

**FUSIONS OF HORIZONS:
THE ONTOLOGICAL CHALLENGE OF ENGLISH FOR ADULT IMMIGRANTS**

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Faculty
of
Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

March 1996

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ABSTRACT

The problem of slow learning by adult immigrants in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes is considered from a view of language derived from Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1989).

Initially, the view of centring language in an understanding of being, *ontologia*, as opposed to regarding language as *episteme*, as an object of knowing, is justified against a background of Western epistemology. It is argued that Gadamer's view of understanding steers a course between the problematic objectivity of positivist theorizing and the contradictions of relativist views of interpretation. It is shown that an ontological view of language can present a powerful challenge to instrumentalist theories about language, in which language is primarily regarded as a tool of communication.

From Gadamer's ideas of tradition and culture, it is argued that ESL teaching for immigrants should be primarily concerned with encouraging social integration. The emphasis upon group-identity in a multicultural context, currently prevalent in much socio-political theorizing about ESL training for immigrants in Canada, is challenged within a discussion of the ideas of identity and democracy from an ontological perspective.

In the last two chapters, current views of second language needs implicit in influential adult ESL curricula models are critically examined. It is argued that a skewed emphasis upon the

functional needs of ESL learners does little to help them strive beyond the threshold of initial proficiency. A redefinition of immigrant needs is offered, wherein both the personal challenge of self-formation and the social challenge of building a pluralistic democracy are emphasized.

Gadamer's understanding of self-formation is extended to the consideration of identity and change in the adult learner. Finally, suggestions are offered for aesthetic content in immigrant ESL curricula, to balance functional language needs with those of self-formation and social integration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Gloria Sampson and Kieran Egan for their patient editing. Thanks also to Vancouver Community College, for the professional development and part-time educational leave without which I would have been unable to complete this work. Certainly not least, I thank my family for their support over the last year.

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PREFACE

There is the surveyor from the far north of China, touching for the first time, the pebbled skin of an avocado. Nearly fumbling it, she drops it from one cupped hand to other. Quickly passing it on round the horseshoe of desks, she takes the dish of yellow green slices which comes after. Still smiling nervously, she pushes it onto the next desk and grabs for her electronic translation dictionary. While fellow students--between nibbles--whisper the new word, the surveyor summons Chinese characters into liquid crystal. Cocked to the dictionary's tiny speaker for the digitized sound ("Av-o-ca-do"), she copies the letters in her notebook under bold Chinese characters. The remembering of a bit of English, surely, does not demand the tasting of a thing so strange!

My official job title is 'instructor of ESL' (English as a second language). I work in a settlement ESL programme, which means that I have the duty of helping, in a classroom context, adult immigrants gain the language skills they need to get a foothold in Canada. It is always a pleasure to bump into former students on the street, or see them back in school for more specialized vocational training. It is particularly pleasing to chat on equal terms with former ESL beginners knowing that they now have at least as big a stake as I can claim in this country of ours.

Yet it is chance meetings with the less-confident former students which tend to linger in mind. Like the encounter at the

bus stop recently, with the surveyor I have just described. Three years after her settlement ESL programme, she was taking an ESL morning class at a community centre. At the upper beginner's level, she awkwardly informed me. Three years after she refused to taste the avocado, her English was no less fragile.

There are many such ongoing ESL clients, sadly, who need something more than they are getting from ESL classes. Their failure to get beyond barely functional English excludes them from the broader social participation they deserve in this country. A host of second language acquisition (S.L.A.) theories attempt to explain why some adults have difficulty learning other languages. I will discuss several of these theories in my latter chapters. The technicalities of many S.L.A. models, however, little satisfies my desire to know why a particular student in a particular situation should be alone in declining to try something new.

I start from the conviction that what goes on in the settlement ESL classroom is a far deeper engagement than language skills instruction. I begin my research with the view that to better understand the particular difficulties of adult ESL learners--to better understand the social engagement of settlement ESL--it is necessary to look beyond S.L.A. theory.

In his landmark survey of issues surrounding the teaching of language, Stern (1983, pp. 35-45) discusses several conceptual frameworks within which the teaching of English may be situated (eg. Mackey, 1965; Strevens, 1876; Spolsky, 1978; Campbell, 1980). While such models look well beyond applied linguistics and

encompass a range of fields as diverse as anthropology and psychology, sociology and pedagogy--none of the frameworks described by Stern includes philosophy.

My desire to better understand difficulties in language learning which encompass the particularities of individuals in particular situations, however, leads me to explore issues which are at bottom, philosophical. The desire to explore understandings of the nature of language which may go beyond the scope of linguistics, has led me to the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In Gadamer, I find a particularly penetrating critique of what I shall describe throughout this text as an instrumentalist view of language and learning. By this, I mean a view of language as tool of communication; a tool which may be ultimately posited as an object of investigation. This use of the word 'instrumentalist', incidentally, is not to be equated with the pragmatism usually associated with James, Dewey or Pierce (Flew, 1984).

In my initial acquaintance with Gadamer's work, I was impressed by his seeming reverence for language compared with the too-often bloodless jargon of much of linguistic theory. "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world", he writes, "rather on it depends the fact that man has a world at all" (1989, p. 378). What I understood seemed rather at odds with previous references to Gadamer I had encountered, in which his ideas were cited in defence of constructivist and post-modern positions, such as I will discuss. Intrigued by this interest in Gadamer's work

across a range of ideological positions, I decided that *Truth and Method*, however demanding, deserved a close and careful read.

While Gadamer's seminal work offers few direct references to education or to the teaching of language, *Truth and Method* does present a powerful argument, in my view, for centring language in *ontologia*, that is in an understanding of being, as opposed to regarding language as *episteme*, an object of knowing. My first chapter will explore Gadamer's ontological view of language and his critique of instrumentalist views of language. I will also briefly consider the language theory of John Ellis (1993) which challenges a number of the assumptions of more established linguistic theories. In my second chapter, I will discuss the political background of settlement ESL. I will connect the instrumentalist view of language to curricular emphases on cultural difference and ethnic identity--emphases which, I will argue, do not promote mainstream integration. In Chapter Three, I will relate the problem of slow learning in ESL settlement classes to the narrow focus of curricula which address newcomers' instrumental needs. In my final chapter, I will propose curricular content which is more resonant with an ontological view of ESL learning for immigrants than that content offered by conventional instrumentalist approaches.

So while this text is about the challenges which the learning of English poses to adult immigrants in Canada, in the broadest sense, my topic is language itself. Of course the workings of language, as Steven Pinker has observed (1994), may be as far from our awareness as the rationale for egg-laying is from the fly. At

the outset, I acknowledge that more deeply satisfying insights into the mysterious nature of language (if indeed, language can be posited as having a 'nature') may well be derived through literary explorations, or even through spiritual quests than through such exposition as I offer here.

In my proposal to survey a range of complex issues which could engage a lifetime of research and scores of theses--I realise that I open myself to the charge of being casual, possibly naive. I suppose that scholars who fix upon the anti-foundational aspect of Gadamer's thought (eg. Madison, 1988; Smith, 1991) would find my approach objectionable. Undeniably, questions of foundations are central to my purpose here. My adaptation of philosophical discourse, particularly in Chapter One, might be assumed to betray some conceit of what Barthes called the readerly text--writing which not only assumes false majesty, but which fails to honestly situate its author's ideological stance (Olsen, 1990). While I do not interpret Gadamer as post-modern, as I shall explain, neither do I attempt to build a theory of language nor one of language education upon an ontological 'foundation.'--such would be contrary to the spirit of Gadamer's thought. My intention, rather, is to explore a fresh perspective through which I might better understand the difficulties of language learning which I daily confront in the classroom.

In this regard, I invoke Aristotelian distinctions to which Gadamer refers throughout *Truth and Method*. *Techne* and *phronesis* are seldom acknowledged in their vital relation to *episteme* and

praxis, theoretical knowing and doing. Whereas *techne* relates to the employment of skill in the making of things as ends in themselves, *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, relates to ethical judgement and action in particular instances (Kaplan, 1958; Hoy, 1978). It is practical wisdom to which we often appeal for direction in our daily affairs and practical wisdom, much more than skill or theoretical knowing, to which 'experienced' teachers often appeal in curricular judgements (Fenstermacher, 1992). For guidance here, I also appeal to *phronesis*. Put simply, as I proceed through this difficult terrain I will try to remain clear-headed and honest about what makes sense within the context of the classroom, as I have experienced it.

