; (h) norm-referenced versus criterion-referenced score interpretation; and (i) standardized tests versus classroom-based tests.

Some types of alternative assessment (such as checklists, surveys, teacher observation forms, and learners' logs) hold promise as program-based means for validly assessing the speaking skills of adult ESOL learners (Weinstein, 2001). However, as Weinstein (2001) notes, "Unfortunately, without guidelines and rigorous procedures, until a system is agreed upon, alternative assessments do not yet produce reliable hard data and are difficult to compare across programs" (p. 182). She adds, "This is a serious drawback for funders" (p. 182). On one hand, there is an apparent need for large-scale standardized but indirect testing procedures, such as the CASAS, which allow comparisons across programs (for both evaluation and research). On the other hand, it is desirable to promote speaking skills through direct testing and locally appropriate program and course assessment procedures.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND STANDARDS FOR TEACHING SPEAKING TO ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

This section briefly reviews what is known about successful teaching of speaking skills and the development of standards related to the teaching of speaking to adult ESOL learners, before turning to issues related to the preparation of adult ESOL teachers. Although a number of studies have been done on literacy instruction for adult ESOL learners, there is little research on the effectiveness of teaching of oral skills in the adult ESOL context. Although ESOL programs are "the fastest growing component in federally funded adult education efforts . . . there is a dearth of empirical research about what works for whom and under what circumstances" (Weinstein, 2001, p. 181). (However, see Banke et al., 2002, for research conducted at Portland State University's lab school.)

One national study (Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, Cronen, & Sebum, 2003) of literacy development reported some findings regarding documented gains in low-level adult ESOL learners' speaking skills. Data were collected in 38 classes across 13 different programs in Arizona, California, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Texas, and Washington. The total sample involved 495 students, more than half of whom were Spanish speakers. Other participants spoke Hmong, Somali, or any of 30 other home languages.

Using the oral component of the BEST as the criterion measure, Condelli et al. (2003) determined that instructional variables, class variables, and student variables were related to growth in oral language skills. First, with regard to instructional variables, "students in classes where teachers used the students' native language as an aid to instruction had faster development" (p. 4). Likewise, where the teacher "used a varied practice and interaction strategy" and "emphasized oral English communication" (p. 4), the learners had faster growth. Second, "classes that had more scheduled instruction time (hours per week) had more student growth" (p. 4). Finally, three student variables were significant: Younger students, students that attended at a higher rate, and students with higher initial basic reading skills had faster growth in their speaking skills.[5] This research is promis-

[5] The Condelli et al. study has not yet been formally published, so these comments are based on the summary. The results are related to the BEST test, and the report summary does not specify the relationship of speaking and listening scores in the research findings. Nor does it state whether "rate" represents frequency or intensity.

ing, but because the main focus of the study was on literacy, more detailed information is needed about teaching speaking to adult ESOL learners.

Standards Promoting Effective Practices

In the United States, the standards movement has begun to influence adult ESOL programs. Standards are codified, official, agreed-upon outcome statements that embody expectations about learning and performance. As Brindley (1998) notes, “Variously known . . . as *standards, benchmarks, attainment targets, bandscales, profiles* and *competencies,* outcome statements are, broadly speaking, standards of performance against which learners’ progress and achievement can be compared” (p. 48; italics in the original).

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), an international professional association, has spearheaded the development of standards for adult ESOL learners in the United States. TESOL has offered workshops and produced guidelines (see, e.g., TESOL, 2000) to help adult educators better meet the needs of nonnative-speaking refugees and immigrants. These standards were developed by recognized leaders in adult ESOL with the input of concerned educators and other stakeholders throughout the country. (See Florez, 2002, and Short, 2000.)

Another promising development is the National Reporting System (NRS), an accountability system for federally funded adult education programs. According to its Web site (http://www.nrsweb.org), the NRS includes the following components:

- A set of student measures to allow assessment of the impact of adult education instruction,
- Methodologies for collecting the measures,
- Reporting forms and procedures,
- Training and technical assistance activities to assist states in collecting the measures.

