



From almost every perspective, the Fall Conference of TESL Toronto was a success. Beginning with widespread participation in the new online registration option, to the choice of Lindsay Clandfield as guest speaker, conference attendees expressed their thanks for the hard work of the Con-

ference Planning Committee.

Teachers were also happy with the variety of PD opportunities offered by the 15 workshop choices, the publishers' display, and the opportunity to meet, mingle, lunch, learn and network.

Overall, the conference was a hit.

(Continued on page 3)

Inside this issue:

ESL Spell 2008 1

President's Message 2

FALL CONFERENCE SESSION REPORTS

Program-Specific Language Support for Adult Learners 6

Grammar to Go 8

More ESL classical Songs 9

Debating in the ESL Classroom 12

BOOK REVIEW: *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People* 14

VIDEO REVIEW: *Akeelah and the Bee* 16

Where Do These Idioms Come From? 18

SPRING CONFERENCE

Saturday, May 9, 2009
New College,
University of Toronto

- Professional Development Workshops
- Publishers and new learning materials
- Annual General Meeting
- Lunch
- Draws and prizes
- Learn, lunch, network and update your skill set



ESL Spell 2008 Takes the Cake

By Sandra Garcia

ESL Spell, the spelling competition for adult ESL learners from Toronto's adult learning centres, was started by Channah Cohen

and a small team of volunteers in 2007.

Their goals were to help second language students feel more successful in learning English, enhance team spirit in the classroom and improve pronunciation.

In just two years, the competition has grown into a

(Continued on page 3)

Message from the President



Welcome to winter and to the latest edition of the TESL Toronto Newsletter. I hope that all of you had a restful holiday celebrating and relaxing with family and friends.

We on the TESL Toronto executive use December and January to reflect on our fall conference and the work that we did for our members in 2008, and look ahead to our spring conference and a new year filled with interesting projects.

First, a look back. Those of you who attended the fall 2008 conference experienced one of our most successful endeavours yet. The guest speaker, Lindsay Clandfield, spoke about the research on teacher burnout and how to combat it as well as his experiences with it. Your comments after the conference told us how much you enjoyed Lindsay's talk and workshops as well as all of the workshops that day.

Thank you as always to the presenters who shared their expertise and the people who attended in full force. A big thank you also to the volunteers without whom many of us would be lost in New College. I was an undergrad at New College and have attended our conferences for many years, but even I have to stop and think for a few moments when asked the location of specific rooms. Our volunteers, on the other hand, are well-versed on room locations and are always happy to help.

This leads me to thanking the executive members who help organize the conferences every year. Thank you for arriving early and staying late and everything else you do to make the conference a success. A final thank you to two former executive members who helped out this fall, Dale Northcote and Martha Staigys. Even though they are no longer on the committee, they lent their hands (and their backs!) to us yet again.

Now to the future. We hope that you have checked out some of the changes to the TESL Toronto website that Patricia has made. In the new year you'll be able to see pictures from our latest conference and more information about the executive members as well as other changes.

Planning is well under way for the May 9th spring conference. We are always interested in receiving proposals for presentations, so if you are interested, please visit the website for information on how to do so. If you would like to volunteer, the website also has information about how to contact our volunteer coordinator.

Finally, although the tasks may not be as glamorous as conferences, the Steering Committee has been working on recruiting new members to the executive board and updating our by-laws from their draft form. Our goal remains to have the executive reflect the members, so to that end we are continuing to look for representation on the executive board from the colleges, the elemen-

tary/secondary panel and the private sector. If you are interested in finding out more about what we do, please visit the website for more details and feel free to contact me with your questions.

I look forward to seeing you in the spring, when the temperatures are higher and the days are longer. ♦



Executive Board

President: Karen Thomson

Past President & Affiliate Director: Antonella Valeo

Treasurer: Cheryl Richman

Website Committee Chair: Patricia Glogowski

Recording Secretary: Akua Joseph

Communications Officer: Marina Marcan

Newsletter Committee Chair: Clayton Graves

Membership Secretary: Anne Cairns

Members at Large: Bruce Russell, Joanne Hincks, Anne MacGregor-O'Neill, Margaret MacLeod, Ken Lackman, Debbie Plested, Marju Toomsalu

Fall Conference 2008: a hit! (cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)

Most Popular Workshops

243 members registered for the conference, with 159 successfully doing it online.

Among the workshop options, the sessions on listening strategies, debating in the ESL classroom, learner autonomy, and warmers and icebreakers were the highest rated on participant feedback forms.

Other workshops on using classical music, teaching vocabulary, and an introduction to the website onestopenglish were also praised. The conference feedback responses are very helpful in planning and improving future conferences, and the Conference Planning Committee pays close attention to both the positive and negative comments.

Members' Feedback

Attendees' responses contained many excellent suggestions which the Committee

is already using as they plan the spring conferences.

For example, some members suggested enlarging the area for the publishers' display so that it wouldn't be so congested. Others called for more time to browse new materials.

A few budget-conscious teachers (and who isn't these days?) also suggested that publishers might offer conference discounts as a good promotional tool. Still others urged the committee to keep open the option of paying for conference registration by regular mail, so that they don't have to provide personal and financial information over the internet.

There was also helpful feedback on the refreshments and lunch offered at the conference, as well as on the newsletter and website, requesting more information on teaching ideas, coverage of issues that are emerging in ESL, online ESL resources and starting a blog.

All good ideas that we are hoping to pursue as part of either the newsletter or the website.

Get Involved

Planning is well under way for the Spring Conference on May 9 at New College, and even the Fall 2009 conference. So check in on the website from time to time (www.teslontoronto.org) to keep yourself up to date. And don't forget to register early.

Your executive committee is also happy to welcome new volunteers in all aspects of its work. So why not act on your new year's resolution to get involved in your professional growth and pitch in to make your Toronto affiliate the most rewarding professional experience it can be for you personally?

See you at the spring conference – Saturday, May 9, 2009 at New College, University of Toronto. ♦

(ESL Spell continued from page 1)

great success and now includes ESL learning centres from across the GTA.

Supported by TESL Toronto and the Toronto Star, this year's contest involved more than three hundred adult learners in school spell-offs to win sixty coveted spots in the semi-final run-off nights that led to the finals.