My effort in Chapter One to situate Gadamer's thought within an historical framework of epistemology assumes no mastery of philosophical issues which are labyrinthine in complexity. In sketching the background against which Gadamer's view of language can be described, my initial strokes are admittedly broad. Incidentally, issues central to *Truth and Method* which are tangential to my purpose, such as Gadamer's critique of positivist science, his view of aesthetics, or his place within the tradition of hermeneutics are clearly addressed in such studies as those of Hoy (1978), Weinsheimer (1985), Warnke (1987) or How (1995). Despite an interest in these issues, I emphasize that my approach to Gadamer is directed by particular interests in adult second language learning.

CHAPTER ONE:
AN ONTOLOGICAL VIEW OF TRUTH AND METHOD

(i) The problem of validity in theories of knowledge.

How can any theory--even a theory of knowledge--be viewed apart from a theorizer? How can commonly-held knowledge exist without common criteria? How might such common criteria be described? However posed, questions about the relationship between the knower and the objects of knowing have been at the centre of western epistemology (Gk. *episteme*, knowledge) since its beginnings in classical Greek philosophy.

In seeking criteria for knowledge claims, epistemology has traditionally focused upon models from the natural sciences where precision of claims and rigour of method would seem to increase the candidacy for legitimacy. Yet despite the dazzling technical achievements arising from the theory and research of physics, chemistry or biology, these empirical sciences rest upon foundations which have long been questioned within philosophical discourse. Foundational assumptions such as that of causality within sense data and that of a distinction between natural phenomena and a knowing subject have been questioned by sceptics from the presocratic, Xenophanes, to empiricist, David Hume. Moreover, an idealist tradition (Spinoza, Leibnitz, Schopenhauer, Hegel) has both sought justification for the possibility for

knowledge beyond a narrow empirical basis and pursued transcendental bases for such possibilities.

In any case, the pursuit of validity through the hypothetico-deductive method of empirical science (Flew, 1984) has historical roots stretching back to Aristotle's grand categorization of the domains of potential knowledge in which the investigation of natural phenomena ('physics') is separated from inquiries into 'metaphysics' and 'ethics' (Kaplan, 1958). In pursuing *episteme*, theoretical knowledge, Aristotle assumed the separation of the rational subject from the object of investigation.

In more direct lineage to empirical science's subject/object separation is Descartes' (1641) dualistic view of rational mind intermingling with, yet separated from, corporeal body. This Cartesian view of a reason potentially disengaged from the world may have reached its apogee earlier in the present century within particular strands of analytic philosophy such as that of logical positivism. One may consider, for example, Russell and Whitehead's attempt in *Principia Mathematica* (1913) to reduce claims of validity to mathematically-precise logical formulations. Recent philosophies of science, however, have markedly distanced themselves from the narrowness of such analytic projects and sought reconstructions of validity in terms of social consensus and falsifiability of knowledge claims (Popper in Magee, 1975).

Challenges to positivist science in this century are often posed in the spirit of the scientific challenge to the spiritual authority of the medieval church by Copernicus in the 16th century.

Somewhat paradoxically, those in the Enlightenment tradition of challenging foundational authority now aims to overthrow what is regarded as the residual dogmatism of the Enlightenment tradition--the search for 'universal' truth through rational enquiry. In the public mind, the idea of value-free science is increasingly suspect. Scientists are held accountable for the products of their research--particularly when such products are seen to do harm to the common good. More sweeping than public questioning of the ideological underpinnings of hypothetico-deductive enquiry, however, are attacks upon the presumption of rational enquiry. Such attacks upon the legitimacy of reason challenge the legitimacy of philosophy itself, in its western tradition, as a 'privileged' (Foucault, 1988) discourse about epistemology.

Before turning to Gadamer, I will outline three contemporary lines of attack upon the Enlightenment tradition of rational enquiry: relativist, critical and post-modern. Various forms of these three positions, as shall be discussed in later chapters, find their way into views about second language curricula. To be sure, none of these positions is clear-cut, nor are particular epistemologies bound entirely to any one of the broad views which I outline. While my brevity does little justice to the complexities of broad epistemological frameworks, my aim is to provide a background against which Gadamer's approach to 'truth and method' may be measured.

(1) The view that objective understandings are untenable and that truth is subjectively constructed by individuals, even if held

in accord by groups, may very broadly be regarded as a constructivist or relativist view of epistemology. Among the most cogent expressions of a relativist philosophy of science is that of Kuhn (1957, 1962). Arguing from the example of the Copernican challenge to the medieval world view, Kuhn suggests that paradigms, *ie.*, broad conceptual frameworks, nurture fruitful inquiry until such inquiry gives rise to contradictions which challenge the old conceptual frameworks themselves. Thus, the encumbered paradigm, like the anthropocentric universe of the middle ages, is swept away by a newer conceptual framework, such as that of a heliocentric universe, wherein simpler explanations are afforded. The idea here is that validity lies in the efficacy and elegance of the paradigm in offering explanations, rather than in some gradual unveiling of a 'true' reality.

On one hand, such relativist positions offer somewhat facile explanations for the competition of what appear to be a myriad of culturally and historically-based world views. On the other hand, relativist views are plagued by self-contradiction. In claiming, for example, an extreme relativist view that all 'truth' is subjective, such a claim is itself reduced to a relative statement which is, therefore, without foundation. In any case, various forms of relativism, however stymied by the inability to agree upon criteria for the evaluation of research, are widely embraced within the contemporary social sciences (Hammersley, 1992).

(2) Adherents of critical theories generally hold that truth is locally and politically situated (Popkewitz, 1984). Following in

Nietzsche's scathing attack on the Enlightenment ideal of rational enquiry, critical theorists often claim that the common 'truths' within powerful discourses such as that of positivist science, are based in 'lies' of rhetoric and in the exclusion of marginalized discourses (Habermas, 1984; Giroux, 1988). In seeking redress for perceived historical injustices, critical theorists often advocate the political interests of particular marginalized groups. While Marxism was an earlier expression of critical epistemology, emancipatory ideologies have been more recently based in group interests identified in such terms as race, gender or sexual orientation.

Opponents of critical theories have questioned the foundational basis upon which the values of one group's emancipatory interests should take precedence over the interests of another's. As Hammersley points out (1992), it is quite possible that there are multiple contradictory critical theories linked with different groups--feminist, Marxist, people of colour, Third World, First Nations, et. al. While critical theorists argue that emancipatory movements often seek coalitions with other oppressed groups, unless one accepts an historicist view (Popper, in Magee, 1975) which posits the historical inevitability of emancipation of all humanity, it is quite conceivable that fighting for one's particular group interests may involve oppressing another's. The question of group identity in regard to immigration will be addressed at length in Chapter Two.

(3) Views which are aligned with both critical and relativist positions are often loosely categorized by their own proponents as post-modern (Leotard, 1984). While post-modernists claim to eschew metaparadigmatic assumptions (*ie.* grand conceptual frameworks), adherents of post-modern views often regard theory and ideology as instrumental to specific ends in specific situations. As Foucault notes: "Theory is not a system, but an instrument, a toolkit... a logic of the specificity of power relations..." (In Clifford 1988, p. 23). Thus, if a particular critical theory serves one's ideological interests, from a post-modern perspective one may hold it at arms length, regarding its value in relative terms.

One expression of a post-modern view, notably relevant to a social view of language, focuses upon the 'text' which addresses itself to particular audiences and which employs particular rhetorical devices (Barthes, 1988). As with a critical view, texts are seen to be contextualized within discourses, *ie.* within fields wherein common terms of reference are held, the most powerful and hegemonic of which is the 'grand narrative' of empirical science (Lyotard, 1984). Validity, thus, may be seen to lie in textual as well as intertextual analysis (Atkinson, 1989).

While challenging such views is not central to my purpose here, it does occur that it is not easy to straddle the fence--as post-modern 'anti-theorists' often attempt to do--between relativism and critical theory. Even in textual or intertextual analysis the key questions of epistemology, however differently posed, remain unanswered. Questions such as: how might texts and

narratives, whether grand or small, be compared and evaluated? How can it be possible to find common ground--however limited--across different discourses? How is 'rational enquiry' best to be regarded? Gadamer, as shall be discussed, addresses such questions from an ontological rather than from an epistemological perspective.

(ii) Gadamer's vocabulary of 'understanding'.