On entering a program, students are assessed to determine their educational functioning level. After a given amount of instruction or time, a follow-up assessment takes place, and the results of the initial and follow-up assessments are compared. The change in educational functioning level determines students’ educational gains.

There are six levels each for adult basic education and ESOL students in the NRS. Each level describes what students entering at a particular

level can do in the areas of reading, writing, numeracy, speaking, listening, functional and workplace skills, and competencies. The six "functioning levels" for adult ESOL learners are Beginning ESL Literacy, Beginning ESL, Low Intermediate ESL, High Intermediate ESL, Low Advanced ESL, and High Advanced ESL. The appendix provides a copy of only those skills and competencies related to speaking. (This information was downloaded January 30, 2004, from http://www.nrsweb.org.)

Using these descriptors, programs determine the appropriate initial placement level for adult ESOL learners based on a standardized assessment procedure. In fact, each level is connected to benchmarks from the BEST and CASAS. For example, the NRS Level 2, "Beginning ESL," skills are connected to scores between 16 and 41 on the oral section of the BEST, and those for NRS Level 4, "High Intermediate ESL," relate to BEST oral section scores between 51 and 57. In comparison, "High Advanced" skills listed at NRS Level 6 are related to BEST oral scores of 65 or higher. The program staff determines the skill areas in which to assess the student, based on the individual's instructional needs and goals.

ESOL Speaking Standards in Other Countries

In Canada, the standards movement has also influenced the education of adult ESOL learners. *The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* for adult ESOL learners (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) are organized in terms of basic, intermediate, and advanced proficiency. For each stage, the document contains global performance descriptions. The accompanying "benchmark" explains what learners at this level can do, gives examples of tasks and texts they can work with, and also lists performance indicators. (See Holt, 1995, for further discussion of low-level adult ESOL learners.)

In Australia, national standards have been written for several facets of education, but those most closely related to concerns about the adult ESOL population in the United States are from Australia's Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP; see Brindley, 1998, and Lipa, 1993). For example, the core competencies at Stage 1 for adult ESOL learners in the AMEP program say such learners "can exchange highly familiar information in spoken language; can negotiate a simple oral transaction to obtain specific goods and services; can recount a short familiar event; [and] can open and respond appropriately in short casual conversation exchanges" (Lipa, 1993, p. 40). By Stage 2 in the AMEP core competencies, adult ESOL

learners "can understand and give spoken instructions in a range of contexts; can exchange familiar information in spoken language; can negotiate oral transactions for goods and services in a range of contexts; [and] can initiate and participate in short casual conversations" (p. 41). (For more about the teaching of speaking in Australia, see Burns & Joyce, 1997.)

Such national standards provide one means for defining goals, systematizing instruction, and evaluating adult ESOL learners' progress, both within and across programs. The next decade will provide many opportunities for investigating the impact of such standards on instructional programs, but the widespread standards initiative does raise some concerns. Brindley (1998) has written an extensive review of assessment in the context of standards projects in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He cautions that "a constant preoccupation with targets and 'terminal behaviour' brings with it a number of potential pitfalls, not the least of which is the tendency for assessment to dominate teaching and learning" (p. 52). Brindley also reminds us that "the quality of the information provided on outcomes will only be as good as the assessments on which the reporting is based" (p. 76).

Professional Preparation for Adult ESOL Teachers

In some states, "there is still no requirement beyond a college degree to teach adult ESL" (Florez, 1997, p. 1). Kutner (1992) notes that "because of the lack of state certification requirements and the lack of training opportunities in institutions of higher education, most adult education staff development takes place through voluntary inservice offerings (e.g., workshops and conferences) rather than in preservice training" (Staff Development Formats section, ¶ 1). Unfortunately, "many ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors receive little or no training, either in subject matter content or in the process of teaching English to adults" (Kutner, 1992, Staff Development section, ¶ 1).