The semi-finals took place in the Toronto Star Auditorium over two nights in late October. Entrants were divided into two groups: Levels 2 to 4 comprised the lower tier and Levels 5 to 7 the upper tier. The top thirty contestants from each tier then moved on to the finals, held Nov. 6 and Nov. 13 in the Council Chambers of Toronto City Hall.

Among the entrants at this year's ESL Spell were more than a few familiar names, returning from last year's inaugural competition, ready to send their sharpened spelling skills into battle once again.

City Councillor Raymond Cho

Before the upper level competition commenced, Toronto city councillor Raymond Cho addressed the audience. He recalled arriving in Canada from South Korea 42 years ago, with little English.

In his first year of elementary school his older sister would constantly scold him for his lackadaisical attitude towards the weekly spelling tests in Grade 7.

To this day, Cho remembers some of the first words he had to memorize: mother, apple and train. So well did his sister train him that on the final test of the year he scored 100 per cent. This success sparked an interest in studying English, a commitment that has stuck with him to this day.

Cho's life as an immigrant was not easy, however. In 1967, Canada's 100th anniversary, he recalls that he couldn't get any work.

Finally he landed a job as a dish-



Toronto city councillor Raymond Cho

washer. This was followed by employment as a labourer in the mines of British Columbia, then as a waiter and finally as a night cleaner.

But ultimately he acquired two

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

M.A. degrees and a doctorate in education from the University of Toronto.

So, he concluded, “I know how you sometimes feel as newcomers to Canada, because I have been in your position, too. And my only word of advice is ‘don’t get discouraged.’ Keep on trying and you will make it.”

The ESL Spell Awards Night was held the following week in the auditorium of OISE at the University of Toronto. Channah Cohen and her committee had arranged not only prize-giving, but live music, a sing-along, dancing, and delicious food.

The Winners

The three winners of the lower tier competition of ESL Spell were Linda (Yueh Hua) Lin of Scadding LINC (overall winner), Annaliza Catapang from Lakeshore LINC (second prize), and Karen (Li Zhong) Hong from Woodgreen LINC (third prize).

In a surprising turn of events, the top prize in the higher tier was shared by El Waggagni El Idris Hanane from Polycultural Mississauga and Neelima Franzan from Finch South Asian Family Support Services. Third place was captured by Sang Chul Kim from Bickford.

The top winners received prizes of \$300, while second and third place winners received \$200 and \$100 respectively. In recognition of their hard work, all contestants who reached the finals, as well as their adult education centres, received beautiful framed certificates of participation.

As the festivities at OISE ended, ESL Spell contestants, along with their teachers, family and friends, shuffled into the chilly night air, bidding each other farewell with shouts of “See you next year.” ♦



The three winners of the lower tier competition of ESL Spell were Linda (Yueh Hua) Lin of Scadding LINC (overall winner), Annaliza Catapang from Lakeshore LINC (second prize), and Karen (Li Zhong) Hong from Woodgreen LINC (third prize).



The three winners of the higher tier competition of ESL Spell were Sang Chul Kim from Bickford (third prize), El Waggagni El Idris Hanane from Polycultural Mississauga and Neelima Franzan from Finch South Asian Family Support Services (first place tie).

Moroccan Immigrant Shares First Prize

Hanane El Idris, 29, arrived in Canada from Morocco only five months before making off with the shared first prize in the 2008 ESL Spell Competition. Idris is a LINC student at the Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services, based in Erin Mills. As Idris explains it, "Winning has encouraged me to focus even more on my studies. I was always interested in English even when I lived back home, but now I have an opportunity to really use the language every day."

Before arriving in Canada, Idris had no idea what a spelling bee even was. But once she found out, she put all her efforts into surfing the internet for websites that could help her to spell and pronounce words on the basic spelling word list as well as the challenge round lists sent out to participating adult ESL schools, too.

Idris wasn't the only one at Polycultural Mississauga to take up the challenge of English spelling. The contest drew in a dozen eager classmates as well, and their lessons with language instructor Sondra Sieminski generated high interest and enthusiasm, building bonds of friendship as they tested one another and brought new words to class each day.



Live music added to the festive atmosphere on ESL Spell awards night.

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

The Communications Adjunct Model: Program-Specific Language Support for the Adult Post-Secondary Learner

Presenters: Linda Bamber and Brigid Kelso

Reviewers: *Lynda Chubak and R.A. Klump*



Enough conference attendees were intrigued by this workshop's title to fill Wetmore Hall 51A at New College, University of Toronto to capacity. Those that had the good fortune to attend heard educator Linda Bamber outline an innovative new language support initiative currently being piloted at the School of Nursing at George Brown College.

Bamber came well-prepared to address her topic, since she is the principal investigator and project lead, as well as Professor of English at the College. She enthusiastically crammed as much information and statistics into her session as the time allowed. What follows is a brief recap.

What is a communications adjunct?

Bamber explained that the adjunct is a series of mandatory language and criti-

cal thinking courses that piggyback onto core nursing program content. Language objectives of these adjuncts are achieved by implementing activities and tasks embedded with content taken exclusively from core nursing courses.

Why have adjunct courses?

According to statistics presented from the program, 40 to 50 per cent of students entering this post-secondary institution arrive under-prepared. These students are defined as "remedial" as determined by a set of language assessments. Bamber reported that while some of these students' skills may fall only slightly below the standard college level, others have skills equivalent to LINC 2, far below the level necessary for students to meet the communication demands of a college nursing program.

Who attends these classes?

Bamber identified three categories of students. The largest cohort is comprised of those whose first language is not English (L2). Many of these arrive in Canada well-educated from their home countries, yet lack sufficient English competency. A second smaller group is called L1.5's. For her purposes, Bamber defines L1.5's as learners whose first language is not English and who have entered the English school system anywhere between kindergarten and 16 years of age.

Murmurs of surprise rippled through the audience as we learned that there are also significant numbers of students classified as remedial whose first language is, in fact, English (L1). As we discovered, the post-secondary remedial classroom extends beyond traditional ESL to include any student (L1, L2 or L1.5) determined to have sub-standard language skills.

Under the George Brown system, all students assessed as remedial are slotted into a first semester course, COMM1003, which provides 42 hours of language training, primarily focusing on writing and sentence structure. In many cases this amount of training has proven sufficient. The college administration, however, recognized that for many students 42 hours was not adequate and asked: What can we do better to support the remedial population? By exploring this question, the Adjunct project took shape and the pilot project began in September, 2007.

