

# ASIAN ESL STUDENTS AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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Between the 1990 and the 2000 censuses, the United States grew in population from 248,709,873 to 281,420,906. Currently, the U.S. population is estimated at over 300 million, making the United States one of the few major industrial countries that is gaining population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

Another significant change is the fact that the number of people in the United States aged five years and over who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 14 percent (31.8 million) in 1990 to 18 percent (47 million) in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). This figure could reach 40 percent of the population by the year 2050 (Lindholm-Leary, 2000).

The 1997 Language Census Report for California Public Schools revealed that 40 percent of Asian Pacific American (APA) children showed limited English proficiency, and the APA group was second to the Spanish-speaking population (Lee-Jerrens, 2005). Likewise, according to the 2000 census, Chinese is the most frequently spoken language at home other than English and Spanish. In the last decade, the number of Chinese speakers rose from 1.2 million to 2 million, an increase of 66.7 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The census further defined households as “linguistically isolated” if no one over 14 years of age spoke English “very well” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), although no data was given for Chinese-speaking households in this regard. In 2000 there were 11.9 million people living in 4.4 million households that were classified as “linguistically isolated” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The dramatic demographic changes have seriously affected the educational sector. From 1991–1992 to 2001–2002, the number of identified students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in U.S. public schools grew by 95 percent (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2002). According to Chun (1980), the lack of English proficiency results in “occupational segregation” for Asian Americans. Many Asian Americans tend to pursue careers that require less English proficiency; they focus on college majors in engineering and sciences rather than in humanities, such as law, journalism, and social science, which demand proficient communication skills (Lee-Jerrens, 2005). For recent Asian-American immigrants, limited English proficiency leads to low scores on the verbal section of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), which is the basis of college admissions; this further restricts their educational opportunities (Lee-Jerrens, 2005).

Teachers assisting students with diverse language backgrounds often are not well prepared, and there is a shortage of teachers certified to teach LEP students who require special language programs (Li & Zhang, 2004). A major concern for those ESL or LEP students is how to improve the quality of learning and

instruction in the mainstream classroom. Many cultural and linguistic differences exist among Asian-American subgroups, posing challenges for a meaningful literacy environment for this group. Minami (1995) revealed that Asian-American students are more likely to participate in the classroom when the teachers are sensitive to their needs and developmental issues.

Because of the significance of the problem, we decided to investigate the amount of instructional support being given to this growing section of the population by the major textbooks used in college undergraduate literacy courses. Specifically, the study concentrated on materials for teaching literacy at the elementary level, grades K–6. General literacy textbooks were examined because most Asian immigrant children find themselves in mainstream classes within a year of their arrival. In addition to assessing the gaps in coverage in standard literacy textbooks, this article directs teachers to journal articles and other resources that can help them to become more effective with Asian ESL students at the elementary level.

## Definition of Terms

The most widely used **college literacy textbooks** were identified by consulting specialists in the field and senior marketing managers from textbook publishers, and by examining publishers’ catalogs and required texts for literacy courses at a number of major colleges and universities.

**Asian ESL students**, for the purposes of this study, refer to Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese students who do not speak American Standard English as a first language.

**American Standard English** is the traditionally acceptable language of instruction (such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) used in schools (Vacca et al., 2006).

**Linguistic diversity** refers to the student’s family language or dialect that they are most comfortable using if it is different from the language used in the school (Vacca et al., 2006).

**Cultural diversity** refers to the student’s family culture that differs from the predominant culture of the school (Vacca et al., 2006).

**Culturally and linguistically diverse learners** are defined as students whose culture and language differ from those of the school (Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 2002, 64).

**Instructional strategies** refer to the instructional beliefs, activities, or techniques that teachers use in their classrooms to support their culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

The **manifest content of a text** refers to the obvious, surface content—words that are directly accessible to the eyes (Fraenkel

& Wallen, 2003, 487).

### The Lack of Coverage of Asian Immigrant Students' Needs in Literacy Textbooks

In order to examine the coverage of Asian ESL students' needs in literacy textbooks, we analyzed the manifest content of the most widely used college undergraduate literacy textbooks. The unit of analysis was the number of pages concerning cultural and linguistic diversity issues in the classroom in general, the linguistic differences between Asian ESL students' and American Standard English, and instructional strategies designed to assist Asian ESL students specifically to communicate in American Standard English. To check the reliability, the scoring agreement between the two researchers was set at 100 percent. Both researchers individually reviewed the same textbooks and then discussed any differences in scoring. The most widely used college literacy textbooks provided representative information regarding the Asian ESL students' learning needs.