A report from the National Institute for Literacy (2000) reviewed state certification requirements for adult education instructors in general, and only mentioned ESOL instructors in a few places. The report states that a "large majority of adult education teachers are part-time (87% in 1993), and often receive little training and experience high turnover" (p. 4). It also says that 24 states require certification for adult educators (see p. 8), but does not specify which of these states require special certification for adult ESOL teachers. The report does say, however, that "roughly 80 to 90

percent of [adult] ESOL instructors are part-time, without benefits or contracts, and are often volunteers" (p. 11). In addition, many states "include ESOL teachers in their adult education certification requirements but in several states there is no requirement beyond a college degree to teach ESOL" (p. 11).[6]

There is evidence that, in the absence of effective preservice education and inservice development, teachers typically teach as they have been taught, whether or not such methods are appropriate for their students. Kennedy (1990) noted that "teachers acquire seemingly indelible imprints from their own experiences as students, and these imprints are tremendously difficult to shake" (p. 17). Lortie (1975) referred to this phenomenon as the *13,000-hour apprenticeship of observation*—that is, the many thousands of hours teachers spend as students observing the implicit models provided by their own teachers.

After conducting a longitudinal study of language teachers, Freeman (1992) concluded that "the memories gained through their 'apprenticeship of observation' function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do" (p. 3). This early imprinting might affect the quality of instruction if teachers who wish to teach communicatively were taught languages with the grammar-translation method or the audiolingual method. If teachers themselves did not "observe" communicative language teaching skills as learners, they could acquire these skills through inservice or preservice training, individual readings, and observation of communicative lessons.

Whether the working conditions of adult ESOL teachers support high-quality instruction for adults who want to improve their speaking skills is also unknown. Citing the work of Willett and Jeannot (1993), Florez (2002) says professionals who teach adult ESOL learners "work in the margins" (p.1): "They work in left-over spaces, with inappropriate materials, under unpleasant conditions, for little money or professional status, with students who are ignored and excluded by the dominant society" (Willett & Jeannot, 1993, p. 477). According to Florez (2002), many teachers who work with adult learners are part-time, hourly employees teaching in more than one program: "Turnover rates are high, and burn-out is common. . . . Adult ESL professionals often feel that recognition and compensation are

[6] Joy Kreeft Peyton of the Center for Applied Linguistics says, "Where structured programs have been established to meet the demand, you may see very clearly defined certification requirements. However, if you are in an area of low demand, or where programs are very informally structured, the requirements may be different" (personal communication, February 4, 2004).

less than adequate and that their programs are given a low status relative to other adult education components" (p. 1).

It is worrisome, therefore, that ESOL speaking classes for adults may be taught by untrained teachers without the appropriate linguistic knowledge and pedagogic background for helping ESOL learners improve their speaking skills (Florez, 1997; Kutner, 1992). One wonders whether teachers who do not receive specific and ongoing ESOL training in how to teach adult learners can really provide the type of effective instruction necessary for learning the complex skill of speaking English fluently and accurately in everyday settings.

Although it is unclear the extent to which ESOL teachers are trained to teach speaking skills, there are efforts in the field to provide resources to teachers. For example, TESOL has produced resources for teachers of adult ESOL learners, such as the books *New Ways in Teaching Adults* (Lewis, 1997) and *New Ways in Teaching Speaking* (Bailey & Savage, 1994). TESOL has also published guidelines for people teaching English in workplace contexts (Friedenberg, Kennedy, Lomperis, Martin & Westerfield, 2003). Such associations also offer short-term training opportunities for teachers, including workshops and conferences at the regional, state, and national level.

CURRICULAR ISSUES IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

Curriculum refers to what is taught in educational programs and the sequence in which that subject matter is presented. In order for adult ESOL learners to benefit from the curriculum of speaking courses (or the speaking component of general courses), they must first have access to the content. In other words, instruction must be scheduled at convenient times and classes must meet in accessible places, at a tuition rate that does not prohibit ESOL learners from enrolling. Second, the course content must be relevant to the adult ESOL learners' needs. That is, the topics and skills covered should be directly related to issues that adult ESOL learners deal with as they speak English in their daily lives.