Bamber then walked us through the
(Continued on page 7)

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

(Continued from page 6)

adjunct program design. At the college, mandatory language remediation courses that span all semesters of the nursing program are now underway. Once a student is identified as remedial they must attend the adjunct courses. Bamber underscored the reality of L1 students graduating from high school with inadequate reading and writing skills, and stressed that the focus of this current initiative is to raise all under-prepared students' language skills to meet college-level standards.

However, due to the large number of ESL learners and the level of skills development required, the courses follow an ESL model. They integrate each of the four language skills and utilize content drawn from core courses such as Anatomy and Physiology, Profession of Nursing and Clinical Applications. The first semester delivers 84 hours, the second and third 56 hours each, for a total of 196 adjunct hours. As Bamber aptly noted, this is "a significant improvement over 42 hours in one semester".

Brigid Kelso, adjunct instructor and co-presenter, showed several excellent examples of content-based tasks built around the language and critical thinking skills required in real life practical nursing settings. Tasks such as analyzing, prioritizing patients and obtaining information at shift change; or listening to descriptions of pictures of "yucky" diseased eyes and then identifying the patient's condition. Wouldn't we all like to make use of activities so relevant to our students' studies?

Bamber's work is being conducted as a research project. From statistics gathered she reported that there has been a marked improvement in the mean grades for affiliated core courses. In one case, where no mean grade improvement was achieved, she felt valuable information was garnered that may lead to changes in the evaluation method and content of the nursing course. Based on the work to date, additional needs have also been identified, such as the need to teach direct



skills, rather than simply exercising pre-existing skills.

There is also a realization that some multiple choice tests for core courses should be replaced by evaluations that incorporate short answer/paragraph writing. In other words, the evaluation methods must reflect the language embedded and taught in the core courses.

The project has also heightened the college faculty's awareness of language needs and created opportunities for collaboration.

Funded by both by the College and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Bamber's research is progressing into new areas, such as investigating the relationship between language and academic and clinical performance, as well as determining benefits gained in language development as a result of participation in the adjunct courses. Currently, there has been an increased language emphasis in certain courses, and linkages have been created so that activities in different courses complement and correlate with one another.

The ultimate objectives of Bamber and her team are to improve retention rates, improve academic and language performance, and, most significantly, to achieve better patient outcomes once nursing program graduates enter their field.

Audience questions validated the appeal of the workshop and importance of this project. Paul Kinnis, for example, spoke for many attendees in his comment: "I found Linda Bamber's talk to be

one of the best-prepared and personally relevant TESL presentations I've seen in recent years."

As a teacher of Occupation Specific Language Training (OSLT), I appreciated that Linda's research revealed statistically significant benefits to developing and teaching these courses in college. In particular, I was intrigued by the fact that what is being learned here about curriculum development can be applied to other settings, such as OSLT for engineering managers."

We thank Bamber and her team for sharing their ground-breaking work; and look forward to another presentation as the communication adjunct model progresses. ♦

Linda Bamber holds a Master's degree in Education in Second Languages, a B.Sc in Biological Sciences, and CTESL certification. She has led curriculum design projects for Tin Ka Ping Secondary School in Hong Kong, Shanxi University in China, and the Scarborough Board of Education (LINC). She has taught ESL/EFL for twenty years in a wide range of contexts. As well, Bamber has worked as a researcher analyst and language specialist for various CIITE projects involving benchmarking and assessment of language tests; and is a certified CLBPT assessor.

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

Grammar to Go – Interesting in-class activities for grammar practice

Presenter: Darryl Press

Reviewer: Ann-Marie Belina

It often comes as a revelation to native speakers of English that explaining the ins and outs of English grammar doesn't come easily. Here's a test: ask someone you know (not an ESL teacher) to explain the grammar of a sentence such as, "If you'd bought a Lotto 649 ticket yesterday you could have won \$43 million."

Here's another and simpler example: Why do we say, "That apartment doesn't have a balcony" in English rather than "That apartment isn't have a balcony?" Your friend will get the point. It's often quite difficult to explain why we say it this way and not that.

Now ask your friend to put herself in the shoes of someone who is learning English as a second language, trying to cope with its many grammar rules and exceptions. They'll soon understand how complicated it can be – for both the learner and the teacher.

At the recent TESL Toronto conference, teacher and editor Darryl Press showed us how explaining some of the trickier ins and outs of English grammar can be made a lot easier when a teacher has clear learning materials. To this end, he presented a workshop on author Mike Tiittanen's new book, *Grammar to Go: ESL grammar activities and exercises for the classroom* (English Plus, 2008).

Judging by the large number of participants in the workshop, it was easy to conclude that a lot of ESL teachers, even experienced ones, are always looking for new ways to improve their grammar teaching skills.

Taking an entertaining, humorous

approach to the topic, Darryl reminded us that even simple grammatical principles can be complex, alleviating my worries in thinking I was the only one in the session that is sometimes intimidated by grammar.

Understanding and teaching English grammar effectively is a continuous process, calling for specialized knowledge and lots of practice. For example, it helps to know how English, often called an 'analytic' language, differs from a 'synthetic' language such as Spanish.

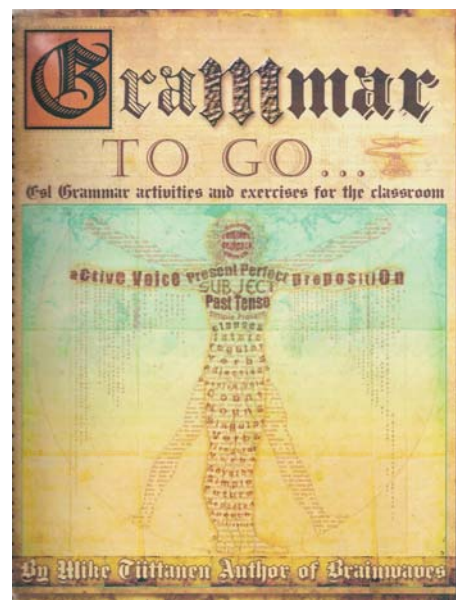
Here's an example of one small difference between the two languages. In English we need to see or understand the pronoun subject of a verb in order to know who is doing an action.

For example, 'I take the streetcar to get to my school'. In 'synthetic' languages such as Spanish, on the other hand, the pronoun is often not said because the form of the verb change, to show who is doing the action: "Take the streetcar to get to my school."