Ten of the most commonly used textbooks in the college literacy programs were included in this analysis, including Cooper & Kiger (2006), Cramer (2004), Farris, Fuhler, & Walther (2004), Gunning (2005), Heilman, Blair, & Rupley (2002), Hennings, (2002), Roe, Smith, & Burns (2005), Strickland, Galda, & Cullinan (2004), Tompkins (2003), and Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon (2006). The ten textbooks were recommended by major publishers, including Pearson Education, Allyn & Bacon, Houghton Mifflin, Merrill/Prentice Hall, McGraw Hill, and Wadsworth/Thomson.

The results showed that (1) the ten general literacy textbooks devoted approximately 157 pages out a total of 5,998 pages (2.617 percent) to cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom, (2) less than one page out of the 5,998 pages examined dealt with any aspect of the linguistic differences between the first language of Asian ESL students and American Standard English, and (3) less than one page of all of the textbooks dealt with any specific instructional strategy designed to assist Asian ESL students to communicate in American Standard English.

In Appendix A, the title, author, and publisher of each textbook is listed, and both the number and percentage of pages addressing cultural and linguistic diversity in the literacy classroom are detailed accordingly. Topics discussed in the textbooks include language, literature, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, assessment, instruction, technology, culture, and family. The ten textbooks devote 157 pages, or 2.617 percent of the combined total of 5,998 pages, to the literacy needs of language minority students. The textbooks by Farris et al. (2004), Heilman et al. (2002), Strickland et al. (2004), and Vacca et al. (2006) respectively, account for more than 60 percent of the pages.

Appendix B presents the proportion of textbook content dealing with cultural and linguistic differences between the first language of Asian ESL students and American Standard English. As shown in Appendix A, some attention is being paid in several textbooks

#	TEXTBOOK TITLE, AUTHOR, & PUBLICATION YEAR	PUBLISHER	PAGES		
			Diversity	Textbook	%
1	<i>Literacy: Helping Children Construct Meaning</i> by Cooper, J. D., & Kiger, N. D. (2006)	Houghton Mifflin	2	561	.36
2	<i>The Language Arts</i> by Cramer, R. L. (2004)	Pearson/Allyn & Bacon	14	622	2.25
3	<i>Teaching Reading: A Balanced Approach to Today's Classrooms</i> by Farris, P. J., Fuhler, C. J., & Walther, M. P. (2004)	McGraw-Hill	25	698	3.58
4	<i>Creating Literacy: Instruction for All Students</i> by Gunning, T. A. (2005)	Pearson Education, Inc.	14	646	2.17
5	<i>Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading</i> by Heilman, A.W., Blair, T. R., & Rupley, W. H. (2002)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	24	594	4.04
6	<i>Communication in Action</i> by Hennings, D. G. (2002)	Houghton Mifflin	10	564	1.77
7	<i>Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary Schools</i> by Roe, B. D., Smith, S. H., & Burns, P. C. (2005)	Houghton Mifflin	10	605	1.65
8	<i>Language Arts: Learning and Teaching</i> by Strickland, D. S., Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2004)	Wadsworth/Thomson Learning	19	553	3.44
9	<i>Literacy for the 21st Century</i> by Tompkins, G. E. (2003)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	5	531	0.94
10	<i>Reading and Learning to Read</i> by Vacca, L. A. L., Vacca, R. T., Gove, M. K., Burkey, L., Lenhart, L. A., & McKeon, C. (2006)	Pearson Education, Inc.	34	626	5.43

to the general literacy needs of minority students. However, in Appendix B, the results are more alarming. Less than one page out of 5,998 deals with any aspect of the linguistic differences between the first language of Asian ESL students and American Standard English.

Appendix C reveals that less than one page of all of the textbooks deals with any specific instructional strategy designed to assist Asian ESL students to communicate in American Standard English. Although African-American and Latino students form the bulk of the minority population, more attention must be given to the growing number of Asian ESL students in our schools.

### The Low Level of English-Language Fluency in Speaking and Writing Among Asian ESL Students

The process of learning English is complex and needs to be tailored to the linguistic differences, cultural diversity, and individual needs of students. It is not realistic to expect that linguistically and culturally diverse students will read and write as competently as their counterparts within a short period of time. Collier (1992) points out that social and conversational proficiency may be acquired quickly, while complex academic language may take five years to master.