I did not find any research that specifically addresses whether one curricular model is more effective than another in fostering adult ESOL speaking skills. However, it is worthwhile to consider innovative curricular models and program structures that might better meet the speaking needs of adult ESOL learners in terms of access and relevance than

do traditional grammar-based syllabuses. This section considers content-based instruction, use of authentic materials, and English for specific purposes—particularly workplace ESOL, in which work-related language classes are offered at the jobsite.

Content-Based Curricula

Research suggests, "Adults learn best when learning is contextualized, emphasizing communication of meaning and use of English in real situations" (TESOL, 2000, p. 15). In addition, "By drawing on learners' background knowledge and thus ratifying the value of experiences that adult learners bring into the classroom, adult education ESOL programs can make instruction more relevant to the learners, who have limited time to devote to formal learning" (p. 15).

Central to content-based instruction is the concept that students learn the language by using it to study some particular content area. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) define content-based instruction (CBI) as "the integration of particular content with language teaching aims" and "the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills" (p. 2). The CBI curricular model appears especially promising for teaching speaking (as well as other skills) in adult ESOL programs, given the limited time working adults have for studying. In effective content-based instruction, learners can gain subject-matter knowledge and language skills at the same time.

Reilly (1988) reviews combining the teaching of English with math, science, and social studies and explains that CBI integrates ESOL instruction with subject-matter coverage. Thus, this curricular model promotes dual goals: the learning of the subject matter and the development of English skills. English is the vehicle for teaching and learning (see Crandall, 1994), and the students' English-language development is also a learning outcome. Shaw (1996) says CBI is beneficial "in terms of practicality (the experience would facilitate future professional performance) and motivation (students would be more interested in language classes which are a vehicle for content relevant to their professional interests)" (p. 319).

Practicality and student motivation are directly related to curricular decisions affecting adult ESOL learners. Content courses (i.e., those built around a content rather than around language structures) can relate to adult ESOL students' professional and social needs for spoken English. One such content area for developing students' speaking skills is citizenship. As Nixon and Keenan (1997) note:

> Speaking English has been a requirement for citizenship since the turn of the last century . . . [i.e., 1900]. An INS examiner evaluates the applicants' knowledge of U.S. history and government by asking selected questions. . . . However, the ability to speak and understand English must still be demonstrated in an oral interview. (p. 1)

Other likely CBI foci for adult ESOL learners include the U.S. education system, local community resources, and health care.

In fact, substantial work has been done on the topic of health care in the development of literacy skills for ESOL learners (see, e.g., Adkins, Sample, & Birman, 1999; Rudd, Moeykens, & Colton, 2000). Research by Cathcart (1989) on spoken doctor–patient interactions could provide the basis for adult ESOL speaking lessons in a course with health-related content.

To offer content-based curricula, ESOL teaching professionals must have the skills to conduct needs assessments, interpret the resulting data, and design appropriate curricula to meet adult ESOL learners' needs. This approach to curriculum design may be particularly important for new arrivals who must meet their day-to-day needs in a new country, because, as Kuo (2000) noted, "Successful ESL curricular designs attempt to address these student needs to ensure proper acclimation to the new environment" (The ESL Curriculum section, ¶ 2).

English for Special Purposes (ESP)

Content-based instruction is related to (but different from) English for specific purposes (ESP) curricula. ESP is an approach to curriculum design that analyzes the linguistic needs of a particular group of learners defined by a common setting or goal (see Castaldi, 1991). In content-based instruction, the learners' focus is the actual subject matter rather than the language in which they are learning that content. In contrast, in ESP curricula, the focus is on the language as it is used in a particular context (such as business English or Spanish for nursing purposes), rather than on the subject matter per se (e.g., the business or the nursing curricula).

With the development of the ESP movement in the 1970s, universities, adult schools, and community colleges began to develop special-purpose courses for ESOL students. At first the topics of ESP courses were related to postsecondary academic disciplines, such as English for science and technology, and English for business courses. For nonacademic adult learners, the ESP movement at that time resulted in two types of curricula: vocational ESOL (VESL) and survival English.

