

【研修報告】

## **A report on the Fifth Pan Asian Conference on Language Teaching, at FEELTA, in Vladivostok, Russia, June 24th-27th 2004**

**Simon G. Capper\***

### **THE PAN ASIAN CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING.**

The Pan Asian Conference is a biennial opportunity for language teachers throughout East Asia to gather and discuss issues and developments in their profession. In previous years the conference has been held in Bangkok (1997), Seoul (1999), Kitakyushu (2001), Taipei (2002), and this year, in Vladivostok, Russia. This year's conference was hosted by the Far Eastern National University, and was organised by FEELTA (Far Eastern English Language Teachers' Association) with the active support of JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching), KOTESOL (Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), Thai TESOL (Thailand Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) and ETA-ROC (English Teachers' Association of the Republic of China). The conference also incorporated the Fourth Asian Youth Forum, which enables students of English from all the participating countries to gather and exchange views (in English) as in the main conference, discussing global issues, culture, language, and international understanding.

### **SHARING CHALLENGES: SHARING SOLUTIONS: TEACHING LANGUAGES IN DIVERSE CONTEXTS.**

The conference was a truly international forum, with over 300 concurrent sessions presented by more than 400 teachers from 24 different countries. This year's theme was 'Sharing Challenges, Sharing Solutions: Teaching languages in diverse contexts'. The theme proved to be appropriate for the conference, in that it was possible to interpret 'diverse contexts' in a number of

ways—applicable to social, educational and cultural aspects of the profession. This generated some highly stimulating, informative and edifying discussions. As the organising committee recognised, because of the size and diversity of the region "the varied cultural contexts we work in mean that there are many differences in our teaching situations, the challenges they present and the solutions we devise. What's going on in other countries in the region? What challenges do teachers there face? How do they go about solving them? Commonalities and differences both offer opportunities... not only to learn about each other but also to learn from each other".

### **PLENARIES, PRESENTATIONS AND POSTER SESSIONS.**

The conference featured plenaries from some language teaching luminaries, among them Stephen Krashen, (Free Voluntary Reading: New Research, Applications, and Controversies), Larry Smith (English as an Asian Language), and Simon Greenall, (Collecting and exploiting raw data for socio-cultural training in the classroom).

### **VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES: AN OUTLINE OF MY POSTER SESSION.**

As in many areas of ESP, nursing students have unique needs and teaching them offers unique challenges, among them, how to prevent learners from becoming intimidated, overburdened and demotivated by the large amounts of specialized language that they are required to learn. While vocabulary is far from our sole focus in Nursing English, it does feature in almost all aspects of language learning and therefore comprises a

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\* The Japanese Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing

significant part of the syllabus. Views regarding how vocabulary is best presented and learned vary greatly. Coady (1997) has identified four main positions:

**(i) Context Alone.** This view claims that all that is required for vocabulary acquisition is huge amounts of comprehensible language input. Essentially, vocabulary is learned incidentally and no explicit tuition is required.

**(ii) Strategy Instruction.** The second approach is one that derives from the belief that however intuitive learners may be in the process of acquisition from context alone, an awareness of vocabulary learning strategies will significantly increase learning efficiency. While some learners may be independently able to develop their own strategies, others will benefit from explicit training.

**(iii) Development plus Explicit Instruction.** This position argues that, particularly for lower proficiency or beginning learners, vocabulary instruction should be more direct, utilising memorization techniques and extensive reading (with the expressed purpose of attention-focused vocabulary development, rather than on incidental gains).

**(iv) Classroom Activities.** This fourth approach follows a more traditional vein of vocabulary instruction, based on activities designed to have a practical focus on vocabulary, but without being constrained (or guided) by any specific methodological guidelines. They may take the form of puzzles, gap fill activities or even traditional grammar translation work, with or without any pretence or aspiration towards immediate communicative value.

My belief is that, given the high demands placed on learners of nursing English and *with only limited class time available to them*, real success is only likely with relatively high degrees of learner autonomy, self-awareness, motivation and an appetite for independent learning. This will in turn require mastery (or at least awareness of) a battery of language learning strategies and memorisation techniques. For this reason, my approach is most strongly informed by positions (ii) and (iii) above.

My poster session demonstrated a variety of practical strategies and activities through which these learners may more easily develop their ability to remember and use new vocabulary. A twelve-page handbook of vocabulary development materials accompanied the presentation. Areas of particular emphasis included vocabulary learning and memorisation

strategies, the use of vocabulary cards, attention to collocations & contextualised vocabulary learning, training in the use of mnemonic devices, and word formation (affixes and roots).

My secondary objective for attending the conference was to initiate an e-mail exchange programme for our Red Cross nursing students. This met with mixed fortunes, despite meeting teachers from a wide variety of backgrounds, (teaching in countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, North & South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, the UAE, and of course, Russia). At the time of writing this report this has led to Red Cross nursing students engaging in e-mail exchanges with students in Malaysia, the UAE, and the USA, with further possibilities currently being explored in Singapore, Thailand, Spain and Russia.



Vladivostok Railway Station—Gateway to Siberia.  
Built 1912, and recently renovated.

## THE CITY OF VLADIVOSTOK, AND SOME CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS.

Vladivostok is a port city, the gateway to the Trans-Siberian express, and historically the home of the Russian Pacific fleet. This military significance and its distance from Moscow (7 hours flight, and 7 time zones away) led to the city being closed to foreigners until 1992. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, even Soviet citizens needed a visa to visit here, but nowadays the city is a thriving nexus for East Asian businessmen. Yet while Vladivostok's crumbling stonework may, *prima facie*, mirror its inhabitants, (and perfectly embody the etymological root of the word 'delapidation') the city has a charm and much to offer anyone with time to visit. Overall, one is left in little doubt that the better days of times gone by will surely come again.

Attending the conference was a hugely rewarding

experience, fortunately so after all the efforts made to get there. Finding a suitably direct route and obtaining a visa were problematic. Getting there required a 6:00 a.m. start from Hiroshima, only to arrive, via Niigata, at the Vladivostok Hotel around 10:00 p.m. Arriving in the city was a culture shock after clean and prosperous Japan. Russians are a hospitable people, when you get behind their rough and slightly intimidating facade, but service personnel, particularly in hotels and shops, were at best indifferent and at worst, almost entertainingly rude. Our hosts at the Far Eastern National University were however, unfailingly helpful, and their hospitality towards bewildered visitors, particularly those struggling with Russian (cyrillic) script and uncooperative hotel receptions, went above and beyond the call of duty.

### Appreciation

I would like to thank the Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing for their generous support, without which my attendance at this conference and the e-mail contacts made there would not have been possible.

### Reference

Coady, J. (1997). L2 Vocabulary acquisition: A synthesis of the research, In Coady, J. & Huckin, T. (Eds.), *Second Language Vocabulary acquisition* (pp.275-281). Cambridge: CUP.