Asian Americans, including Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese, are from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. They come to school with varying degrees of English proficiency, ranging from Fluent English Proficient (FEP) to those who pri-

marily use their native language with limited English (Ruddell, 2002). They also suffer from various degrees of stress as a result of the immigration process (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). Thus, the expectation that Asian-American children will learn English, which is very different from their native language, within one year is not realistic (Lee-Jerrens, 2005).

Narain (1991) emphasizes the need for teachers of writing to understand the special needs of Asian ESL students. One difficulty is that the students have access to different idioms of the English language, including British English, native idiomatic spoken English, and American English. This exposure to different forms of written and spoken English causes confusion and necessitates students having to choose between passive or assertive forms of expression and language usage in a variety of social settings. In addition, Asian ESL students are often at a disadvantage in learning Standard English because their level of proficiency surpasses that of their parents, who are using their native language at home. Gipe (2006) argues that the phonological organization of Asian ESL students' native language might influence their auditory discrimination and oral reading ability. In order to communicate effectively in written and spoken English, Asian ESL students need to be able to write effectively and also use correct grammar and punctuation (Fitts, 2001).

Ruddell and Unrau (1994) propose a sociocognitive processing model of literacy for ESL students, as it includes the sociocultural settings that are involved in learning to write and speak English. Along similar lines, one report advocates the use of activities that incorporate literature, music, and relevant cultural materials to assist Asian ESL students with their English pronunciation (Katchen, 1988). Katchen also suggests that the students should practice with written passages that are longer than sentences in order to understand the stress patterns and rhythm of Standard English. A teaching guide developed by Dixon (1993) is designed to help Asian ESL students who lack fluency in written English. Dixon concentrates on the cultural heritage and background experiences of Asian students, using that as a springboard to teach English.

### The Differences Between Asian Language Structures and English Require a Different Approach to Teaching English to the Asian ESL Students

The value of the home language should be acknowledged and respected. Cullinan (1974) argues that all language varieties should be regarded as equally valid, and that Standard English is not basically better than any nonstandard dialect. S. Krashen (Lee-Jerrens, 2005) indicates that literacy skills can

### Appendix B: Proportion of Textbook Content Dealing with Cultural and Linguistic Differences Between the First Language of Asian ESL Students and American Standard English

#	TEXTBOOK TITLE, AUTHOR, & PUBLICATION YEAR	PUBLISHER	PAGES		
			Asian ESL Students	Textbook	%
1	<i>Literacy: Helping Children Construct Meaning</i> by Cooper, J. D., & Kiger, N. D. (2006)	Houghton Mifflin	0	561	0
2	<i>The Language Arts</i> by Cramer, R. L. (2004)	Pearson/Allyn & Bacon	0	622	0
3	<i>Teaching Reading: A Balanced Approach to Today's Classrooms</i> by Faris, P. J., Fuhler, C. J., & Walther, M. P. (2004)	McGraw-Hill	0	698	0
4	<i>Creating Literacy: Instruction for All Students</i> by Gunning, T. A. (2005)	Pearson Education, Inc.	0	646	0
5	<i>Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading</i> by Heilman, A.W., Blair, T. R., & Rupley, W. H. (2002)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	0	594	0
6	<i>Communication in Action</i> by Hennings, D. G. (2002)	Houghton Mifflin	0	564	0
7	<i>Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary Schools</i> by Roe, B. D., Smith, S. H., & Burns, P. C. (2005)	Houghton Mifflin	0	605	0
8	<i>Language Arts: Learning and Teaching</i> by Strickland, D. S., Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2004)	Wadsworth/Thomson Learning	0	553	0
9	<i>Literacy for the 21st Century</i> by Tompkins, G. E. (2003)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	0	531	0
10	<i>Reading and Learning to Read</i> by Vacca, L. A. L., Vacca, R. T., Gove, M. K., Burkey, L., Lenhart, L. A., & McKeon, C. (2006)	Pearson Education, Inc.	0	626	0

### Appendix C: Proportion of Textbook Content Dealing with the Instructional Resources and Strategies Designed to Assist Asian ESL Students to Communicate in American Standard English