One promising model of curriculum delivery connects the educational program with the adult ESOL learners' employers. For some time, VESL programs have been offered through adult schools, community colleges, and vocational–technical schools (see Buchanan, 1990). More recently, however, some adult ESOL programs have been offered at the learners' actual work sites. The phrase *workplace ESOL* refers to both the linguistic content of the language lessons and to the venue where the courses are offered.

In this context, the language instruction is typically sponsored by the employer and housed at the learners' place of employment. An example from agriculture is a California vineyard that offers a summer ESOL course for field workers. Every April the company designates 20 senior workers to take the class. Those who choose to participate are released from work for 2 hours, 4 days per week. (The company pays their normal wage for the first hour, and they are expected to put in their own time for the second hour.) A 12-week ESOL course begins in early May, concentrating on basic literacy and oral communication skills with a focus on the language needed in their work (Sherry Baildon, personal communication).

Workplace ESOL lessons focus on the vocabulary, grammar, and speech acts needed by employees in their work context. For instance, a community college in Washington State has agreements with several businesses to provide ESOL instruction for employees with limited English-speaking abilities. Room attendants, laundry workers, and kitchen stewards receive ESOL training at some major hotels. Classes are also housed in vocational programs at the college, such as the wood-construction program and culinary program. Adult ESOL learners develop their speaking skills while learning workplace basics and then are placed in entry-level jobs in their field. Employers are very supportive of these programs (Daphne Cuizon, personal communication).

Discussions of workplace ESOL programs (e.g., Martin & Lomperis, 2002; McGroarty & Scott, 1993) suggest that because such programs are located at the learners' job sites and are tailored specifically to their on-the-job communication needs, workplace ESOL is an efficient vehicle for the delivery of instruction. However, Burt and Saccomano (1995) caution, "It is unlikely that a workplace ESL class of 40–60 hours will turn participants with low-level English skills into fluent speakers of English" (p. 3).

Authentic Materials in Teaching Speaking for Adult ESOL Learners

ESP curricula are typically based on the close examination of naturally occurring texts (both spoken and written) and involve the use of authen-

tic materials for teaching speaking and listening. *Authentic materials* are based on naturally occurring conversations and other spoken (or written) samples, such as announcements and radio broadcasts, that are relevant to the learners' lives. Spelleri (2002) defines authentic materials as "any items created for the general community and not specifically for the ESL community" (p. 16). They are contrasted with intentionally pedagogical texts, such as written dialogues and simplified listening passages constructed for teaching purposes.

When examining textbooks, videotapes, audiotapes, or computer-delivered lessons for authenticity, one must consider at least three issues. First, there is the *authenticity of the text* (how natural the language sample is). Second, there is *authenticity of the task* (what adult ESOL learners are supposed to do with that language for learning or practice opportunities; Nunan, 1989). Third, there is *authenticity of response*—that is, how natural, contextualized, and uncontrived the speech required of the learners may be (e.g., in a testing situation; see McNamara, 2000, pp. 27–29, for further discussion.) Thus, authentic materials must be relevant to the learners' lives.

Cathcart (1989) argued for curricula based on authentic rather than contrived language and noted the "mismatch between grammar structures in natural conversation and those in ESL texts" (p. 107). To analyze the characteristics of conversations, Cathcart collected naturally occurring speech data in a pediatrician's office and two women's clinics. The use of authentic materials based on such data for teaching speaking is important because "simulated excerpts may serve to mislead students about the nature of everyday interactions" (p. 105).

Teachers of adult ESOL learners "may, or may not, be given textbooks or materials for teaching the oral skills class" (Lazaraton, 2001, p.105). Where there are prepared texts available, they may be lacking in terms of their authenticity. Lazaraton and Skuder (1997) analyzed ESOL speaking texts published between 1976 and 1995, and found that "even the most recent texts fell short on the authenticity criteria used (formality, turn-taking, quantity of talk, etc.)" (Lazaraton, 2001, p.105).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING SPEAKING TO ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

All of the foregoing information has implications for the teaching of speaking to adult ESOL students in the United States. These implications are discussed next in terms of practice, research, and policy. They raise a

number of important questions to be addressed by researchers and policy-makers with regard to educational opportunities for adult ESOL learners in the United States.