Grammar to Go, a 138-page spiral-bound learning and activity book, presents grammar points and activities like the one above in a logical progression from simple to complex. It also contains board games, questionnaires, situational dilemmas for in-class discussion, grammar exercises, puzzles, and an assortment of learning games. It is reasonably priced at \$27.99.

The workshop exploded with excitement when we organized ourselves into groups and began to do some of the activities. They are designed especially for

(Continued on page 9)



Grammar to Go is a compilation of Mike Tiittanen's best lessons, a follow-up to his previous book, *Brain Waves* (Oxford, 1998). Tiittanen has been teaching English as a Second Language since 1992 and is currently studying towards his PhD in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University, UK.

Darryl Press is a teacher for the TDSB at Flemingdon-Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre and Seneca College.

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

(Continued from page 8)

teachers who take a communicative approach to language teaching, because many of them also allow for debate and discussion. And there's no better way to find out what a learner does and doesn't understand than to have him/her actually use language to try and do something.

For example, in Chapter 4 on using the present perfect and present perfect continuous, learners make up questions to ask the teacher, as in: "How long have you worked here as a teacher?, How long have you been married?, How long have you been doing yoga?" The questions search for real information that the learners want to know.

Some of the topics ask learners to express their personal opinions on issues, especially when they feel passionately about a subject. For example, "How do you feel about a family sending their grandparents to a senior citizen's home?"

This activity helps learners acquire the language structure "I'm against... + VERB + ing" or "I'm in favour of...+VERB + ing". In this activity, they are gaining useful practice with gerunds, but it also brings their own lives into the picture, so that grammar is attached to something personal. It is this quality that makes grammar rules memorable.

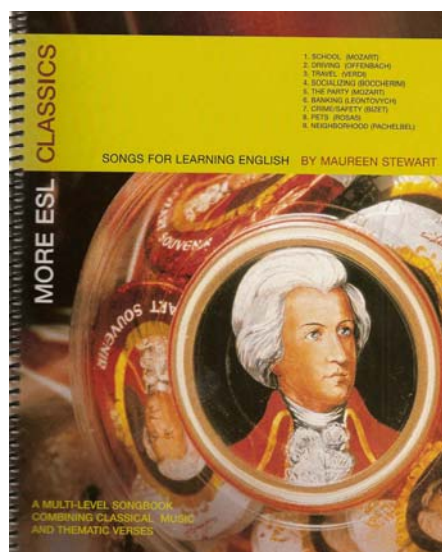
Darryl completed the workshop by demonstrating how the activities in *Grammar to Go* can be adapted endlessly, to embrace any particular grammar point the teacher is working towards.

This feature makes Tiittanen's approach to teaching grammar not only useful for ESL teachers but a flexible and renewable resource - one that's good to have as part of any ESL teacher's repertoire. ♦

More ESL Classical Songs

Presenter: Maureen Stewart

Reviewer: Milka Stupar



Maureen Stewart has been teaching adults in Canada and abroad for twenty years. She is currently a lead Instructor at the Eglinton LINC Centre.

To see the syllabus, hear samples and to inquire about ordering materials as well as information about copyright, please visit Maureen Stewart's website at: <http://www.eslclassics.com>

Many of our students are familiar with classical music, whether they know it or not. They might have heard a classical piece as a popular ringtone on a cell-phone, as background music in a shopping mall or as the theme for a TV commercial. So in fact most students have had lots of exposure to classical music no matter where they are from. "It's a universal form of communication", says Maureen Stewart as she introduces her workshop.

Because of its universality in modern communications, classical music resonates with a broad range of people and is no longer the exclusive domain of social elites in society.

"Among its many benefits, listening to classical music enhances memory retention", Stewart continues. She points out that "Picture stories, for example, when combined with classical music, will often release feelings in learners. The resulting expression of emotion is an effective learning technique because it relaxes learners so they can take risks in producing language. This allows them to achieve a whole range of language objectives in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Moreover, when they meet classical music they have listened to in the past, the images constructed earlier and the vocabulary they used will invariably come back into mind, accessible for use

(Continued on page 10)

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

Daily Activities*Wake up early.**It is Monday.**I can't sleep late.**It's not Sunday.**Eat my breakfast. Take
a shower.**Brush my teeth.**Put on my clothes.**I have an hour.*

(Continued from page 9)

once again.”

Following the huge success of her first publication in Canada, Germany and the U.S., Stewart has published a new book titled, *More ESL Classics: Songs for Learning English*, a multi-level songbook combining classical music and thematically-focused language.

As in the first volume, the songs in the new book are theme-based and organized into nine independent learning units that deal with specific grammatical structures. The themes resemble the language objectives of the LINC curriculum and provide a coherent structure for each unit.

Stewart advises that the lessons, based on a communicative-based approach to language learning and the development of individual learning strategies, can also be presented independently and adapted to the needs of learners and their level of proficiency in any ESL/EFL program.

Stewart has developed the concept of

using classical music to cover themes as diverse as daily activities, banking, children, crime, driving, doctor's office, employment, fast food restaurant, neighbourhood, the party, safety, shopping, socializing and winter weather, among others.

In covering the theme of daily activities, for example, Stewart presents a simple song with easy lyrics that catch the feeling of our hurried, harried urban life. The lines are in short phrases, using imperatives and phrasal verbs.

The music is a dancy tune from Ponchielli's opera *La Gioconda* (Dance of the Hours), familiar to almost everybody. It is also the source of a famous musical parody by comedian Allan Sherman about a kid who goes to summer camp (“Hello mudda, hello fadda, Here I am at Camp Granada”).

As learners listen to the song *Daily Activities* they internalize stress, rhythm, intonation and learn useful verbs, nouns and adjectives.

Stewart points out that although the primary focus of her approach is on developing listening skills, integration of other language components into the lesson plans is a necessary and important component, since it prompts student interaction. For example, while listening exercises might be designed for working on vocabulary and specific grammar structures, related activities in speaking, reading and writing enable learners to express their own ideas about the themes and topics, and thus enrich their overall language experience.

The exercises are designed for work in pairs, in small groups, with the whole class and for individuals after which the opportunity is given for comparison and collaborative evaluation. This approach to language learning thus enhances thinking and information processing.