#	TEXTBOOK TITLE, AUTHOR, & PUBLICATION YEAR	PUBLISHER	PAGES		
			Asian ESL Students	Textbook	%
1	<i>Literacy: Helping Children Construct Meaning</i> by Cooper, J. D., & Kiger, N. D. (2006)	Houghton Mifflin	0	561	0
2	<i>The Language Arts</i> by Cramer, R. L. (2004)	Pearson/Allyn & Bacon	0	622	0
3	<i>Teaching Reading: A Balanced Approach to Today's Classrooms</i> by Faris, P. J., Fuhler, C. J., & Walther, M. P. (2004)	McGraw-Hill	0	698	0
4	<i>Creating Literacy: Instruction for All Students</i> by Gunning, T. A. (2005)	Pearson Education, Inc.	0	646	0
5	<i>Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading</i> by Heilman, A.W., Blair, T. R., & Rupley, W. H. (2002)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	0	594	0
6	<i>Communication in Action</i> by Hennings, D. G. (2002)	Houghton Mifflin	0	564	0
7	<i>Teaching Reading in Today's Elementary Schools</i> by Roe, B. D., Smith, S. H., & Burns, P. C. (2005)	Houghton Mifflin	0	605	0
8	<i>Language Arts: Learning and Teaching</i> by Strickland, D. S., Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2004)	Wadsworth/Thomson Learning	0	553	0
9	<i>Literacy for the 21st Century</i> by Tompkins, G. E. (2003)	Merrill/Prentice Hall	0	531	0
10	<i>Reading and Learning to Read</i> by Vacca, L. A. L., Vacca, R. T., Gove, M. K., Burkey, L., Lenhart, L. A., & McKeon, C. (2006)	Pearson Education, Inc.	0	626	0

transfer from the primary language to other languages. Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey's study (Lee-Jerrens, 2005) also reports that children who are literate in their native language are more likely to enjoy long-term academic achievement. Green (1991) states that the typological features of the first language transfer to the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, the learners' home language should be valued and accepted as part of their second language acquisition and learning (Commins, 1989; Walters & Gunderson, 1985).

In Minami's study (1995), the home languages of the Asian-American students were used as both a medium and an object of instruction. When Asian-American students' language interferes with their ability to communicate efficiently in American Standard English, it is important for the teacher to identify the inter-language interference and to explore ways to help the students adapt to the situation, in both spoken and written forms of communication.

Although none of the ten literacy textbooks used in the present study discussed linguistic differences between the first language of Asian ESL students and American Standard English, a number of research papers offer relevant information on the topic. The following is a compilation of the most useful and practical teaching suggestions to assist Asian ESL students to become proficient in Standard English.

## Chinese

Yang (2001) outlines a number of noticeable differences between written Chinese and English. For example, Chinese-speaking students tend to use an indirect style of written discourse without a definite conclusion, and generally omit references to their sources. She therefore suggests that Chinese-speaking students should learn to emulate the English writing conventions of using a personalized, rhetorical style of discourse, and a thorough documentation of all citations used in their work.

Taborek & Adamowski (1984), Green (1991), Yang (2001), and Ruddell (2002) illustrate other noticeable linguistic differences between Chinese and English.

- **Inflection:** The lack of word inflections in denoting tense, plural nouns, and parts of language cause Chinese speakers to fail to add -ed for past tense, to add -s for plural nouns, to use third-person singular verbs, or to modify word endings when the word function changes (Yang, 2001). Verbs and adjectives do not change with number because the quantity of a noun in Chinese is reflected by the use of an amount before the noun (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984). Three apples is expressed as "three apple" (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984); other examples are: "He LIVE in San Francisco" (Ruddell, 2002) and "Many HOUSE beautiful" (Ruddell, 2002).
- **Suffixes:** No suffixes are applied to nouns, adjectives, and adverbs (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984). For example, "happy" can be used as an adjective, adverb, or noun; its ending does not change to "happily" or "happiness."
- **Topic-prominence:** The topic always comes first, while the subject is less significant than the topic. The subject also

may be omitted in conversation (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984). "Very hot" means "It is very hot."