Implications for Practice

As previously noted, the grammar-translation method teaches primarily reading and writing skills, and "the shortcomings of audiolingual methodology are widely acknowledged" (Savignon, 1991, p. 262). In helping nonacademic adult ESOL learners meet the demands of speaking English in everyday life, courses based on interactive communicative-language teaching combined with language-awareness activities seem to be a promising instructional approach for adult ESOL learners to improve their speaking skills (Graham, 1994; Swain, 2000). Communicative language teaching emphasizes speaking and listening rather than reading and writing. Although communicative language teaching has traditionally emphasized fluency, accuracy can also be developed, particularly if a language-awareness component is central to the instruction. I have found no convincing research on adult ESOL learners that demonstrates the superiority of any particular method; however, the activities associated with communicative-language teaching and language awareness seem, by their nature, more likely to be helpful to nonacademic ESOL learners who really want to speak naturally.

As discussed throughout this chapter, the complexity of spoken language means that teachers need solid knowledge and understanding about the nature of speech and strong methodological skills for helping adult ESOL learners develop their speaking skills. It should be clear that teaching adult ESOL speaking classes (or working on speaking in four-skills courses) does not simply involve having conversations with the students. Thus, preservice training programs should prepare novice teachers specifically to work with adult ESOL learners, whose needs differ dramatically from those of elementary or secondary school ESOL pupils and from those of academic adult ESOL learners. Student teaching or internships should take place in actual adult school and community college courses that serve adult ESOL learners (even if that is less convenient for faculty members than placing trainees in their own university's ESOL program). (See Rymes, 2002, for a description of an adult ESOL course at a neighborhood center that served as the practicum site for teachers in training.)

The findings of Condelli et al. (2003) have implications for teacher education as well. They found that when teachers were able to use the stu-

dents' first language, the students experienced faster development. Also, where the teacher "used a varied practice and interaction strategy" and "emphasized oral English communication," the learners had faster growth (p. 4). The skills for teaching oral communication using varied, interactive activities should thus be part of the preservice training for adult ESOL teachers.

Implications for Research

The population of adult ESOL learners has not been studied as widely as either international students at colleges and universities, or linguistic minority children in K–12 public school contexts in this country. The research that does exist has focused more on adult ESOL learners' literacy skills than their speaking skills. Yet "immigration to the United States is approaching an all-time high" (Kurzet, 1997, p. 69). In spite of the current numbers of ESOL learners and the predicted increase in their numbers, we have relatively little research about the most effective ways to teach speaking skills to nonacademic adult ESOL learners for effective and efficient development. Answering these specific research questions, among others, would help ESOL programs and practitioners better serve adult ESOL learners:

1. What specific in-class activities selected by teachers promote the development of adult ESOL learners' oral skills most effectively and efficiently? (The research by Condelli et al. [2003] is promising but it focused primarily on literacy development, using data from fewer than 500 low-level learners in five states. Replications and extensions of this research are needed.)
2. What teaching activities and curricula lead to gains reported in the NRS?
3. Given the time pressures on adult ESOL learners, what combination of class time and out-of-class opportunities help them achieve the levels of speaking proficiency (including both accuracy and fluency) to which they aspire?
4. To what extent do patterns of high enclosure and social isolation inhibit the development of adult ESOL learners' English speaking skills? Where patterns of high enclosure exist, what community resources can be used to increase opportunities for English interaction?
5. What roles can technology play in the teaching of speaking to adult ESOL learners? Can software programs comparing the learners' output to

that of native or proficient speakers of English demonstrably improve the learners' pronunciation? Can technology increase adult ESOL learners' access to English in ways that affect their speaking skills?