To illustrate her technique, Maureen Stewart divided the workshop participants into nine groups of two to three people, distributed sample materials, discussed possible sequencing of given exer-

**Composers in *More ESL Classics***

Mozart – Eine kleine Nachtmusik

Offenbach – Infernal Gallop

Verdi – La donna è mobile

Boccherini – Minuet

Mozart – Piano Sonata #16

Leontovich – Shchedryk

Bizet – Carmen – Habañera

Rosas – Sobre las Olas

Pachelbel – Canon in D

cises, and encouraged further input.

During their follow-up presentations, each group's song was played, and the products of their language activities described.

Most importantly, as the material was experienced first-hand, lively discussions during the presentations highlighted some of the following learning objectives and outcomes:

- Developing students' familiarity with classical music puts them at ease, and creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere where they feel free to express themselves without fear of making mistakes.
- Well-chosen classical pieces which are simple, easy to follow and upbeat will enhance memory retention

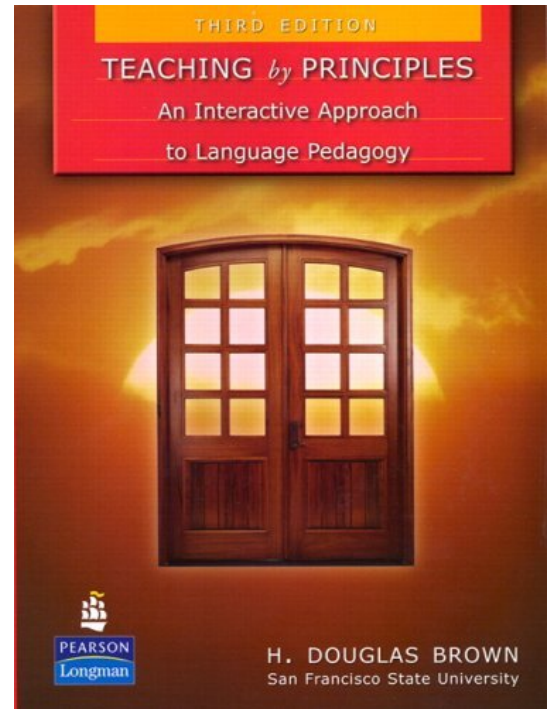
(Continued on page 11)

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

fyi

Suggested readings and links:

- *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, Third Edition, by H. Douglas Brown offers new chapters on course design, technology, and critical pedagogy reflecting current trends and advances in methodology. Contains pre-reading organizers at the beginning of each chapter, updated and expanded references, and treatment of recent "hot topics": corpus linguistics, form-focused instruction, multiple intelligences, nonnative English-speaking teachers, learner autonomy, alternatives in assessment and reflective teaching.
- Humanistic Language Teaching and Total Physical Response website: www.hltmag.co.uk/oct08/mart01.htm



(Continued from page 10)

- The songs must use high-frequency words in authentic everyday language about real events and concerns in students' lives.
- Song lyrics that are carefully shaped can be illustrated with pictures, a feature which allows them to be presented in a variety of ways, such as in speaking activities.
- Songs from classical music should explore a variety of ideas, avoiding the overuse of the themes of love and boy-girl relationships found in most pop music.
- Each song can be used to focus on a particular grammar topic so they can be easily integrated into lesson planning.

Stewart's approach comes out of a number of theoretical approaches to language learning, such as:

- Total Physical Response (Asher) – derived from the 'trace theory' of learning: memory is increased if it is stimulated or 'traced' through association with motor activity. In this approach, language is associated with a series of simple actions that can be easily retained by learners.
- Innatism (Chomsky) - learners actually know more about language than they could reasonably have learned if they had to depend entirely on the input they are exposed to.
- Interactionist (Piaget and Vygotsky) - Language acquisition is similar to and influenced by the acquisition of other kinds of

skills and knowledge.

- Cognitive understanding is built on the interaction between the learner and the things that can be observed, touched, manipulated. Language develops entirely from social interaction
- Communicative Language Teaching - Communicative competence is the desired goal. Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language

This workshop, by providing teachers with ideas for integrating classical music into their language programs, offered a stimulating approach to enhance learning. ♦

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

Debating in the ESL Classroom: Critical Thinking Through Language Application

Presenter: Michael Schmidt

Reviewer: Vasie Kelos



Michael Schmidt (centre) teaches at Langstaff Secondary School (York Region District School Board) and in summer ESL programs.

For those of us teaching upper levels or English for Academic Purposes, Michael Schmidt's workshop was a valuable experience and well worth attending. Michael reviewed some of the classical debating techniques and demonstrated a cooperative technique that was new to many called "Four Corners," an informal debating format that can be adapted to many teaching situations.

The classical debating techniques are the ones adopted in academic settings and Michael suggested www.idebate.org as a good source for generating ideas. However, he warned that the topics must be chosen and phrased carefully so that they encourage a "clash" between the debating

teams.

The students must begin with a debating statement. Schmidt provided a helpful format in his handout booklet outlining how to write up debating arguments. When the debate is finished, the students are evaluated using a rubric out of 40 points: 10 points for knowledge/understanding, 10 points for thinking/inquiry, 10 points for effectiveness of communication, and 10 points for application of ideas to other situations. The instructor must explain the marking rubric form, explaining what is expected in each category and then hands out a completed rubric with comments to each student.

Schmidt's interest in debating began in a French summer program he attended

as a student and found somewhat dull because the activities were not challenging the students. He concluded that debating might be one way to incorporate critical thinking for intermediate to advanced ESL levels.

The advantage of a debate is that contending ideas have to be shaped and presented in order to persuade – a more engaging way to develop language and thinking than simply repeating answers to questions. In a debate the learner must generate an opinion about the topic and defend it with concrete arguments. Schmidt and others contend that debating also makes learning memorable.

In the workshop he drew our attention to the working style of Canada's parliament – or the Ontario legislature – as an example of a place where the cut and thrust of real debate occurs daily. Both legislative chambers in action can be viewed on television through CBC news-world programs such as "Question Period" and "Politics" as well as local cable TV outlets such as Rogers Cable Channel 105 – the Ontario Legislature.

Schmidt also advocates debating because the number of possible topics is limitless and the format can be adjusted by the teacher to meet the needs and skill levels of the students. Intermediate level students generally use a less formal vocabulary and perhaps need less debating time than advanced students.

