



**Fall 2010**

www.atesl.ca

## President's Message

by Audrey Olson

As my year as president of ATESL comes to an end, and as we make final preparations for our annual conference in Edmonton, I am filled with awe at the number of volunteer hours willingly given by ESL-focussed professionals across the province.

There are many roles these volunteers play every day - teacher, tutor, administrator, researcher, funder, advocate, student, counsellor, mentor, friend. In addition, they commit to furthering the excellence and professionalism of English language teaching through activities such as committee work, Board service or conference organization. To all of them, my sincere thanks.

During this year, the ATESL Board members have worked on a number of fronts to support the membership. We signed an agreement with Alberta Employment and Immigration to complete a Resource Management project, which created a database of government funded resources and curriculum projects accessible through the ATESL website. We began a Curriculum Framework Project, also funded by AEI, which will provide assistance to programs across the province in creating well-designed curriculum to meet the needs of learners. We have contacted government on behalf of our members; we undertook a survey to help us determine the future of the accreditation procedure; we supported professional development through first-time presenter bursaries; and we have represented the interests of ESL in Alberta with national bodies such as TESL Canada and the CCLB Board. The diversity of our membership is now better represented as we have four active Local organizations in Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary and Lethbridge. ATESL is also in sound financial shape and our administrative officers and web presence provide the membership with access to information and needed support.

I would like to offer my special thanks to all the members of the ATESL Board for their dedication and many accomplishments this year and for the commitment of each one to excellence in representing the members of ATESL. In particular, thank you to Judy Sillito for sharing your heart as well as your expertise during your 3 years in a presidential role.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as president of ATESL. I wish Diane Hardy, our incoming president all the best during her tenure.

- Audrey

### President's message

A message from Audrey Olson

### Pragmatics in the ESL Classroom

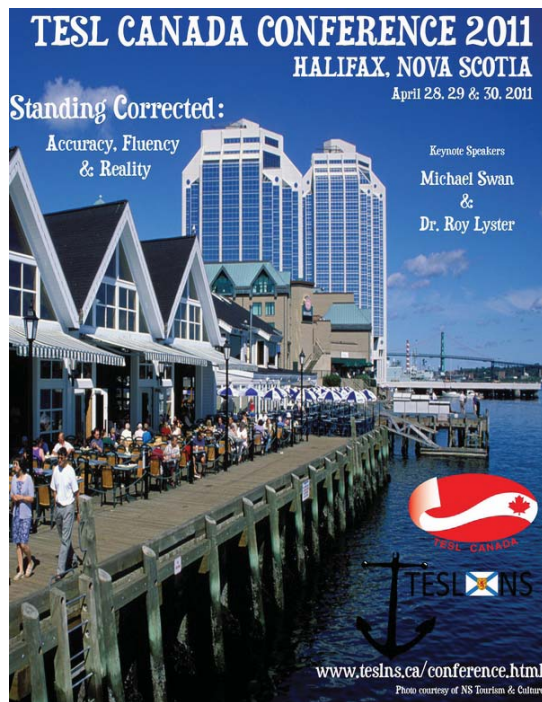
by Lori Diepenbroek

### In Conversation: Tsedale Aregawi

by Su Croll

### Learner contribution

Poem, *Here I Am* by Arnaldo Perez



### The ATESL Newsletter

is published quarterly.

Deadlines: **Feb.15, May 15, Aug.15, Nov.15**

Announcements, workshop dates, book reviews, teaching ideas, and articles relevant to the field.

Contact: Irene Wood at [atesl.admin@shaw.ca](mailto:atesl.admin@shaw.ca)

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## Here I am

by Arnaldo Perez

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Here I am saying yes instead of si,  
speaking with a different tone and rhythm  
building sentences word by word  
and thinking more of how to say than what to say

Here I am keeping a five foot distance from people  
avoiding eye contact to look polite  
saying sorry for everything  
and trying to give back any favour to not become indebted

Here I am calling friends for a visit two weeks in advance  
talking about weather and something else  
having two and a half small talks with my neighbour per year  
and coping with my natural instinct to hug men and kiss women

Here I am laughing without understanding the jokes  
treated politely for being a customer and occasionally for being human  
missing each day the sun falling into the sea  
and trying to keep alive the sound of the waves in my mind

Here I am waiting for my first dream in English and being afraid of it  
teaching my dog not to bark  
seeing a strange culture take over my daughter's  
way of thinking and feeling  
and selling myself in the big auction called the labour market

Here I am living in a city whose buildings, parks,  
streets, corners remind me of nothing  
imagining that the solitary maple leaf in the Canadian flag  
is the solitary star in the Cuban flag  
convincing myself that things could have been worse  
and writing this poem as if it were a math exercise

Here I am, or maybe not



## Pragmatics in the ESL Classroom

by Lori Diepenbroek

Although the focus in ESL classrooms has traditionally been on skills such as reading, writing, grammar, listening and speaking, there is a need to expand the “priority skills” to include pragmatic ability. Pragmatics is the “ability to use language appropriately according to the communicative situation” (Garcia, 2004, n.p.). Much of the literature about pragmatics focuses on speech acts (an utterance whereby a speaker tries to do something or get the hearer to do something, such as an apology or request – Garcia, 2004).

While there is a growing body of research about pragmatics, it is not clear whether this research is utilized in the classroom. This is a concern, since the literature suggests that, at least in the short term, pragmatic competence is unlikely to develop completely through exposure alone (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). It also suggests, however, that students who do receive instruction in pragmatics gain pragmatic competence more quickly and/or more thoroughly (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

Pragmatic instruction can be challenging for instructors, given the lack of resources available (Grant & Starks, 2001). Textbooks in particular have come under fire for a general lack of pragmatic content (Vellenga, 2004), oversimplified information (Basturkmen, 2001), and content that is based on the author’s perceptions and intuitions rather than naturally occurring speech (Boxer & Pickering, 1995).