6. As pronunciation problems have been shown to influence others' perceptions of adult ESOL learners, what are the most effective and efficient means for improving learners' pronunciation?

7. Do standards influence how speaking skills are taught to adult ESOL learners in the United States? What impact do the standards for adult ESOL learners (TESOL, 2000) have on teacher preparation programs?

8. Regarding assessment, to what extent do scores on the BEST and CASAS tests accurately predict adult ESOL learners' success in speaking English in social and work-related contexts? What, if any, is the washback effect generated by the widespread use of the multiple-choice CASAS exam in teaching speaking to adult ESOL learners? What is the washback effect of the BEST, a direct test of speaking? What, if any, will be the washback effect of the newly developed computerized version of the BEST in teaching speaking to ESOL learners?

There are also general contexts that need to be studied. For instance, it is felt that partnerships with learners' employers (or potential employers) offer time-effective opportunities for adults who might otherwise not be able to do so to attend classes. Fitzgerald (1995) reported that 36% of adult ESOL learners "were employed at the time of [their] enrollment in adult education" (ESL Profile section, ¶ 1), and Condelli et al. (2003) found that greater instructional time led to greater student gains on the oral component of the BEST. Given time pressures on working adults, the combination of the workplace site as a venue and financial support from employers is a promising combination for promoting class attendance and subsequently language acquisition by adult learners. (See, e.g., Burt & Saccomano, 1995; Martin & Lomperis, 2002; McGroarty & Scott, 1993.) Research is needed to determine which features of workplace ESOL programs (e.g., accessible sites, financial support, situated relevance of the curriculum, etc.) lead to greater attendance and improvement of the adult learners' speaking skills.

The preservice and inservice training of adult ESOL instructors is also a broad topic for further investigation. A national survey of preparation practices of adult ESOL instructors would be useful for determining whether adult ESOL teachers have the knowledge and skills they need to teach the complex skill of speaking English. Observational studies of effective adult ESOL teachers (those whose students make notable gains,

attend regularly, show increased willingness to try to use English outside of class, etc.) could inform teacher-preparation programs.

Funding should be devoted to research on the development of adult ESOL learners' speaking skills, as has been done for their literacy development. With support from the public and the private sectors, organizations such as the TESOL International Research Foundation (TIRF; see http://www.tirfonline.org) could encourage and adjudicate proposals for research on the language development of adult ESOL learners.

Implications for Policy

Policymakers at local, state, and national levels should be aware of the needs of adult ESOL learners in the United States. They should also be conversant with the educational issues and choices we face as a nation with regard to maximizing educational opportunities for new Americans. These issues include the following concerns.

Partnerships in support of adult ESOL programs have become very important as public funding for adult education decreases. In Massachusetts, for instance, Fish (2002) notes that 82% of the growth in the workforce in the 1980s and 1990s resulted from immigration. He estimates that immigrants who are proficient in English are likely to earn about 20% more than those who lack English proficiency. Fish adds that many Massachusetts organizations, such as the Boston Foundation, Citizens Bank, Fleet Bank, Verizon, the State Street Foundation, and the New England Regional Council of Carpenters, have been providing English-language instruction for their employees and, in some cases, for the surrounding community. Fish also states, however, that there are more than 15,000 people on the waiting list for government-funded ESOL courses. He calls for communication among government officials, the private sector, labor unions, and nonprofit organizations to determine how best to meet the need for ESOL courses. Unfortunately, a national survey of 12,000 businesses by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1994 revealed that only 3% of those businesses offered basic skills or ESL training for employees (Burt, 1995; see also Spence, 1999, for a discussion of worker-centered learning).

TESOL and other U.S.-based organizations (such as the Center for Applied Linguistics) have participated in the development of standards for adult ESOL learners (Short, 2000; TESOL, 2000). There are also models of standards available from other English-speaking countries (see, e.g., Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000). Policymakers should devote resources to the implementation of these standards (e.g., for designing curricula, developing

materials, and guiding assessment), and researchers should investigate the standards' impact on instruction and assessment (Brindley, 1998).