Readings from the newspaper on a current hot topic are also a good way to help students find and express their opinions, use vocabulary and clarify concepts. In a related homework activity students

(Continued on page 13)

FALL 2008 CONFERENCE SESSION REPORT

(Continued from page 12)

can write up their opinion or write an essay or opinion piece that incorporates both sides of an argument.

Michael walked us through the accompanying booklet he'd provided, going into detail about such issues as: creating a debating statement, debate evaluation, House of Commons role play. A House of Commons debate begins by reviewing the vocabulary associated with parliament, the seating and so on. Students begin by stating "Be it resolved that..." (e.g. Canada should not send its military force to any other country in the world.) The teams then present arguments and rebuttals, addressed to the Speaker.

Formal debate procedure, in which there is a strict time limit for each speaker (e.g. 3 minutes) is preferred to avoid some students monopolizing the debate. Students learn to present their ideas succinctly and are not allowed to make personal attacks against others.

Schmidt then described two alternative debate formats – the 'Tag Debate' and 'Four Corners.'

In the Tag debate the class is divided into two teams, the "Pro" side and the "Con" side. Students are given time to research a topic and think of both an argument supporting their side of the issue and how they might challenge an argument from the opposing side. Four desks are put into the centre of the room, forming a square.

Two students from each side sit at the desk, facing their opponent. Only the students at the table can speak. Everyone in the class should get a chance to sit at the table and make at least one statement supporting their side or refuting the other side.


In the Four Corners format, the teacher or class chooses a statement on an issue or a topic in the current news. The topic could be about pollution, sources of energy, a statement about values. Whatever the statement is, it must lend itself to differing points of view. In each corner of the classroom put up a label or sign

(strongly agree, disagree, agree, strongly disagree) Students move to the corner of the room that best expresses how they feel about the statement, issue or question.

In their respective corners, students share with each other why they chose that corner. Later, call upon random pairs of students to state why they chose as they did.

The Four Corners strategy can be creatively extended in the following way. With masking tape, lay down a 'value line' on the floor. Have the students position themselves along a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree. They sign their name on the spot, then debate and afterwards return to their initial spot to see the distance they may have shifted in their opinion, putting reasons for why something happens in each corner.

This workshop on debating was informative and useful. Michael Schmidt expanded on the simple debating format and showed us how to make adaptations according to our particular classes. In attempting such activities, students become more comfortable expressing themselves in English in a more formal setting and develop critical thinking skills as they participate in this student-centered activity. ♦



Reference reading:
Beyond Monet: the artful science of instructional integration. Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser, Toronto: Bookation, 2001. ISBN: 0969538839 DDC: 371.102 Edition: \$52.00



FOUR CORNERS:

A Cooperative Learning Tactic

This is a useful pre-debate activity:

- Begin with a statement, issue or question
- Label your classroom corners: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
- Students are given a specified period of quiet time in which to form their opinion. At this stage, dialogue is not allowed.
- Students move into the corner which best represents their view of the issue
- In small groups, students discuss why they moved to the corner they did and record their combined reasons.
- Students then report on their reasons from each corner

BOOK REVIEW

When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People

by Ann Batko, edited by Edward Rosenheim

Reviewed by Cheryl Coull

As a TESL student, I spend a great deal of time doing assigned readings and examining textbooks as teaching and learning resources.

But when I recently spotted Anne Batko's *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People: How to Avoid Common Errors in English*, I grabbed it on the chance that a grammar textbook could be both useful and interesting to read.

My hopes were not unfounded, for Batko's light-hearted approach to helping those with language problems is a far cry from the typical academic style of such books. In short, I'd recommend this book to everyone who wants or needs a good refresher course on 'proper' grammar and usage, in plain language, and clearly presented.

The book's editor is Edward Rosenheim, Professor Emeritus of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago. In the foreword he underscores the importance of proper language use as 'a kind of invisible passport into the company of people who, because they respect language, almost automatically respect others who use it correctly.'

He goes on to describe the wide variability in language usage and standards today, but advocates learning and practising what the *New Oxford English Dictionary* calls 'the accepted standard of literature and conversation'. And that is where this book comes in. It provides a quick-study course for both the grammatically-challenged and the linguistically anxious.

In her introduction, Batko describes

learning language as a set of 'habits' developed through repeated use of conventional structures. Unfortunately for many, however, a lot of these are bad habits, and this book is designed to help undo and overcome them

When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People begins with a test to see how sharp your grammar skills are already. (Don't worry, there's an Answer Key which helpfully directs you to specific chapters on verb tenses, agreement, problem pronouns, prepositions, words that sound the same, and made-up words.)

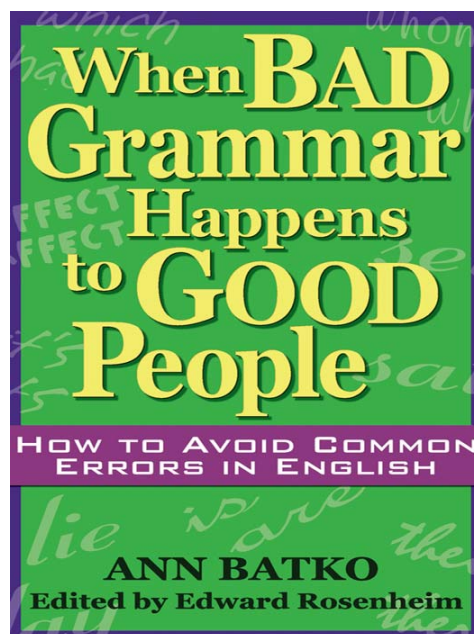
The first section then reviews the eight parts of speech, the elements of a sentence, and independent and subordinate clauses.

The sections of each chapter deal with errors that can be traced back to one grammar or usage rule. Each section opens with a brief lesson explaining the rule and then addresses individual errors. The unit on verbs, for example, contains a section on transitive and intransitive verbs, a section on tricky verb tenses, and one on the subjunctive.

Individual grammatical and usage errors are easy to find in the content because they are numbered for quick reference, and a tip is sometimes offered to help learners remember the rule.

To review and measure your progress there is a test at the end of each section in all the chapters except the pronunciation chapter, and all the tests have an Answer Key.

And to help determine whether



When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People: How to Avoid Common Errors in English. Ann Batko, edited by Edward Rosenheim. Career Press, Franklin Lakes N.J. 2004. 256 pages, softcover \$18.95

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

you've really formed a new language habit there are Review Tests at the end of the book, covering the grammar concepts that people find most difficult.