Gadamer's approach to understanding has evolved from a long tradition of hermeneutics (from Gk., *hermeneutikos*, to interpret) notably associated before this century with the exegesis of biblical texts. Earlier in this century, Dilthey adapted hermeneutic approaches in an attempt to justify knowledge claims in the human sciences (Howard, 1982, Warnke, 1987). In a contemporary context, hermeneutics encompasses a range of approaches for textual interpretation within discourses as diverse as theology and jurisprudence, ethnography and literary criticism. In the lineage of 18th century scholar Chladenius, Gadamer regards his approach as 'philosophical' hermeneutics (Warnke, 1987; How, 1995). What Gadamer seeks is feasible and justifiable grounds for knowing which do not deny the humanness of knowledge. As Georgia Warnke notes: "Gadamer does not mean that we must give up a concern for the validity of our knowledge, but rather...that we must render it compatible with a cultural and linguistic embeddedness of our understanding" (1987, p. 168). In this sense, Gadamer's hermeneutics can be viewed as a challenge to positivist

epistemology which avoids the relativist abandonment of the search of grounds of accord within genres of discourse.

Gadamer draws ontology into the midst of epistemological questions. By centring *Dasein*, being-in-the-world in knowing, Gadamer follows the phenomenological break of Heidegger (1977) in putting the indisputable fact of being at the heart of philosophical concern. With *Dasein* at the centre, all claims of knowing--however speculative, aesthetic or precisely empirical--are presupposed by being-in-the-world. *What are the limits of our knowing?* the pivotal question inherited from Kant, is replaced by: *what possibilities are opened to our historically-situated understanding?* By this shift, the very vocabulary of empiricist truth and method--'empirical knowledge', 'validity', 'reliability'; even 'truth' and 'knowledge'--may be supplanted by a hermeneutic one, key terms of which I will proceed to explore.

In the sense that understanding is contextually-specific interpretation centred in language, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics may appear to lie, *prima facie*, enticingly close to a relativist position. I shall argue, however, that due consideration of such concepts as authority, tradition, common sense, and openness as expounded in *Truth And Method*, provide a basis for authenticating and evaluating judgements derived from interpretations. It is important to note at the outset that understanding for Gadamer, is just as possible--and just as difficult--within domains of the human sciences (Dilthey, 1913) as within those of the natural sciences. This broadened view of

understanding is particularly relevant to my concern here with language and education, domains of human science.

In broadening the scope of legitimacy for understandings, Gadamer gives a particularly close examination to the concept of experience. The simplistic view that empirical knowledge is provided by objects of perception or sense data--a view inherited from Locke (1690)--persists, arguably, in positivist inquiry. Gadamer distinguishes between two modes of experience, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. *Erlebnis* is characterized by its immediacy. It encompasses the intellect and feelings in a holistic sweep of sentience. *Erlebnis* is one-way 'total mediation' (Gadamer, 1989; p. 69) by which, for example, the experiencer is drawn in abruptly--perhaps only fleetingly--by the beauty of an aesthetic object. Despite the sentient power of such experience, *Dasein* is unchanged by its experience as *Erlebnis*.

Erfahrung, in contrast, involves an 'in-betweenness' of experiencer and experienced. In its broad sense--particularly significant to the human sciences--*Erfahrung* denotes intersubjective experience(s) in which a person is drawn in and changed by an event (1989, p. 97). Gadamer emphasizes that *Erfahrung* is "an experience of negation" (p. 157). The suggestion here is of the unrepeatable learning experience by which our previous views are, to some extent, negated. There is a moral aspect of this kind of experience which is related to the Aristotlean idea of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and referred to in this Preface. That is,

such experience informs the conduct which is appropriate to particular situations. Most significantly, it is through *Erfahrung* that we apprehend our incompleteness and open ourselves to possibilities in the cultural and historical world beyond ourselves (p.347). The incomplete nature of *Erfahrung* suggests not only that our understanding is "situated within prejudices" (p.276) but most critically, that the potential to learn and change in a positive way through our experiences is a condition of our being.

"Prejudices," Gadamer explains, "constitute the historical reality of our being" (p.276). 'Prejudice' refers to the givens which constitute *Dasein* and frame our understandings. It must be noted that this sense of prejudice is without the negative connotation of its common usage. Rather than emphasizing how situatedness limits our understanding, as relativist and critical positions tend to do, Gadamer stresses that the very frames and presuppositions which bind our knowing within an ontological horizon (p. 245) also open our understanding to broader possibilities: "the natural givenness of our existence... constitute a truly hermeneutic universe in which we are not imprisoned... but to which are opened" (intro., xxiv).

An openness to new possibilities--where it is evident--is based in *Bildung*, the overarching influence of culture. Taken from its root, the idea of *Bildung* (Ger. *Bild*, 'picture', 'image') suggests a Platonic image of perfection, towards which human beings may strive. Less figuratively, the concept refers to authority beyond ourselves which provides the touchstones by which we gauge

our ongoing (and unending) self-improvements. Self-formation for Gadamer, is clearly not merely growth or natural development as celebrated by Rousseau. The life project of self-formation is rather 'a task'--an exacting ideal towards which we may or may not choose to struggle. We pursue this ideal by questioning and keeping ourselves open to the 'otherness' beyond ourselves (p. 282). Both the idea of openness to new possibilities and that of self-formation will be central to later discussions of the ontology of adult second language learning.

The notion of a transcendent ideal which provides the image (*Bild*) for self-improvement may well be connected (in a manner not to be explored here) to what are commonly regarded as spiritual apprehensions. In philosophy, the origins of such an ideal may be traced to Plato's pure forms. It may be recognized in ideals as distinct as Saint Augustine's *City Of God* or in Hegel's universal consciousness, the latter idea to which Gadamer expresses an indebtedness (p.79). In more recent times, the 'authority' underlying these ideals may be recognized in the Freudian Superego or in Durkheim's social authority (Bullock, 1988). While this authority lies beyond the self, it is emphatically not based in some objective reality such as materialism posits. Neither is it to be understood as a dogmatic code existing beyond our interpretations and meriting blind obedience. *Bildung* is based rather in a communal sense of history and tradition. It is a "nameless authority" handed down to us which has "power over our attitudes and behaviour" (p.280). The authority of tradition

represents, in a figurative sense, the accumulated wisdom of our cultural heritage as given in our understanding. Tradition here, resonates with Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia (Bullock, 1988), the collective of voices--familial, societal and historical--through which the individual speaks. The variety of voices in which "the echo of the past is heard" (Gadamer, p. 284) represents, *in toto*, moral touchstones of our collective and personal history.

In a moral sense, the authority of *Bildung* provides notions of "judgement, tact and taste" (p.19) critical to the conduct of daily life. Again echoing the notion of Aristotelian *phronesis*, Gadamer stresses that tact, the cultivated sensitivity by which we relate to the changing demands of situations, is "not just a piece of psychological equipment" (p.28). The important point is that culture is not simply instrumental to our understandings but is embedded in our being. This notion will be considered later in reference to the cultural embeddedness of language.

Although we are situated within a particular historical and cultural heritage, there is a broader cultural ontology in which all humanity may choose to share. This touchstone of cultural being which has potential to transcend differences of history and language is the *Sensus Communis*, the common sense, an idea Gadamer ascribes to Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Just as there is, in the broadest sense, understanding of common decency irrespective of cultural differences, the capacity to mediate understandings is also an inheritance of a common sense. It is interesting that the

idea of common sense should have so inspired Tom Paine, the American revolutionary pamphleteer, a generation after Vico.

A key question is: how does the *Sensus Communis* relate to reason? By professing to "a deep scepticism about the fantastic overestimation of reason by comparison to the affectations which activate the human mind" (p. 567), Gadamer rejects the Enlightenment privileging of a rationality, free of passion and historical prejudice, as the means to objective truth (Weinsheimer, 1985). Yet while refusing the idea of an abstract intellectual tool operating without prejudice and tradition, Gadamer stresses--contrary to a relativist position--that the fact of human community depends upon a "concrete universality" (p. 21) which directs and adjudicates individual will. If indeed "concrete universality" is to be regarded as a mode of rationality, it is certainly not equal to logical formulation of truth. Yet if the vestiges of Enlightenment tradition reside in pursuing what is common to the human condition, then Gadamer, arguably, is part of this tradition. As Howard notes: "Gadamer seeks to develop a mode of rationality that includes an awareness of the cultural-historical factors that influence reason and provide standpoints and structures for thought" (1982 p. 98).

Thus, Gadamer stresses both the historical 'groundedness' of understanding, and authority beyond the self by which we may evaluate our interpretations. While there are different notions of tradition-based authority in respect to situatedness, Gadamer emphasizes that tradition-based authority does tend to reflect the

will of a majority in "a community, a group, a people, a nation or the whole human race" (p. 43). In this regard the precision of accord within fields of natural sciences, rather than evidencing the attainment of objective truth, reveals the breadth of common ground realized over the centuries within the shared discourses of interlocking fields of research. While scientists may bitterly disagree in matters both great and small, they have a 'language' for their disagreement. The discourses of the natural sciences incidentally, are not necessarily hostile to less influential discourses, as critical positions claim. The point is that even the most disparate positions in culture, history and language have the capacity to find common ground--at least grounds for their disagreement. Understanding, for Gadamer, moves in a dialectic manner through questioning (again the indebtedness to Hegel) toward a mediation of contrasting understandings.