Funding policies are influenced by demonstrable results, often scores from standardized tests. As policymakers demand educational accountability, however, they should be aware that assessment instruments—including inappropriate tests—can drive instruction and shape the curriculum.

Implications for policy should have an effect on resource distribution. Writing about professionalism in adult ESOL literacy instruction, Crandall (1993) stated:

> Large multi-level classes, limited resources, substandard facilities, intermittent funding, limited contracts with few benefits: This is the context in which adult ESL literacy practitioners work. Adult education is a stepchild of K–12 education and an afterthought in U.S. educational policy. (p. 497)

These comments are still true today and apply just as well to speaking instruction for adult ESOL learners as to literacy training contexts.

The number of adult ESOL learners in this country is growing, and their importance in the workforce and in communities should not be underestimated. Given the complexity of speaking in a new language and the importance of spoken interaction to promote language acquisition, there is a great need for further research on how best to help this significant group of learners acquire the English speaking skills they need.

APPENDIX: NRS SPEAKING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR ADULT ESOL LEARNERS

Level 1: Beginning ESL Literacy

Speaking and Listening

- Individual cannot speak or understand English, or understands only isolated words or phrases.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual functions minimally or not at all in English and can communicate only through gestures or a few isolated words, such as name and other personal information.
- May recognize only common signs or symbols (e.g., stop sign, product logos).

- Can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English.
- Has no knowledge of computers or technology.

Level 2: Beginning ESL

Speaking and Listening

- Individual can understand frequently used words in context and very simple phrases spoken slowly and with some repetition.
- There is little communicative output and only in the most routine situations.
- There is little or no control over basic grammar.
- Communicates survival needs simply, and there is some understanding of simple questions.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual functions with difficulty in situations related to immediate needs and in limited social situations.
- Has some simple oral communication abilities using simple learned and repeated phrases.
- May need frequent repetition.
- Can handle routine entry-level jobs that require only the most basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated.

Level 3: Low Intermediate ESL

Speaking and Listening

- Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetition.
- Can ask and respond to questions using such phrases.
- Can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty.
- Has some control of basic grammar.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs and maps.

- Can fill out simple forms but needs support on some documents that are not simplified.
- Can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication, but in which job tasks can be demonstrated.
- Can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions using technology (e.g., fax machine, computer).

Level 4: High Intermediate ESL

Speaking and Listening

- Individual can understand learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with some repetition.
- Can communicate basic survival needs with some help.
- Can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation.
- Relies on description and concrete terms.
- Has inconsistent control of more complex grammar.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction, and has some ability to communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects.

Level 5: Low Advanced ESL

Speaking and Listening

- Individual can converse on many everyday subjects and some subject with unfamiliar vocabulary, but may need repetition, rewording, or slower speech.
- Can speak creatively but with hesitation.
- Can clarify general meaning by rewording and has control of basic grammar.
- Understands descriptive and spoken narrative and can comprehend abstract concepts in familiar contexts.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual can function independently to meet most survival needs and can communicate on the telephone on familiar topics.

- Can interpret simple charts and graphics.
- Can handle jobs that require simple oral and written instructions, multistep diagrams, and limited public interaction.
- Can use all basic software applications, understand the impact of technology, and select the correct technology in a new situation.

Level 6: High Advanced ESL

Speaking and Listening

- Individual can understand and participate effectively in face-to-face conversations on everyday subjects spoken at normal speed.
- Can converse and understand independently in survival, work, and social situations.
- Can expand on basic ideas in conversation, but with some hesitation.
- Can clarify general meaning and control basic grammar, although still lacks total control over complex structures.

Functional and Workplace Skills

- Individual has a general ability to use English effectively to meet most routine social and work situations.
- Can interpret routine charts, graphs, and tables and complete forms.
- Has high ability to communicate on the telephone and understand radio and television.
- Can meet work demands that require reading and writing and can interact with the public.
- Can use common software and learn new applications.
- Can define the purpose of software and select new applications appropriately.
- Can instruct others in the use of software and technology.

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