Pros

1. Organization and Design. These are clearly major strengths of the book. Readers can see the topics covered at a glance, and the clever chapter titles are appealing. Sub-headings also identify important language sub-skills. For example, Chapter 4: Mangled Modifiers, has a section organized under "Adjectives vs. Adverbs – bad vs. badly; real vs. really; near vs. nearly, good vs. well." The content of each chapter is not only comprehensive, but organized in such a way that readers can navigate through the book efficiently.

2. Authenticity of Errors The topics and examples included in this book were selected, according to the author, on the basis that they occur regularly in everyday English. Both errors and their corrections are in easy-to-find screened boxes flagged by boldface headings: "Don't say...."/ "Do say...." But what distinguishes this book from many other is the clarity of the follow-up explanations, titled "Here's Why."

I was particularly impressed by Batko's explanations in the section "Mixing up Words That Sound the Same." She neatly clears up a host of everyday errors, such as the distinction between "affect" and "effect" (both noun and verb). Those of us who watch TV or read a daily newspaper have often encountered the "affect vs. effect vs. effect" issue, and this was the clearest explanation I've ever met.

3. Simple, Direct Language This book aims to help real people through real communication situations encountered in business, professional and academic life. The explanations of grammatical conventions, usage and appropriateness are accurate and never overworked. They are practical, clear and to the point. In the

context of ESL, teachers in training who wish to brush up or review their knowledge might profitably work through the book in preparation for practice teaching and job interviews.

Cons

As a native speaker of English I found it refreshing to read a grammar book that was so comfortable for the general reader. I wondered, however, whether occasional colloquialisms and idioms might pose comprehension problems for lower-level ESL readers (e.g. "He cries crocodile tears" p.80). Some reviewers might dismiss the informal tone of the language in the book as 'popular' and 'lightweight', though I found it refreshing. Those who spend a lot of time examining and reviewing self-help manuals on language use like this one might also notice its similarity to other books on the market.

With few quibbles, however, I can recommend *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People: How to Avoid Common Errors in English* as a comprehensive, easy-to-use reference for teachers or students looking for an approachable grammar check-up. ♦



Cheryl Coull lives in Scarborough, Ontario, and is currently finishing her last three TESL credits through Centennial College. She currently works for two online ESL tutoring companies, working with students in Korea and Russia.

Selected items from the Grammar Pre-test

Circle the correct choice.

- Doris foolishly spent four hours (laying, lying) by the pool and now looks like a radish. (See Chapter 2 for help)
- Each of those revolting insects (belong, belongs) to an endangered species. (See Chapter 3 on 'agreement'.)
- Pauline and a man with a large sheepdog (live, lives) in the apartment above mine.
- It's (he, him) who left the laundry out in the rain.
- My grandfather left most of his money to a home for wayward dentists; the rest went directly to my daughter and (I, me, myself).
- I want that pastry so (bad, badly) that I can almost taste it.
- Wanda correctly (inferred, implied) from Steve's frantic signals that he meant to (imply, infer) that she should get off the train tracks.
- To win my love, you must meet one simple (criteria, criterion): absolute perfection.
- We stared (incredibly, incredulously) at the (incredible, incredulous) spectacle of Lulu dancing on the table.
- Angela kept a (respectful, respectful) distance from the bears and wolves, (that, which) eventually retreated to their (respectful, respectful) dens.

VIDEO REVIEW

Akeelah and the Bee

Reviewed by Jeannette Chan

Had enough of winter? Could you do with a warm and fuzzy experience to lift your spirits? Then try the recent movie, *Akeelah and the Bee*, now available on DVD. It may be just the tonic you need to survive those cold February nights.

In this inspiring 2006 film, Akeelah Anderson, a sixth-grader from inner-city Los Angeles, overcomes the scorn of classmates, the dismissive jeers of competitors from wealthier schools, and even the skepticism of her own mother as she displays her prowess in spelling, leading up to the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC.

As in most underdog tales, our heroine's journey is as important as her arrival, and the personal rewards of her efforts transcend the fame that she achieves. The film's central theme of triumphing over adversity has universal appeal, perhaps especially for ESL students and immigrants, many of whom face life challenges like those confronting 11-year-old Akeelah.

As the story begins, Akeelah is in trouble for skipping classes and failing to do her homework. As punishment, Mr. Welch, her idealistic principal, sentences her to take part in Crenshaw Middle School's spelling bee. Much to her own embarrassment, she easily wins.

Pressured by administrators to raise the academic standards of his school, Mr. Welch sees Akeelah's remarkable spell-

ing ability as one way to do just that and enlists the aid of his friend, erudite college professor Dr. Joshua Larabee, as her spelling coach and mentor.

The professor himself had been a spelling bee champion as a boy, but his self-confidence was so eroded by the tragic death of a beloved daughter and his subsequent marital break-up that he abandoned the classroom. He now works as an educational administrator, in self-imposed exile from the students whose excitement at learning was once a powerful source of purpose and fulfillment in his life.

Akeelah gets off to a rocky start under Larabee's stern tutelage, but over time their relationship deepens, much like that of a natural father and daughter. Through the new stability and purpose that Dr. Larabee brings to her life, Akeelah commits herself to the goal of winning in the one area where she has the power to achieve greatness.

At home, Akeelah receives little encouragement from her practical and embittered mother, widowed five years earlier by the senseless street murder of her husband. And at school she is derided by most classmates, whose interests run to rapping, fashion and athletics, not academic smarts.

It is the warm memories of her father, however, that give Akeelah comfort and inspiration. Coupled with the profes-



Akeelah and the Bee, Lionsgate films (2006)

(Continued on page 17)



Keke Palmer in the title role of *Akeelah and the Bee*, (2006) . www.akeelahandthebee.com/

(Continued from page 16)

sor's dedication to her goals she begins to dream bigger dreams.

In one unforgettable scene, Larabee asks her to read a framed quote of W.E.B. Du Bois on his study wall: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure...And as we let our own light shine we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same."

Akeelah and the Bee draws us into the life of the characters from the first

frame, touching us with its emotional directness and universality. At the same time it starkly portrays the adversities faced by intelligent children who are classed as 'different', the challenges of inner-city children's lives and the motivations that drive some parents to push their children to win at any cost.