- **Word order:** The adjective is placed after a noun and becomes a predicate (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984). "The great man" is stated as "The man great." The word order of an interrogative sentence is the same as that of a statement (Green, 1991; Ruddell, 2002; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984). For example, "You go home?"
- **Omission:** The auxiliary verb "be" is usually omitted (Ruddell, 2002), as in, for example, "He (is) sick." "To" is omitted after "come" or "go" (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984), as in "He comes (to) New York." Prepositions are omitted or misused (Ruddell, 2002). For example, "I live (in) San Francisco." The definite article "the" is omitted because there is no "the" in Chinese to make nouns specific, and the position of a noun in a sentence is used to refer to a definite person or thing (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984).
- **One morpheme:** Chinese speakers have difficulty telling the boundaries of multi-syllabic words in English (Taborek & Adamowski, 1984; Green, 1991).
- **Subordinate clauses:** Double transitions are used (Taborek & Adamowski, 1984; Green, 1991). For example, "because... therefore," "although... but."
- **Passives:** Chinese speakers usually fail to use the passive in English. Verbs usually have identical active and passive voice forms (Green, 1991; Taborek & Adamowski, 1984).

## Japanese

Mariko (1999) discusses the differences between Japanese and Standard English and gives examples of error analysis.

- **Syntactic errors in constructions that are different in English and Japanese,** such as "That is *why* people *wonder if*..." (unable to understand the relation between "why" and "wonder if").
- **Syntactic errors due to sentence processing,** such as "The news didn't say what brought him there or where his parents were *when this strange incident happened*" (failing to understand that the italicized clause is a dependent clause linking to "where his parents were").
- **Lexical errors, mostly polysemy.** "You have probably seen at least one or two Charlie Chaplin's films, I am sure" (misunderstanding "I am sure" at the end of the sentence as "definitely").
- **Lexical errors interpreting word classes.** "Fact is *stranger* than fiction" (misinterpreting "stranger" as the noun).
- **Lexical errors misrepresenting within a word class.** No examples given.
- **Lexical errors involving cultural misunderstandings** (misinterpreting 32 degrees Fahrenheit as 32 degrees Celsius).
- **Lexical errors involving formal similarity of words.** "University degree essential" (mistaking the word "university" for "universality").
- **Unknown common/colloquial expressions in language:** "Thanks for stopping by!"

- Errors in the text: “a *ligne* of cosmetics” (typographical error for “line”).

## Korean

There exist cultural preferences for ways of showing disagreement. According to Bell (1998), Korean ESL learners' expression of disagreement is more direct and forceful than that of American native speakers. Americans' expression of disagreement is a more indirect style termed “token agreement” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, 114). Bell's 1998 study shows that the Korean ESL learners prefer direct rather than polite strategies regardless of whether the addressee interprets their words as threatening. This study also reveals that Korean ESL learners adjust their politeness strategies based on the age and status of the addressee, with the higher-status addressee treated more politely.

## Vietnamese

The Vietnamese language is monosyllabic and tonal with few consonant clusters. There are many diphthongs and triphthongs but few final consonants or disyllabic combinations. Some phonemes are the same for English and Vietnamese, but many English phonemes are not in the Vietnamese language, and many Vietnamese phonemes are not in Standard English. The influence of Vietnamese on English constructions could impact phonological productions and cause difficulties for Vietnamese English language learners. Phonemes and syllable structure used must be similar to Standard English whenever possible, and the teacher must check the level of difficulty for both receptive and expressive tasks (Hwa-Froelich & Matsuo, 2005).

ESL students use rules from their native language schemata in learning English, and therefore many of their so-called errors are the result of the influence of their native language rather than linguistic or cognitive deficits (Green, 1991). Thus, teachers who can comprehend their Asian students' “idiosyncratic” expressions, either in written or oral form, are more able to provide useful feedback to facilitate those Asian students' literacy development.

## Asian ESL Students' Different Learning Styles Impact Their Learning

Children from culturally diverse backgrounds may have learning styles very different from what is expected by mainstream teachers, and there are identifiable learning styles for Asian students. One characteristic of the Asian learning style is a teacher-centered, closure-oriented learning mode, leading Asian students to dislike ambiguity, uncertainty, or fuzziness (Rao, 2001). Many students in Asian countries view the learner's role as to receive knowledge rather than to discover or interpret it (Rao, 2001). Japanese and Korean students are usually introverted, shy, quiet, and reticent; they are reluctant to overtly express their emotions, opinions, or disagreement in the English-language classroom (Harshbarger, Ross, Tafoya, & Via, 1986; Song, 1995). Sato's 1982 study (cited in Rao, 2001) indicates that Asian students took fewer speaking turns than non-Asian students did. Chinese students valued “listening to the teacher” in the language classroom (Liu &

Littlewood, 1997). They tended to be less autonomous and more dependent on authority figures and more obedient to rules (Sue & Kirk, 1972). Likewise, Korean students viewed the teacher to be the authority (Harshbarger et al., 1986).

