

## Some Considerations in Tutoring ESOL Students

1. Deficit model versus Additive model
  - a. Deficit model: The student is at a disadvantage because s/he speaks another language
  - b. Additive model: This student has great learning potential because s/he already speaks another language
  - c. What is your point of view as a tutor? Do you view students' language issues as deficits or as additives? This will affect how well your student will learn.
2. Language processing time used by second language learners
  - a. A lot of brain resources are used to do something deceptively simple
  - b. T's input > S hears > S translates > S considers meanings, nuances, and contexts > S extracts appropriate meaning > S formulates a response > S vacillates between L1 and L2 to formulate a response > S experiences shyness about pronunciation or writing, causing awkwardness or delay > response is emitted > S checks to see if response was received accurately

### 3. Cultural differences: The U.S. versus everybody else

The U.S.	Almost every other culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low-context</li> <li>• monochronic</li> <li>• linear-thinking</li> <li>• focus on exact words, exact meaning, ambiguity not tolerated</li> <li>• litigious and rigid</li> <li>• blunt, direct</li> <li>• writing begins with the central point, then explains it explicitly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high-context</li> <li>• polychronic</li> <li>• nonlinear-thinking</li> <li>• focus on emotional content and imagery; ambiguity preferred</li> <li>• negotiating, flexible</li> <li>• polite, indirect, face-saving</li> <li>• writing may not state a central point until the end, or perhaps never at all</li> </ul>

4. Different styles of academic writing in different cultures
  - a. Asian cultures
    - i. Hubris vs. humility; Face-saving vs. bluntness
    - ii. Common belief dictates that Great Writers Get Published, and Bad Writers Do Not. Therefore, all published writing must be by accomplished masters, and they are not to be questioned.
    - iii. Respectful, polite, high-context culture.
    - iv. Writing tends to "dance around" the topic without ever actually grappling with it. Writers tend to be shy about arguing with an author's claim and fear making powerful statements. "The nail that sticks out gets pounded down."
  - b. Arabic cultures
    - i. Image is more important than meaning; style is more important than accuracy.
    - ii. A negotiating culture; polychronic, high-context culture
    - iii. Writers tend to speak in vague, repetitive terms because the point is to create the image and feeling, not to put all the meaning into individual words. Writers

often want to argue all angles of a topic instead of focusing on one single angle so as to give a more complete picture. Descriptions can be lurid and sometimes emotionally charged.

- c. Latin cultures
    - i. Collectivist values over individualistic ones; family over independence
    - ii. High-context culture
    - iii. Writers do not always elaborate on what they feel should be universally understood. Values can appear to be the product of lack of examination or critical thinking when actually they reflect the comfort of being in a group and the absence of a need to be independently recognized for one's thinking.
  - d. TIP: Let students see that there is nothing wrong with their thinking or value system, but that it gets interpreted a certain way by American academic writing and reading. Their goal should be to become bicultural in their writing rather than to feel they have to adhere to rules that make no logical sense in their own culture and language.
5. Key Grammatical Difficulties for Learners of English (NOTE: sentence joining problems are not included here because they are not much more difficult for nonnative speakers than they are for native speakers.)
- a. Word form problems
    - i. In language learning, one usually learns one form of a word for a particular context and purpose: "I am a successful doctor." (new word: successful)
    - ii. This can lead to mistakes such as "I will successful at my next endeavor."
    - iii. TIP: Suggest that students do more thorough vocabulary study, looking up phonology AND all different forms. Show them how to find this in the dictionary.
  - b. Verb tense system
    - i. 3 tenses, 4 aspects = 12 verb tense forms (in active; also 12 in passive)
    - ii. Students have to learn the FORM (I have worked), the FUNCTION (started in past and continues to present) and the PHONOLOGY ( I've /workt/ ) of every single verb tense and aspect.
    - iii. Some verb tenses/aspects are composed of 2, 3, or 4 words, and each word takes a different form (base form, present participle, past, or past participle)

I worked He worked	I work he works	I will work he will work
I was working he was working	I am working he is working	I will be working he will be working
I had worked he had worked	I have worked he has worked	I will have worked he will have worked
I had been working he had been working	I have been working he has been working	I will have been working he will have been working