It should be obvious that the term understanding, *Verstehen*, is pivotal in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. As posited by Dilthey (1914), *Verstehen* was an attempt to broaden the conception of empirical knowledge and extend the possibility of validation of knowledge claims to the human sciences. As widely adopted in recent qualitative research, *Verstehen* often refers somewhat loosely, to a researcher's self-conscious reflections in regard to the researched (Hammersley, 1992). For Gadamer, *Verstehen* is closely connected with *Verstandigung*, coming to an understanding with someone, in that both involve an in-betweenness, a middle-ground. (p. 59). Understanding also entails *Erfahrung*, the experience of

the negation of one's previous views. As previously implied, understanding is bound to tradition-based authority. The historicity of understanding (p.215) to which Gadamer frequently refers, inscribes the human condition of being situated by the givenness of past events. Through our actions we continue to make history and to participate in tradition. Hermeneutic understanding for Gadamer involves the effort to take account of our effective history (p.165) ie. to deepen our awareness of the historical condition of our situatedness within our interpretations.

The dialogic aspect of understanding is captured in its 'I-and-Thouness' (p. 311). While underscoring the in-betweenness of understanding, I-and-Thouness, also encountered in the theology of Martin Buber (1923), does not imply that participants in dialogue simply construct meaning intersubjectively. The dialogue paradoxically involves a relationship among those in dialogue, their subject matter and the interpreted authority of effective history. In a manner that overarches intersubjective dialogue, conversants 'converse' with tradition (p. 186).

Indeed, the prototype of hermeneutic understanding is conversation. At the outset, the direction a conversation will take is essentially unpredictable. Good conversation does not belong to either participant, but rather participants "belong to the conversation" (p. 384). Conversants neither demand submission nor passively submit to the others' opinions as through careful questioning they move towards a reasonable mediation (*Vermittlung*, the root of which is *Mitte*, middle). Attentive to prejudice,

conversants integrate one another's opinion into their interpretative search for truth. "Conversation is not a matter of adjusting tools" Gadamer asserts, "What is said has a claim over one" (p. 442). Of course, information is communicated in a conversation. The good conversation, however, is much more than an instrument of information exchange. Where there is understanding, conversants are drawn into an event and ontologically changed by their encounter.

Being-in-the-world is always vulnerable; it is as subject to potential danger as it is to enrichment. Our openness to others undeniably involves risk--not the worst of which psychologists might refer to as 'cognitive dissonance' or 'ego anxiety' (Reber, 1985). As Gadamer notes, perhaps with a touch of irony: "there is no complacency, passivity or self-satisfaction in understanding" (p. 384). Understanding in this rigorous sense, prescribes an ideal of a cultivated *phronesis* which not everyone may desire, let alone achieve. The cumulation of our situated understanding is never self-contained, never complete. Every understanding opens to a new one. Self-understanding is by nature, limited--there is no final horizon (p. 302).

'Horizon' has a curious etymology. Its root, *kuklos* (Gk.) somewhat ambiguously denotes both 'limit' and 'circle,' the latter of which is the defining metaphor of hermeneutic method. Just as every horizon opens to a new one, the limits of understanding provide by their very nature, the conditions for the possibility of further understanding. As we interpret other world views, the

nature of the horizon within which our interpretations occur is itself transformed by the other horizons we encounter. The occurrence of such transformation(s) Gadamer calls 'the fusion of horizons' (p.397). Opportunities for fusions arise when, for example, we encounter unfamiliar ideas, face others whose views contrast with our own, or when we struggle in the tentative use of a foreign language. If understanding in its ideal sense has attended such encounters, then we emerge with a broadened world-view. This broadening can be viewed as a positive outcome in regard to the life-project of self-formation. The fusion of horizons offers an ontological meaning for learning itself. In later chapters I will adapt this metaphor for application to the learning of English as a second language by immigrants.

(iii) The centrality of language in Gadamer's hermeneutics.

"...the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language" (p. 378).

Throughout my discussion of *Truth And Method* thus far, I have been circling the role of language--the very core of Gadamer's philosophy. Paradoxically, my attempt to provide a conceptual framework for the discussion of an ontological view of language, has presupposed the role of language at every turn. It is through language that a sense of self is formed and a culture embodied; through language that we interpret experience and come to understandings.

Although ultimately language is a mystery which is "so little an object that it seems to conceal its own being from us" (p. 378), Gadamer offers some insight into this mystery by his analogy of the sign and the picture (p. 91). As aesthetic object, the picture "does not disappear in pointing to something else, but its own being shares in what it represents". The sign, in contrast, disappears in the performance of signifying, just as the word disappears in meaning. In meaning, the being of language is essentially invisible. Conversely, meaning itself eludes the effort to objectify the being of language. Effort to objectify language becomes like that of the mythical snake circling with tail in mouth, trying to swallow itself.

This view presents a dilemma. Given that language lies so close to being, approaching language as object of investigation always threatens one with self-contradiction (Parret, 1983). The question here is: does an ontological view of language effectively deny inquiry into the nature of language without resort to tautology or mystification? In undertaking an epistemological inquiry into language, we presuppose its being, yet also depend on epistemological method in seeking insight into the ontology of language. In any case, such a dilemma need not cut short this discussion. Rather than becoming ensnared in logical contradiction, I can situate this inquiry as one interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutic approach, just as Gadamer situates his own investigation into the "phenomenon of human understanding" (p. xxii). A fruitful way to proceed, in my view, is through a

dichotomous view of language. Here 'language as lived' and 'language as object of inquiry', can be regarded as two faces of the same coin. While the coin cannot be seen from both sides at once, epistemological enquiry into the phenomenon of language can be justified within the framings of ontological givens.

Even though Gadamer disputes the foundational assumptions of linguistics (I shall return to this point), the well-known *langue/parole* distinction offers a useful analogy for viewing language dichotomously. For de Saussure, *langue*, very generally refers to language as a cultural/historical artifact of a people and *parole* refers to the living speech of persons (Harris & Taylor, 1989). *Parole* then is the living, ever-changing aspect of language as manifested in speech, whereas *langue* is the enduring aspect which carries common cultural reference. In Gadamerian terms, the historicity of *Verstehen* is analogous to *langue* while the dialogic aspect of *Verstandigung*, coming to an understanding, bears analogy to *parole*.

In further regard to the aspect of constancy in language, cultural values for Gadamer are "sedimented in language" (p.401). While all human languages obviously differ in form, they are still capable of affording "the same unities of thought and meaning" (p. 404). Every word in a language has a history by which its meaning, perhaps over millennia, has evolved. As suggested in reference to the *Sensus Communis* and *Bildung*, there are schemas of reference to which we appeal for common meaning. These may be viewed along a continuum from the very general and universal (eg. the

understanding of 'if' or 'wish', as expressions of desires reaching beyond immediate experience) to the more narrow and culturally specific schemata which give languages their particular 'shadings' (p.443). The possibility that concepts such as 'word', 'meaning' or 'language' itself may be commonly understood--however imparted through education--evidences the embeddedness of schemas which are presupposed in discourse. The sedimented meaning which is constantly shaped and reshaped in conversation is for Gadamer, 'the miracle' of language (p.425).

In view of this ever-changing side of the dichotomy, language lived as speech is an 'event' to which participants dialogically belong. Though the tug and shift of mediated meaning, the 'living virtuality' of language is realized wherein "a whole world of meaning comes into play without having to express it totally" (p. 458). To the sensitive ear, every word may resonate with the potential meaning of the language of which it is part, and in metonymic fashion may cause: "the world view that underlies it to appear" (p.458). In a manner again suggestive of Bakhtin's heteroglossia (Bullock, 1988), the polyphonic voices of individual and cultural history are resonant in every speaking voice. Unless attentive to it, one may fail to appreciate the profound richness embodied in the most ordinary speech.

A key consideration (which I will revisit in my final chapters) relates to what Gadamer regards as the 'fundamental metaphoricity' of language (p. 75). Apart from its secondary instrumentality, living speech, for Gadamer is 'play' wherein "the

player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him" (p. 109). Meaning in this sense reflects something of Nietzsche's "joyous affirmation of the play of the world" (Madison, 1988). Though the subtle aesthetic play of allegory, symbol and pun; language has the capacity to become richly-layered meaning. What might be regarded epistemologically as a language 'game' (or linguistic register) utilizing particular syntactic and discourse patterns, ontologically transcends form to realize a world of meaning. Although language in this sense might be considered 'decorative' (p. 45) this is not to be taken in the classical sense of a sophisticated use of language wherein rhetoric may be calculatively used as an instrument of persuasion (Flew, 1984).