In the study reported here, twelve instructors from two Canadian institutions with large ESL programs were surveyed to determine how they teach pragmatics in the classroom. The main questions I sought to explore were: a) Is the importance of pragmatics reflected in instructors’ views and practices? b) Where do instructors learn about pragmatics? What are their sources of knowledge? c) How are teachers dealing with pragmatics in the classroom? And d) what materials do they use to teach pragmatics, and do these materials reflect current research findings?

On the whole, instructors from both institutions rated pragmatics as very important. There was an awareness that good pragmatic abilities will help learners achieve their goals, regardless of their immediate academic context. Interestingly, most instructors rated the importance of pragmatics for their classes as higher than the importance assigned by the curricula.

The participant’s sources for background knowledge about pragmatics varied. However, only a handful of respondents had any formal training in pragmatics. Instructors indicated that they rely heavily on life experience. The literature suggests that teachers themselves need explicit training about pragmatics in order to deal with pragmatics accurately (Vaquez & Sharpless, 2009). It is worth exploring how well life experience translates into an ability to teach pragmatics. It is particularly of interest since some of the instructors who rated themselves as most confident in their knowledge and ability to teach pragmatics had little or no formal training.

Within the classroom, it appears that, while the textbooks used by the instructors are lacking both in quantity and quality of pragmatic material, most instructors use supplementary materials. There appears to be frequent utilization of role plays, discussions, and media sources (such as the Internet, television and movies). This is encouraging, given the reported lack of support in commercial texts and the need expressed by researchers (Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Grant & Starks, 2001) for teachers to draw on supplementary resources.

While most instructors found the most formulaic, most culturally imperative and most frequently occurring speech acts the easiest to teach (e.g., thanking, greeting), those acts that require more permutations and nuances were more difficult (such as denying a request). Many instructors struggle with teaching the underlying norms and values that are the foundation for speech acts and pragmatics in general.

Based on this survey, it does appear that some of the current research on pragmatics for L2 learners is having an impact on the “front lines”. However, rigorous classroom studies are required as a follow-up to determine which tools might best facilitate acquisition of pragmatics and whether ESL students are gaining the pragmatic skills they need to integrate well into their local communities.

### References

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### ATESL Mission Statement

The Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) is a professional organization that promotes the highest standards of teaching and English language program provision for all learners in Alberta whose first language is other than English. We do this by:

- encouraging and providing professional development opportunities that are consistent with generally accepted principles of adult learning and with currently understood principles of second language learning and teaching;
- liaising with other organizations, local, provincial, national, and international, engaged in education;
- creating awareness about immigration, settlement of immigrants, and English language learning by communicating with government, business, and the general public;
- encouraging awareness of issues of accountability and program standards by communicating with English language program providers and learners;
- encouraging the highest standards of teacher preparation and performance by administering an ESL teacher accreditation process;
- working collaboratively with government to develop policies and procedures which govern the provision of English language programs and related services for immigrants to Canada;
- encouraging and supporting the participation of learners in the decision-making processes that determine their educational choices.



In Conversation with ...

**Tsedale Aregawi**

## Coming Full Circle

By Su Croll, EMCN

As EAL teachers, we often wonder what happens to our students once they leave our classes or programs. I recently had the opportunity to speak with a former student from Edmonton Mennonite Centre's "Parenting and Literacy" and LINC programs.

Tsedale Aregawi is the kind of newcomer success story that EAL teachers love to hear about. She moved to Edmonton from her home country of Ethiopia in 2005. Almost immediately she joined the "Parenting and Literacy" program at EMCN with her then two-month old daughter where she was happy to meet with a welcoming community of other mothers. There Tsedale was able to work on English skills, but also to share her own cultural heritage through songs and rhymes in her home language, Amharic. One of the core philosophies of EMCN's parenting course is the importance of maintaining links to home language and culture even while students are integrating into Canadian society.

Thinking back to her time in the Parenting class, Tsedale said, "It's important for kids to keep their language so they can know their identities. We are rich in culture." Tsedale went on to explain that it isn't only important for children to know their mother tongues, but also for teenagers and young adults who will themselves carry the culture forward, while at the same time, retain ties with parents and grandparents.

Interestingly enough, in her present position with the Multicultural Co-op where she works with Ethiopian and Eritrean pregnant mothers, Tsedale is maintaining those cultural links that bind communities. She works as a translator and cultural liaison between women from her community and the medical system. She helps them make medical appointments and sometimes accompanies the women to doctors' offices to provide translation services and support.

Tsedale laughed when I commented that she was the teacher now. She admits that maybe she always was a bit of a teacher. Even when she was a student back home, she liked to help children with their Amharic alphabet. Education is important to Tsedale. Besides the parenting and literacy class, she also graduated from a LINC 4 class at EMCN where she says she felt truly mentored by teacher Karen Bradley. She then studied full-time at Norquest College, getting help with work-place English and following an "English for Careers" course. And now she has her own career at the same kind of agency that first helped her. She said, "If I can help someone who was like me when I came, that's good."

Tsedale would still like to continue improving her reading and writing skills. She wonders if additional part-time studies are in her future. On the other hand, she herself is a busy mom. Besides her job at the Multicultural Co-op, Tsedale has two children: a five-year old daughter and two-year old son who she will, no doubt, raise with pride in their home culture and love of their adopted one.

Now that she is no longer a newcomer, Tsedale feels she can help those who are. Her life has come full circle.

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