- iv. Many English tenses do not exist in other languages at all

- v. Some aspects are virtually identical (I have lived in San Bruno for ten years, I have been living in San Bruno for ten years) in some cases, and totally different in others (I have given him gifts; I have been giving him gifts)
  - vi. TIP: when working with verb tense, ask the student to describe what tense and aspect he/she wants to convey. “When is this action happening? Are you finished, or will it continue?” Then, ask them to pull out the correct tense that goes with that action. Finally, ask them “why is it correct?” to be sure they know it.
- c. Modals
- i. of the 9 modals, there are up to 20 different meanings.
  - ii. The modal precedes the verb, and the verb does not inflect – it stays in the base form. We say, “He should go” and not “He should goes” and “I could swim when I was young” and not “I could swam when I was young.”
  - iii. “You **must be** home at 9:00 or you will be grounded” vs. “You **must be** Bob. Nice to meet you.”
  - iv. The most subtlety of meaning in the English language exists in the modals – meaning can be entirely altered by misuse: “You may do that” (it’s your option) vs. “You may do that” (my permission is granted) vs. “You may not do that” (my prohibition).
  - v. TIP: With modal problems, ESL students should explicitly know the rule about the base form. You can remind them of this: “What’s the rule for verbs that follow a modal?” However, they may struggle with meaning, so try giving them feedback on it: “Saying ‘you have to go’ sounds like you’re commanding me. Are you just giving me advice? What can you use instead?”
- d. Singularity/noncountability
- i. Some are easy to understand: rice (not rices), hair vs. hairs, etc.
  - ii. Some are confounding. “There was no interest in the topic.” vs. “She has many interests.”
  - iii. TIP: Once you draw the student’s attention to several plural problems, ask the student to read the sentence with the error and make the correction themselves. They need training in looking for those plurals. You can also make lists of countable and noncountable nouns as they come up in the writing, and put them on a separate piece of paper. Give them to the student as a reference and suggest that they study them.
- e. The Myth of –ing and –ed
- i. Early in English language learning, students learn –ing as being part of the present continuous verb tense (I **am singing**), so they forever connect it with being a verb. They also learn –ed as past tense, and forever connect it with past tense.
  - ii. Later, they learn the paired participial adjectives such as **interesting/interested**, **boring/bored**. They are so confused by the differences between the two that they do not realize that they are dealing with –ing/-ed words.

- iii. Later, they learn gerunds (verbs that act as nouns): **Shopping** is fun.
  - iv. Later, they learn the passive voice (The window **was cleaned**)
  - v. Yet, they still cling dearly to the belief that –ing and –ed are verbs only because that was what they learned first.
  - vi. TIP: Remind them of this flexibility in –ing/-ed forms, and help them identify parts of speech in their sentences.
- f. Prepositions
- i. Prepositions are cultural. In English, you sit in your chair, but in Czech, you sit on your chair.
  - ii. Prepositions do not follow any logical rules: In the morning, in the evening, in the afternoon, at night (nearly every student will say “in the night”)
  - iii. Prepositions cannot be memorized by themselves to be used correctly. They must be memorized in collocation with other words. “He is **interested in** economics, but more **fascinated by** politics.”
  - iv. TIP: Train the student to look at the words next to the preposition. Use Google to enter a word, then look at the highlighted instances that come up, and show the student how to take note of what kinds of prepositions are next to those words.
- g. Collocations and idioms
- i. See attached.
  - ii. TIPS: don’t expect learners to know idioms. There is no reason to expect that they understand them, and they will often attempt to make literal meaning of them.
- h. Affect of the learner and the quality of the learning environment
- i. Learners who like the sound, the representation, the culture, and the identity of a language will learn it faster than learners who are offended or turned off by it.
  - ii. Learners who see themselves as functioning, self-actuated, good people in the language will learn it better than those who feel marginalized or persecuted.
  - iii. Learners whose sole experience with English is their English class will not get adequate models for English nor opportunity to practice it.
  - iv. Learners who have their lives socially and functionally compartmentalized into work, school, and family will also have language that is compartmentalized; that is to say, the things they learn in the one area may not cross over into the other areas because their affect and identity in those areas may have been established entirely by others, not by themselves.
  - v. TIP: Complement the student wherever uniqueness of expression occurs, and make him/her feel good about having created some identity in the language. Make sure the student is aware that you respect the hard work that she/he does in learning and writing in English. Engage the student in relaxing conversation that can illustrate the benefits of learning English well. Discuss some of your own struggles with writing so they can see that it’s not only nonnative speakers who have trouble with writing.

**A few resources:**

Iowa State University International Community Resources

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/international/CulturalDifferences3.html>

CATESOL Position Statement on the Differences between ESL and Basic Skills:

<http://www.catesol.org/eslbs.html>

Bridging Cultural Differences: American Public Relations Practices & Arab Communication Patterns:

<http://academic2.american.edu/~zaharna/arab-comm.htm>