The plot of *Akeelah and the Bee* throws the viewer no curves; it is formulaic and predictable. But the story is heartwarming and the lead characters are convincingly revealed through the fresh talent of 13-year-old Keke Palmer as Akeelah, the powerful restraint of Laur-

ence Fisburne as Dr. Larrabee, and the gritty realism of Angela Bassett as Akeelah's mother. It is easy to give into the emotional pull of this trio. This is a film that will touch your heart.

Those who enjoyed the quirky and highly popular spelling documentary *Spellbound* (2002), which explored the lives of actual spelling prodigies from a diversity of races, social classes and geographic regions, will be similarly captivated by *Akeelah and the Bee*.

At a bargain price of \$13.95, this DVD comes highly recommended. ◆

Where do those idioms come from?

By Meryl Olmstead

Many of our strangest idioms and expressions came into the English language 400 to 500 years ago to describe people, events, and social customs in Elizabethan England. Since they derived from common experience they were absorbed into general use.

What follows is a short and unscholarly exploration of some of the stranger, tastier – and smellier – idioms that have survived.



Smelling like a rose

Meaning: appearing to be successful, happy or good.

Usage: If you come out of a tricky situation or investigation ‘smelling like a rose,’ people believe that you are good and honest even though the circumstances could have made you appear bad, dishonest or unworthy.

Origin: In Shakespearean times many people got married in June because it was the custom for people to take their yearly bath in May and by the following month they were still acceptably fragrant.

But as the summer wore on many were starting to stink. So in weddings the bridal party often carried bouquets of flowers, usually roses, to hide their natural body odours. It was a sort of sensory cover-up.

Since that time we have continued to

use the idiom ‘smelling like a rose’ to describe people whose outward appearance is wholesome even if underneath they are not quite as pleasant as they seem.

Example: The newspaper accused the city councillor of corruption, but in the end he came out smelling like a rose.



The upper crust

Meaning: the higher social classes; the aristocracy; the richest people

Usage: The upper crust has traditionally referred to a wealthy elite; nowadays the idiom may also refer to other kinds of elites – intellectual, literary, sports, or managerial, for example.

Origin: In late mediaeval times in England, a loaf of bread served at social occasions such as a party or a feast was often divided according to the social status of those in attendance.

Common folk such as workers got the bottom part of the loaf because it was often singed or burned.

The host family got the middle part which was sometimes barely baked and somewhat glutinous.

The best part of the loaf, the golden crusty layer at the top, was reserved for special guests, especially if they were from a higher social rank. They received the upper crust, the choicest part.

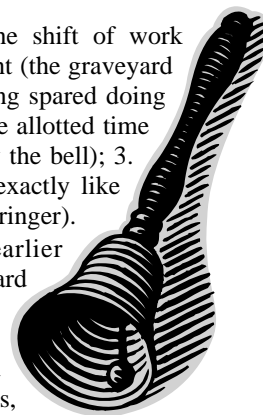
To this day we use the idiom to describe those of higher rank within the society, though in modern egalitarian societies there is sometimes a slight taint to the term.

Example: Only the upper crust can afford to eat at that three-star restaurant.

The graveyard shift, saved by the bell and a dead ringer

Meanings: 1. the shift of work that begins at midnight (the graveyard shift); 2. relief at being spared doing something because the allotted time has run out (saved by the bell); 3. a person who looks exactly like someone else (a dead ringer).

Usage: In earlier times, the graveyard shift was commonly assigned to lower level, less-educated workers in factories, mines, transportation, etc. Nowadays, that shift is also often assigned to highly-educated workers in



(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

information technology and other fields, since the global economy works a 24-hour day.

In the context of sports such as boxing and wrestling, there are strict time limits to each period of activity, and a bell or a buzzer alerts everyone to the end of the 'round.'

A competitor who is clearly losing can be 'saved by the bell' before he or she loses the match.

A dead ringer is a person who looks so like another person that he or she is often mistakenly identified for that person.

Origins: As the sixteenth century wore on, English churches began to run out of places to bury people. The majority of the population were Christian folk who had by law and custom to be buried in the graveyard of their local church.

Because of the overcrowding in cemeteries, people began to dig up the coffins of deceased family members and take their bones to a special house for re-burial. A vacated grave could then be used for another burial.

When coffins were opened, it was found that the occasional one had curious scratch marks on the inside. Gravediggers quickly realized that they may have been burying people who not dead, simply unconscious.

A cautionary practice thus arose by which a string was tied to the wrist of all people pronounced dead. Gravediggers attached a bell to the end of this string before the coffin was covered with earth and they sat at the grave through the night, hence 'the graveyard shift.'

If the gravedigger heard a bell, he would know whether the person he had just buried should be disinterred, in other words 'saved by the bell'.

Obviously this person would be 'a dead ringer' for the person who had just a few hours before been buried, since it was in fact the same person.



Examples: Three of my Level 5 students invariably show up for class very tired because they have had to work the graveyard shift.

The Olympic wrestler, who was saved by the bell in the second round of her match, went on to win the gold medal.

My wife claims that our new neighbors are dead ringers for Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

To bring home the bacon

Meaning: bring home enough money from one's employment to support a family

Usage: Traditionally the idiom has referred only to supporting a family, but it is now also used in sports to indicate that a team or individual has won a game or a prize.

Origin: From time to time, common people in sixteenth-century England were lucky enough to get hold of a side of pork for their own use. This was a rare and special event, and the family usually went to some lengths to let their neighbors know about it. When guests came to the house, the hosts would bring out their bacon and hang it from a beam in plain sight. This porcine showing-off was a sign of the family's status, since obviously the provider for the house had enough ingenuity to bring home the bacon.

Example: In Canada today, wives and husbands often share in 'bringing home the bacon.'

But wait! ...as the TV infomercials always remind us...there's more. The bacon idiom above gave rise to another one still in use: 'to chew the fat,' which means 'to talk informally.'

The bacon hanging in the Elizabethan living room just described was not merely for show. Generous hosts would cut off a few thin slices to share with their guests, thus doubly impressing them.

Everyone would sit around the room and happily 'chew the fat' as the evening wore on, telling tall tales, comparing their new waistcoats, and making fun of the nobility.

No doubt when the guests had all returned home they realized that they had had the pleasure of living 'high off the hog,' if only for an evening.

But that's another idiom, for another time. ♦



Meryl Olmstead is a Toronto TESL educator and consultant. Meryl has contributed to several English textbooks widely used in Canadian curricula.