An ontological view of language may be further revealed by regarding as dichotomy the two modes of experience, *Erlibnis* and *Erfahrung*. For Gadamer, even perception relies on meaning (p. 92). Even the most primitive mediation between experiencer and experienced involves categorizations of perception which are linguistically-based. He notes: "Language embraces pre-hermeneutic consciousness as well as all modes of hermeneutic consciousness" (p.378). Human awareness without language--for example, that of an infant or a severely autistic person--is not to be discounted as a kind of experience, similar to what Gadamer would regard as *Erlibnis*. *Erlibnis* as experience totally mediated by what is experienced, may be regarded in its immediate sense to be detached from language. Apprehension of natural beauty or music enjoyed in its immediacy, for example, often seem disconnected from language.

Although *Erlebnisse* have the potential to give rise to *Erfahrung*, understanding is only possible through language. As we talk, write or even think about experience(s) as categories of our life-world, there is interpretation. Yet it is critical to note that interpretation in this sense is not to be equated with a constructivist epistemology. *Erfahrung* experience cause one to rise beyond the self. While language implies interpretation, interpretive understanding always presupposes a common world. "Every true linguistic experience of the world," Gadamer notes "is experience of the world, not experience of language" (p. 542).

Further to the interpretative character of understanding: language is not just a prejudice which situates us in our understanding, but it is the very form whereby we are situated. While situated in language we have the choice of whether to regard language primarily as an instrument of our needs, or to realize its richness. Through language we may achieve, if we so choose, richer hermeneutic understanding of our common world of meaning. If we choose not to open ourselves to *Verstehen* then our prejudices, even the pre-schematization of our native language, will hem us in. Yet Gadamer does not emphasize the restrictions imposed by this situatedness. Although we cannot 'escape' our situation within language (p. 474), we can pursue self-improvement through questioning, interpretation and revision (p. 99). Although such self-understanding is by nature tentative and incomplete, the possibility of breakthroughs of meaning and learning--fusions of horizon--are always before us.

(iv) The problem of translation.

The question arises: if we are situated in the preschematizations of our own language, what is our situation with regard to other languages? Are we, as an extreme Whorfian position (Bullock, 1988) might assume, imprisoned within the constructs and cultural schema of a native language?

It could be argued these very interpretations of *Truth And Method* are hemmed in by an English-speaking world view. In a Platonic sense, the translated text upon which I depend is a second remove from the 'real meaning' of the original German. Yet in the hermeneutic view, the meaning takes being from common understanding rather than from having existence in some objectifiable form. While the authenticity of these interpretations still depends on the accuracy of the translation, the notion of accuracy itself is supplanted by one of hermeneutic sensitivity. If the translators have been sensitive in their interpretation and I, in turn, careful and tactful in mine, there is potential that my mediations with this translated text may encompass some part of the common ground to which Gadamer appealed. Bearing in mind that "in writing, language gains it's true sovereignty" (p. 391), if I can convey my thoughts with sufficient clarity, there is even potential that this interpretation can realize in another mind, a fusion with Gadamer's ideas. Thus, however removed by translation and however contextually situated, shared meanings may be given life.

Gadamer does not deny that a language may encompass a generic world view which has been imparted, in a somewhat Deweyan sense,

through education and socialization (p. 441). Still, in the ontological view, it is not the formal structure of a language which distinguishes the world view, but rather the traditions 'handed down' in the language (p. 542). That there is potentially a common ground for understanding across languages is, for Gadamer, much more interesting than a linguistic preoccupation with differences of form and function. Every human language not only has the potential to say anything it wants but it has the capacity to encompass, within its particular shadings, ideas and insights available to all other languages. The key to the enrichment of understanding in any language is the availability of *Erfahrung*, the learning experience, and the cultivation of sensitivity and tact in interpretations of otherness.

If meanings available to all other languages are available to one's native language, what then is the value--apart from the obvious instrumentality--in learning other languages?

Prima facie, it would seem that a very high level of proficiency in a language is required for conversation in a hermeneutic sense. Struggling within interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) *ie.*, within the creative and makeshift language which second language beginners cobble together from unanalysed chunks and working hypotheses, would seem to offer little scope for dialogical understanding. Neither to be ignored is the risk and embarrassment so often attending the fledgling use of another language. Moreover, where there are marked imbalances of language ability in dialogue, authentic in-betweenness might seem even more unlikely to be

achieved. Of course, the problem of power-imbalance challenges dialogue even where there is equal linguistic proficiency among conversants. What must be stressed, however, is that the same difficulty of finding a "common language" (p. 388) is faced by participants in dialogue who may have, in a linguistic sense, fluency in the same medium. A common language in the ontological sense, rather than referring to commonly held 'tools' of exchange, refers to a commonality of meaning. Even in first language dialogue, accommodating to a common language is a challenge which depends upon openness to the other. As Gadamer notes: "Reaching understanding presupposes that both partners are ready for it and are trying to recognise the full value of what is alien and opposed to them" (p. 368).

This is not to suggest that the ideal of hermeneutic understanding should--or even could--be modelled across registers and contexts of language use. However, the model does serve to show that there is 'translation' in the interpretative sense, whether in foreign or in native language use. There are, to be sure, far greater difficulties (as shall be discussed in Chapter Three) with interpretation in foreign language use. Yet even where there are considerable linguistic obstacles before dialogue (eg. weaknesses in language skills), conversants still have potential to find common ground for meaning. Whether listening or speaking, reading or writing in one's own language or struggling in the use of another--we all depend, in a figurative sense, on 'interlanguage'.

At the same time, it must be noted that using a foreign language with fluidity does not, in Gadamer's view, result in a change of being. One has the capacity to be as open or closed to otherness in the use of a foreign language as one has in the use of one's first language. Fluency in another language does not provide one with a new medium of sustenance, as if a gilled creature might adapt itself to air. Gadamer, however, does note that while preserving their own relationship to the world speakers of other languages "may extend and enrich" their worlds (p. 453). The acceptance of such a challenge, as shall be discussed in later chapters, is driven by the will for self-formation rather than by the immediacy of instrumental needs.

(v) Gadamer's questioning of 'scientific' linguistics.

"An ideal system of signs, whose sole purpose is to coordinate all signs in an unambiguous system, makes the power of words ... appear as a mere flaw in their utility" (Truth and Method p.414).

In questioning the basis of scientific linguistics, Gadamer does not challenge the common sense appreciation of language's indispensable usefulness. What he does take issue with is the theoretical preoccupation with language form and function at the expense of semantic content. What seems to characterize much theorizing about language, in Gadamer's opinion, is an instrumentalist outlook by which language is primarily regarded as a tool of communication. This primary focus on the efficacy of the 'sign material' (p. 414), in the ontological view, slights the

world of meaning which language brings to being. Without referring to specific theories of linguistics, Gadamer questions the value of engaging in language theory without regard to ontology.

In a narrow epistemic sense, certainly, a language may be regarded as a kind of 'tool'. It has form and function and specific skills are required for its mastery. Yet as with technology as described by Heidegger (1977), the feature of instrumentality in language--however intended to be an incidental feature of becoming-- is 'unconcealed' as a feature of devalued being. Given that value resides not in the becoming, but in the being, form stripped to function is usually a barren and narrow realization of being. For illustration, one might compare the relative value of a plastic digital watch and an antique pocket watch. Both may be regarded as tools or as aesthetic objects. Only in few situations, however, is the more efficient tool, ie. the plastic digital, likely to be regarded as either the more beautiful or the more valuable of the two. Although language is not to be regarded as object, the watch analogy serves to show that when regarded primarily in terms of its efficacy as sign material--without consideration of its aesthetic--the essential being of language is devalued, if not denied.

For Gadamer, the history of the instrumentalist view of language is bound up with the broad history of Western epistemology. The history can be seen to begin with the categorization of *logos* (Gk., 'word') apart from meaning, such as Plato carried out in the *Cratylus* dialogue (Howatt, 1984). The notion of the arbitrary word detached from the pure form (or real

thing) it signifies was carried forward in the mainstream of epistemology, wherein empirical investigation posits "being as absolutely available objectivity" (Gadamer, p. 414). The detached *logos* as embedded epistemological schema is evidenced in the supposition of 'real' objects independent of language, and the positing of language itself as object. Thus, by the separation of form from content, the epistemological notion of language itself is 'invented'. However, in Gadamer's view, "We have too little left if we ignore the actual content of what languages hand down to us and try to consider language *only* as form" (p.404).