Other characteristics include visual, concrete-sequential, analytic, thinking-oriented, reflective learning, kinesthetic, tactile, individual, and field-dependent learning styles. Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean students are visual learners and tend to rely on visual stimulation; any oral directions without visual backup seem to be confusing for them (Park, 2002; Reid, 1987). Chinese and Japanese students make use of strategies, such as planning, analysis, memorization, sequenced repetition, outlines, and lists for structured review (Rao, 2001). Japanese and Chinese students show greater reflection and concern for precision as compared with American students (Anderson, 1993; Condon, 1984).

The learning styles of Asian students must be acknowledged to avoid teaching-learning style conflicts. Mismatches between learning and teaching styles diminish students' motivation to learn. Students might become bored, inattentive, or discouraged and decide to give up (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991). Conflicts between teaching and learning styles consistently and negatively affect students' grades (Wallace & Oxford, 1992). As expressed by an English-major college student to his American teacher in China, the introverted, analytic, and reflective learning styles of Asian students are often at odds with the extroverted, global, and impulsive teaching styles of U.S. instructors (Rao, 2001).

Reid's study (1987) points out that the longer the time the students have been in the United States, the more auditory their learning style preference becomes. Some variance can be found in the learning style preference among various Asian groups. Korean students are more visual than Japanese students. Chinese students are strong visual learners, while Japanese students are the least auditory of the three ethnic groups (Reid, 1987).

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ESL students prefer kinesthetic and tactile learning (Dunn et al., 1990; Reid, 1987) and do not like group learning (Reid, 1987). Chinese-American students prefer to study alone rather than with peers (Dunn et al., 1990), and Korean students in Korea prefer structured and formal classes (Suh & Price, 1993). In Park's study (2002), Vietnamese ESL learners showed greater preference for group learning than Korean ESL students.

Bridging the gap between the instructor's teaching styles and the students' learning styles can not only maximize students' classroom learning (Breen, 1998; Rao, 2001) but also enhance students' learning motivation, performance, and achievement (Brown, 1994). “The narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes” (Kumaravadivelu, 1991, 98). Numerous studies argue that the match between teaching and learning styles can reduce teacher-student conflicts (Griggs & Dunn, 1984; Smith & Renzulli, 1984).

Asian students are more likely to participate in classroom activities when the teachers are sensitive to their needs and to their ongoing life development, and when they provide solid instruction (Minami, 1995). However, as Suarez-Orozco and Gardner (2003) point out, many teachers are not being made fully aware

of the instructional challenges posed by the increased diversity of school populations. Therefore, it is necessary to learn how to interact with students who have a different language, culture, and value system in order to help them grow academically and reach their potential.

In sum, the need to improve English proficiency for Asian ESL students is crucial for success in education, careers, and life. The teacher needs to acknowledge and support Asian Americans' cultural and linguistic differences and to provide meaningful teaching strategies. The inclusion of the Asian Americans' native language into the literacy learning environment will provide a sense of security, promote self-esteem, and encourage these students to learn at their own pace. The teaching of English language skills through bilingual Asian-English literacy texts will increase the readers' interest, curiosity, and pride and encourage them to read more literature.

### **Instructional Resources and Strategies Designed to Assist Asian ESL Students to Communicate in American Standard English**

This section provides resources that preservice and in-service teachers can use to find the information missing in the textbooks, along with suggestions for teaching literacy to this immigrant group.

For immigrant students, language problems as well as lack of access to individualized teacher assistance can create a tremendous strain. A number of studies cited in Li & Zhang (2004) indicate that inappropriate materials and ineffective instructional methods can lead to low achievement in English learning no matter how long the student remains in ESL classes. The authors cite the case of a 14-year-old sixth grader from China who still suffered from limited English proficiency, although she had been in a pull-out ESL program for two years (Li & Zhang, 2004).