By this ontological view, questions about how people learn languages or even theoretical questions about the nature and purpose of language lie within broader questions about how particular theorizing is situated. Scientific linguistic theory, particularly theory of cognition which employs a technical discourse of positivist methodology (The 'input-output' terminology which I shall discuss in Chapter Three) is answerable to the broad epistemological difficulties of empirical method referred at the beginning of this chapter.

Language theory faces the further difficulty of developing a metalanguage, *ie.* a language about language, suitable to describing language as object of its own investigation. For Gadamer, "this problem of a metalanguage may be unsolvable because it involves an reiterative regress" (p. 414). While such foundational difficulties clearly undermine the content of language theory, the potential value of specific claims should not be flatly dismissed. Even where

the situatedness of theory is problematic, valuable insight about language may still be obtained. The key lies with regarding specific claims within linguistic theory as potential *Verstehen*, framed within semantics, and mediated between theorizer and interpreter. Evaluation of specific claims then, may be sought though the mediation of tradition within human science discourse (eg. theories of language) and, more broadly, through the mediation of common sense.

Without intending to be dismissive, I can illustrate Gadamer's critique of linguistic science by considering key presuppositions of a widely influential language theory, that of generative grammar (Chomsky, 1977). Very broadly, this theory posits a cognitive capacity to generate from 'deep' syntactic structures, the particular strings of word order evidenced in the 'surface' structure of utterances. Language, thus viewed by a disengaged reason, is posited as an objectifiable entity characterized primarily by syntactic structure. By situating itself within a scientific discourse (ie. a branch of cognitive psychology), generative grammar subjects its claims to the narrow and rigorous criteria of positivist science and assumes the epistemological difficulties of such discourses (Lyons, 1970). At the same time, the very fuzziness of such terminology as 'deep structure' and 'language acquisition device' (ie. the innately human capacity to learn a language) within the Chomskyan discourse attests to a difficulty with metalanguage. As Gadamer notes: "There is no such thing as a purely technical discourse" (p. 415). This is not to

suggest that the generative grammar model is inelegant; nor to deny the value of this theory's social applications, such as in remediating aphasic speech disorders. Moreover, generative grammarians--unlike post-modernists--can well be credited for accepting the 'court' of rational discourse as a fair forum for evaluation of their achievements. However, the main thrust of an ontological critique remains--that there is at the heart of generative grammar theory, a vacuum of being.

(vi) John Ellis' theory of categorization.

In view of the foundational difficulties of epistemologically-based theorizing, one may wonder whether new linguistics discourses, with fresh vocabularies are needed to give due consideration to the power of words beyond their utility. While focusing on the contexts and consequences of language, the pragmatic theories of Halliday and Hjelmslev, for example, still give priority to the functions of semantic use (Howatt, 1984). Even semiotics (which will be briefly discussed in Chapter Three) while presuming to realize simultaneously the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions of language (Parret, 1983) still, arguably, presupposes a 'code and message' model (Ellis, 1993).

John Ellis' theory of language (1993) merits some attention here. Like Gadamer, he theorizes from within the horizon of semantics ("using language is thought", he maintains) and attempts to challenge the instrumentalist view of language as tool of communication. Unlike Gadamer, he situates himself within the

discourse of language theory. Drawing on contributions of B.L. Whorf, L. Wittgenstein, C.S. Pierce and de Saussure; Ellis argues that categorization is the fundamental operation performed by language (p. 24). Ellis points out that any coding or decoding operation presupposes a "preexisting convention" (p. 18). Even communicating without verbal or written language (miming, gesturing) presupposes shared cultural understandings. Harkening to Gadamer's preschematizations, such commonality is based in semantic categorizations of experience.

Categorizations of experience for Ellis do not reflect a Lockean world of objects, but are language-dependent. Ellis puts meaning before form by viewing even abstract conceptual understandings as experiential groupings. Our most fundamental categories, he suggests, are organized as binary-opposites along semantic continua such as: grammar words (high generalizability, low semantic-content) and lexis (low generalizability, high semantic-content), nouns (concept of stasis) and verbs (concept of change). Contrary to an empiricist view of facts (eg. 'This book is closed') as statements about natural phenomena, and value-related statements (eg. 'I hope for peace') as abstract judgements, Ellis regards factual concepts as precise groupings and value-related concepts as loose groupings both within semantic continua. "The world," Ellis offers, "contains only a great continuum" (p.32). He argues, against epistemological convention, that descriptive categorizations (eg. 'square', 'peacock', 'polymers') are actually more complex than evaluative categories ('good', 'bad'). In this

regard, he reasons that descriptive categories are tightly organized while the evaluative ones, embedded in older language, are amorphous. Although Gadamer might suggest that Ellis' fuzzier evaluative categories are hermeneutically richer, both he and Ellis would agree on the fundamental point that communication presupposes shared meaning. While categorization schemas vary, of course, among cultures and the shared categories of scientists differ from those of carpenters, Ellis veers from an extreme Whorfian cultural relativism. He regards, as does Gadamer, every human language to have anciently embedded preshematizations for realizing--each in its own fashion--such notions as that of 'good', 'bad' or 'admirable.'

Not to push a comparison too far--significant differences can be noted between Ellis' theory of language and Gadamer's ontological view. Ellis gives more stress to the cultural differences in the categorical constructions of different languages. "Language," he states "is the most crucial thing that differentiates one community from another" (Ellis, p. 119). Even world views based in such closely-related languages as German and English, reveal for Ellis, profound cultural differences. In contrast, Gadamer stresses that understanding need not be "burdened by schematizations" (Gadamer, p. 549) despite the culturally-different world views realized in the linguistic shadings of different languages. The distinction here may be seen as one of emphasis, with Ellis emphasising the aspect of linguistic

situatedness and Gadamer stressing the concrete universality of common sense available to all human languages.

More fundamentally, there is a different position on the question of teleology, the purpose of language. For Ellis, language is "the most central factor in the social life of those who share it" (Ellis, p. 119). His view of the categorizations of shared social meaning serve a pragmatic end of "sorting, simplifying, grouping and abstracting" from experience (Ellis, p. 27). While Ellis emphasizes the pragmatic ends of language, Gadamer, in regard to the utility of language, declares interest in: "the opposite of what linguistics tries to investigate" (Gadamer, p. 403). In his ontological view, examination of the purpose, *ie.* the ends of language *per se*, is a misconstruction. Living language as the mediation of understanding, may realize the 'play' of words, the benefit of *phronesis*, practical wisdom, or even the 'cultured consciousness' of *kalon*, 'the beautiful' (p. 86). Simply put, for Gadamer, the being of language is end in itself.

(vii) Conclusion.

Gadamer is no less than poetic is his evocation of the power of words in speech. In contrasting the detached *logos* of instrumentalist theory with his hermeneutic understanding of language, he describes the living word as 'pure event' and "the Greek *logos*, penetrated by the Christian idea of the word made flesh" (p. 419). Such metaphoricity is indeed, a world apart from 'deep structure'. This is certainly not to suppose that Gadamer's

questions about the basis of linguistics make irrelevant the thought and research of a long tradition of epistemologically-based language theory. I view Gadamer's critique not as justification for flatly rejecting the insights of linguistics, but as opportunity for examining the presumptions of second language learning and teaching in a new light. Of course, not all the important theoretical questions about language are addressed within such an ontological perspective. For example, there is the matter of how specific modes of literacy (Havelock, 1976; Vygotsky in Lantolf, 1994) may influence the being of language. In Chapters Three and Four, I intend to explore such issues which relate directly to second language curricula.

Finally, to return to my situation as language teacher: how might this ontological perspective be integrated into classroom *phronesis*? The appreciation of the richness of ordinary language, I believe, offers opportunities to explore more deeply the aesthetics and play of language learning. The new understanding of the nature and role of communication, as shall be discussed, calls into question the functional emphasis in second language curricula and shifts greater attention to the challenge of the cultural embeddedness of the target language. A new understanding of "what is handed down" (Gadamer, p. 280) in language as more deeply schematized than form or structure can provide opportunities to explore with learners of English the cultural preschematizations specific to this language. Most significantly, the understanding of learning as self-formation provides insight into the risks and

challenges faced by the adult immigrant second language learner.

In the only reference which the author of *Truth and Method* makes to his own role as teacher, Gadamer reveals he had urged his students to realize: "that when you take a word into your mouth you have not taken up some arbitrary tool which can be thrown into a corner if it doesn't do the job; but you are committed to a line of thought that comes from afar and reaches on beyond you" (pp. 547-548).

I am both inspired and challenged by this invocation to introduce Canadian English to newcomers not just as a social survival-package, but as a treasure house of handed-down meaning which invites their entry. Whoever takes English into her mouth is linked to emerging worlds which join Australia to Zimbabwe and linked to history which stretches back beyond Anglo-Saxon Britain; even back beyond ancient Rome and Greece. Of course in entering the world of Canadian English each speaker, whether Korean or Guatemalan, Chinese or Iranian, may add to English's immense cultural richness some shading of her own cultural horizon.

Such a view of the engagement of the ESL classroom however, needs further justification. In the following chapter, I turn attention to the broad political issues involved in the teaching of English to adult immigrants.

CHAPTER TWO:**THE POLITICAL STAKE IN UNDERSTANDING****(i) introduction.**

"To learn a language is to increase the extent of what one can learn.... the exercise of this capacity for understanding always means that what is said has a claim over one and this is impossible if one's own world-view and language view is not also involved" (*Truth And Method* p. 442).

Even though one's proficiency in it may be limited, making meaning in a foreign language affords unique opportunities for understanding. At the same time, the instrumental use of a foreign language is no more likely to realize *Erfahrung*, the learning experience, than is the instrumental use of one's native language. Openness to what seems alien to one's prior understandings--the first condition of the learning experience--is demanding in any event. Without coercion, one must choose to question aspects of what has been previously taken for granted. There is always risk in allowing new insight "a claim over one" within the middle ground where fusions of horizon are possible. Still, as Gadamer stresses, the self and its relationship to the world is not essentially changed by such fusions, but is rather extended and deepened (p. 453).

At first sight, a classroom where adult immigrants of vastly different backgrounds come together in the common interest (however differently interpreted) of learning English for resettlement would seem to provide rich potential for *Erfahrung*, the learning experience. Despite the challenge of second language proficiency, the sharp contrast of world views would seem to offer excellent opportunities for fusions with the unfamiliar. Yet openings to understanding in such a classroom situation may be as easily construed as obstacles to learning. Rather than regarded as potential for *Erfahrung*, experience in the English as a second language classroom may be taken as *Erlibnisse*--little more than amusement in the exotic. Challenging engagements with unfamiliar cultural meaning may be regarded as hegemonic threats to native culture and personal identity.

Such political outlooks may be as varied as the perspectives from which they are taken. Students and teachers may cast the politics of a particular classroom situation in a different light than the educational researcher, for example, who views the same engagement with supposed detachment. Obviously, there is no dearth of ideologies which vie for attention and which champion moral claims. The only commonality among disparate political positions appears to be an equal conviction in the possession of truth. Whether acknowledged or not, ideology is as integral to the language classroom as it is to any social engagement (Philipson, 1988; Pennycook, 1989; Ho, 1993). Just as every conversation can be viewed linguistically within a larger pragmatic context, every

classroom--indeed every curricular choice--can be framed in a political context.

It is upon this understanding that the project of critical pedagogy (Illich, 1983; Friere, 1989; Giroux, 1988), for example, attempts to confront at the classroom level, the broad social dynamic in which 'discourses of power' representing wealth and social privilege are seen to dominate. From this critical position, students presumed to represent socially-disadvantaged groups are actively encouraged to advance the distinctiveness of their cultural values. The efforts to 'empower' the dispossessed (Friere, 1971) or more modestly, to promote learner self-esteem, are laudable ideals. Yet arguably, the emphasis that critical pedagogies give to group identity and cultural difference may do little to encourage openness or promote common-interest in the multi-ethnic classroom.

There are no easy formulae for dealing wisely with cultural difference in the adult ESL classroom. While experienced ESL teachers have adept strategies for overcoming barriers of language proficiency, bridging the gulfs among cultural horizons can be a much more delicate matter. A broad avowal that differing cultural values among fellow adults merely reflect varying social norms, beliefs and self-interests may seem, *prima facie*, to be the safest approach for avoiding clashes of cultural difference. But invariably, cases will arise where it is apparent to the teacher that a student's cultural beliefs or practices--while not afoul of the law--are likely to result in misunderstanding or embarrassment

in a Canadian context. One might think for example, of a male student, expressing opinions about women which are likely to be considered odious or provocative to many Canadians. In this case, some moral principle or social value needs to be invoked to inform the newcomer of the possible consequences of those beliefs or practices likely to be judged culturally inappropriate in this country. Clearly, there is uncertainty and risk in seeking common ground for comparison and evaluation of beliefs and practices. Cultural relativism offers painfully little guidance in this regard. The price of avoiding potential conflicts of values is too often the denial of authentic--as opposed to merely patronizing--recognition of difference.

For Gadamer, questions of values, like the questions of metaphysics, rebound into Being-in-the-world wherein there is no horizon beyond history for some 'final' settlement. As I have argued, however, in the previous chapter, Gadamer's conception of the historicity of understanding is not to be equated with a relativist position wherein meaningful comparison and evaluation is effectively denied.

In this chapter, I will explore the broad political context in which immigrant ESL education is situated. Broadly drawing on ideas of culture and the democratic life from Habermas, Taylor, Goldman and others; I will consider the contribution which an ontological view of language learning can bring to the social debates over cultural difference, integration and common values which reverberate into the settlement ESL classroom itself.

(ii) Identity in the ontological view.

'Culture' (from Latin, *colere*: 'inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship') in its common usage typifies the "primitive and unsorted categorizations" described in the previous chapter (Ellis, 1993). In its broadest sense, culture is often used to contrast that which pertains more directly to 'the human world' from 'the natural world' background (Levi-Strauss, 1966). While elusive in meaning, few concepts are as richly connotative. When considered as the commonality which binds the individual to family, clan, linguistic group or nation (Herder in Goldman, 1993); attributes which distinguish group identity in exclusion from other group identities are given emphasis. Often notions of 'culture' as that which is created and sustained by a group are conflated with that which is regarded as a 'natural' inheritance of a group or nation (Latin, *nasci*, 'to be born'). Thus, claims of the 'natural rights' of particular groups tend to be merged with justifications for the protection of a group-culture from defilement or absorption by other (usually larger) cultural entities. At the time of this writing, the same multi-ethnic region of Southern Europe which affords modern languages the verb 'balkanize', bears tragic testimony to the darker possibilities of the merging of cultural identification with nationhood.

Obviously, the commonality that emotionally binds a group, particularly as evidenced in a shared language (in the linguistic sense), gives a particular shading to a world view. This sense of group identity may be understood in terms of a shared tradition

(Gadamer, p. 282) which is usually--although not exclusively--realized in a shared language. A common tradition, for Gadamer, provides the standards of taste and the force of morals which bind an authentic society (p. 84). Such standards may or may not seem compelling to those outside a particular group. Still, in the pursuit of understanding, the commonality of shared tradition neither automatically includes others who share in the same tradition nor excludes those who do not. A shared language in the linguistic sense is not a common language in the ontological sense. Even within the shared traditions of family, clan, linguistic group or nation, individuals still face the challenge of understanding.

Consciousness of the self, for Gadamer, is primarily bound to awareness of a world beyond the self (p. 459). In contrast to the detached *cogito* of Descartes, awareness of the 'I' emerges dialogically through awareness of a 'thou' (Gadamer, p. 250). In this ontological sense, identity emerges through conversation not only with others, but most broadly, through conversation with 'otherness' itself. *Bildung*, the cultural ideal of self-formation and *Überlieferung*, the authority of tradition, inscribe aspects of otherness which provide openness to potential understanding. Both have universal as well as group-specific dimensions. Universality of tradition may be evidenced, for example, in the recognition within historical linguistics of the complex etymologies shared among many languages by which meanings handed down from the distant past are realized in living speech.

While sedimented in particular languages, such preschematized meaning is not only a cultural inheritance particular to a language. There is a common sense, as discussed in the previous chapter, in which all humanity may share. By listening to the "voice(s) that speaks to us from the past and...place our meaning in openness" (p. 374), the self may seek identifications concentrically broader than those of family, clan or nation. Loyalty to a particular tradition need not prevent the individual from entering a more and more widely-defined community (Warnke, 1987, p. 175). It is the awareness of situatedness itself, Gadamer notes, that allows the cultured individual to place his or her life and concerns within a larger horizon. For example, by becoming more aware of the cultural stereotypes (Giles & Coupland, 1991) which so often distort our encounters with the cultural other, we may have healthier and richer encounters with others whose group identifications may be remote from our own.

(iii) Identity in immigration.