There are a number of bilingual instructional programs aimed at teaching English to ESL students. Three basic types of bilingual instruction are submersion, submersion + ESL, and immersion (as cited in Lee-Jerrens, 2005). The submersion approach places LEP students in regular classrooms with English speakers, without providing special or extra support. The submersion + ESL approach places LEP students in an ESL class for one hour every day, and the rest of the school day in classes with native English speakers. The immersion approach places students in all-English classes, except for language arts, within which the primary language of those LEP students is taught. Lee-Jerrens (2005) indicates that an English-only learning environment does not provide a sense of security, promote self-esteem, or encourage LEP students to learn at their own pace.

Mahoney (1994) advocates the inclusion of works by Asian authors writing in English as texts in ESL classes with Asian students. The teaching of English language skills through these texts has the following advantages (Mahoney, 1994):

- Using such texts may increase Asian students' motivation to read more literature by writers from their own culture and, from there, more literature in general.
- Some Asian literature in English may be easier to compre-

hend and may therefore be more accessible to Asian students. This will increase confidence in reading and help students to improve their reading skills.

- These texts may give Asian students a positive psychological boost to realize that Asian writers are internationally recognized as writers in English. Such writers may act as role models for Asian students.
- Reading works by Asian authors in English may give Asian students a sense of ownership of the English language. This may help shape a positive attitude to the language and increase students' motivation to master it.
- It may be easier, at first, to teach basic literary concepts through such literature. For example, concepts of motive and characterization may be initially more accessible to students in the more familiar environment of some Asian literature in English.

Lay (1991) has developed an extensive guide for college teachers with Chinese-speaking students who are learning English. He includes examples of common difficulties encountered by the Chinese students, who are used to reading from right to left and vertically in columns from top to bottom. Lay also gives a detailed account of specific problems in writing, including the use of articles, tenses, verbs, clauses, prepositions, and word order.

### **Implications for Future Teachers and Schools**

Asian ESL students often have difficulty finding resources to improve their literacy skills in American Standard English. Bilingual educational programs especially designed for Asian Americans are rare, and there are also limited resources to help these students learn English in schools (Hinton, 1999).

In order to adequately assist children who are learning English as a second language, literacy teachers need to consider the language variations and cultural values among their students, and adjust their instructional strategies accordingly. Yang (2001) points out that many grammatical errors of Asian ESL students are caused by the grammatical structures of their language. Teachers are able to diagnose the real learning problems and provide remedial assistance if they are aware of the differences between Asian languages and American Standard English.

Teaching styles need to be adjusted to the idiosyncratic linguistic characteristics as well as the diverse learning styles of the Asian ESL students in order to help Asian ESL students become effective strategy users and self-directed learners. Park's study (2002) reveals that Asian ESL college students prefer kinesthetic and tactile learning but not group learning, although some Vietnamese ESL students are amenable to small group arrangements. In addition, Chinese and Korean ESL students are more visually oriented than their English-speaking counterparts (Park, 2002). Park suggests that teachers use more visual aids in teaching, such as real objects, pictures, charts, character webs, maps, graphs, computer graphics, graphic organizers, semantic maps, films, and videos, and that students be encouraged to draw pictures and create charts and diagrams in their learning (Park, 2002).

Teachers must value their students' family cultures and learn strategies to overcome cultural dissonance. Cheng (1998) argues

that cultural differences often confuse Asian-American students in a school setting. Asian classrooms tend to be more structured, while American teaching styles are more participatory and interactive. To help Asian ESL students improve their discourse skills in English, teachers need to provide classroom strategies to help them overcome this cultural dissonance. For example, teachers can explicitly explain school discourse rules and provide explicit comparisons between languages (Chinese, for instance, is tonal and non-inflectional, while English is intonational and inflectional). Teachers can create skits scripted with discourse rules, read stories aloud to students, and expose students to various narrative styles such as letters, stories, newspapers, magazines, biographies, and poetry (Cheng, 1998).

The writers believe that undergraduate preservice teacher education textbooks should include material that informs teacher candidates of the basic linguistic differences between the first language of Asian ESL students and American Standard English. This material could be also part of an integrated unit in diversity, or could be included in units of instruction embedded in regular literacy courses.

While the writers understand and appreciate the difficulty of including new content in existing education curricula, we feel that the need to address the urgent literacy problems faced by many immigrant students is of paramount importance. A key feature of a democratic society is to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities to benefit and prosper. In the case of Asian ESL students, assisting them to communicate more effectively in American Standard English would be a major achievement in this endeavor.

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