Cultural isolation in a contemporary context, is all but impossible. The multiethnic and multilingual interchange which was historically confined to ports and market crossroads (Howatt, 1984) now potentially enters every home and every life. Yet ironically, the ideal of the broadening of self through fusions with cultural otherness is daunted at every turn by the social and political contexts wherein cultural identities are presumed to be encouraged or endangered. Too often the subtler possibilities for richer

understanding of otherness are overshadowed by the more conspicuous risks and challenges. This tendency, I will argue, reflects the way in which cultural identity is often misunderstood in contemporary political discourse.

The supposed fragility of distinct cultures is often presumed to be threatened by what Andy Hargreaves called the only 'dead certainty' of contemporary life--change (1994). In this regard, cultural integrity is subject to two paradoxically opposed influences: a coalescing movement towards sameness and a fragmenting tendency toward difference. The homogenizing influences of popular culture (particularly its American varieties) within the global free-market of ideas and technologies are well-reported, if little understood. At the same time as political borders disappear and we move closer to the much-touted or maligned global economy, the sense of nationhood shrinks and the sense of community itself narrows. Again, the tragedy of Yugoslavia may illustrate this troubling reversion to forms of tribalism.

Set against this seething global upheaval are the dramas of ordinary lives--people fleeing change as often as seeking it. The issues of immigration have changed little since Oscar Handlin wrote "With old ties snapped, [immigrants] face the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meaning to their lives" (1951, p. 5).

While resettlement is mercifully less harsh than it was for 'the uprooted' of the last century, the difficulties are hauntingly familiar. There is the crucible of getting a job, finding new

community, getting used to a strange language and a bewildering culture very often amidst self-recrimination for having taken on such uncertainty. Of course, every experience of immigration is poignantly unique. To paraphrase Neil Bissoondath, writing on multiculturalism in Canada: volumes of social theory pale in the sight of "a new immigrant shivering in an overcoat" (1994).

Distinct though every experience of immigration surely is, the politics of immigration and language learning are often framed within issues of group identity. A tension is presumed between the social forces which impel particular groups of immigrants towards integration, or push them away from participation in the cultural mainstream (Schermerhorn in Ho, 1993). Presuming such a social dynamic, issues of integration often revolve around power relations among social groupings.

For immigrants without fluency in the mainstream language, the integration-segregation continuum (Giles & Coupland, 1991) presents the following dilemma. Insofar as the sociopolitical situation encourages social integration as an option at all, the embrace of the mainstream culture may offer the best opportunity for second language learning and upward mobility (Lambert, 1967; Giles & Coupland, 1991). Yet in the critical view that 'visible' minorities are likely to be denied all but marginal participation in the greater society, the best interests of such immigrants may lie in resisting assimilation and strengthening their 'out-group' identity (Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Moodley, 1992; Lewecky, 1992). As these dichotomously opposed positions suggest, the dilemma is a complex

one. In order to clarify what is at issue here, it is useful to consider the question of assimilation in a broader perspective.

(iv) Assimilation and the narrowing of identity.

In a recent forum on multiculturalism and the modern state, Habermas (1994) argues for the collective rights of immigrants to resist assimilation if they so choose. A democratic constitutional state, in his view, ought to allow both citizens and non-citizen residents the freedom to maintain cultural forms of life and tradition which may be distinct from those of the cultural mainstream. This critical view is grounded in the notion that the cultural integrity of certain marginalized groups may require legal protection from the assimilating influences of "Eurocentric global society" (Habermas, p. 109). At the same time Habermas distinguishes between two kinds of assimilation: conformity to the laws of the new country, and the voluntary embrace of mainstream cultural values.

Habermas acknowledges, however, the predicament that such a position presents. Clearly, the collective rights of the marginalized have to be set against the rights of the greater society to maintain a political culture, particularly if the influx of the cultural other is likely to change the composition of the country in an ethical-cultural respect (p. 137). All nation states, as Michael Walzer notes in the same forum, act to reproduce men and women of a certain sort (p. 101). In this respect the question may be asked: to what extent can a democratic state demand that

immigrants assimilate in order to maintain the integrity of its citizens' way of life? The irony here is that the greater society is only able to protect the rights of marginalized groups insofar as the state itself retains legal authority.

At the same time, there are profound dangers in viewing the democratic state primarily as a legal instrument which adjudicates among competing group-interests. When narrow loyalties supersede common loyalties, as Charles Taylor points out (1994), people come to view themselves more and more atomistically. They feel "less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances" (p. 113). While people may indeed feel linked in common projects with members of their ethnic community or fellow adherents of a particular credo, the bonds of loyalty to greater society (Latin: *socio*, 'friendship') are weakened. Individuals, then, come to view their differing needs and demands only in terms of charter rights and legal obligations. In the inevitable conflicts of self-interest, litigation too often replaces conversation in the pursuit of social justice.

In any case, viewing the state primarily as a legal entity presupposes the state's authority. The question remains: how does a collection of differing interest-groups agree upon even a limited statutory authority? What is the basis of any communality? Writing recently in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, journalist Michael Valpy opined that: "Societies are governable because their members hold important values in common--not because their governments have a lot of guns and jails" (March 11, 1994).

This reference to common values broadly echoes Gadamer's understanding of society as bonded by "a nameless authority sanctioned by custom and tradition" which has "power over our attitudes and behaviour" (Gadamer, p. 280). As previously discussed, it is through this common authority that distinct individuals may extend the horizons of their situated world-views. The profound challenge is in realizing this ideal of society within a modern constitutional democracy wherein the inevitable multiplicity of world views is further encompassed within many ethnicities and first languages.

The cultural relativist approach is simply to accept--even to celebrate--what are presumed as irreconcilable differences among distinct discourses. This view, it may be argued, is often echoed in the advocacy of an official policy of multiculturalism (Moodley, 1992); the view that broader society is composed of a unified 'mosaic' of smaller group-identities. Since it is assumed inappropriate to judge any particular culture by the standards of others, the operative principle in intergroup discourse becomes 'tolerance' of cultural otherness. Yet there is a world of difference, as the novelist Robertson Davies once noted in a C.B.C. radio interview (1980), between the ideas of 'tolerance' and 'acceptance.' While acceptance requires "true understanding of differences", tolerance is far more fragile. Tolerance requires not so much knowledge of the other as: "wilful ignorance blended with a measure of condescension". As Louis Goldman points out (1993), rather than cultivating appreciation of the common humanity of the

culturally other, the attempted education of the mainstream culture in multicultural tolerance, all too often results only in the hardening of group identities.

The relativist view of cultural difference is itself challenged by critical positions, such as that of Habermas, wherein it is argued that social justice can only be served by critically analyzing and challenging the powerful discourse(s) of the mainstream. From this position it is often advocated that minority groups protect themselves from the hegemonic interests of in-group language and culture by developing hegemonic group-strategies of their own (Philipson, 1988; Pennycook 1989; Lewycky, 1992). Although certain neo-Marxist ideologies adhere to the hope of a future free of class-struggle and social fragmentation, for the historical present, critical positions tend to view interaction among groups to be primarily determined by instrumental dealings in the strategic pursuit of greater social influence.

In regard to this critical concern with justice for the marginalized, Gadamer, for his part does not deny that hegemonic interests surely operate within society. "In the beginning in language" he notes, "we are trained in social norms and conventions behind which there is always economic and hegemonic interests" (p. 566). Yet in understanding a broad-based tradition as embedded in language itself, he insists that his project is not to legitimize a prejudice "in favour of existing social relations" (p. 567). He refers rather to the profound dangers implicit in the reduction of language and dialogue to notions of power relations. In his view,

it is only through conversation that every voice, including those of the marginalized, can be heard and through dialogue that injustice in existing social relations may be brought to wider understanding (p. 214).

At the same time, the possibility of wider understanding itself depends upon the meeting of a multiplicity of cultural horizons on common ground. Such dialogue is in turn, encouraged or discouraged by the prevailing social order. In this regard it may be asked: is a legal entity comprising a collection of isolated social groups bound only by instrumental needs (if not by mutual suspicions) likely to encourage understanding? How long is such a legal entity likely to even share a language or languages instrumentally in the linguistic sense, if it shares so little common ground in an ontological sense?

Though indeed, change may be the only 'dead certainty' for the future of the pluralistic state, change without the balance of constancy is likely to realize profound social disorder. As A.N. Whitehead warned at the conclusion of his discussion of symbolism (1985): "Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision must ultimately decay, either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows" (p. 88).

The 'symbols' to which Whitehead refers function similarly to Gadamer's preschematizations of meaning embedded in and handed down in language. The embedded cultural meaning which preschematizes understanding is realized through shared semiotic codes (Barthes,

1972) and common images, as shall be discussed in Chapter Four. Ordinary language may be rich in allusions to heroes, tragic or uplifting events, for examples, through which a common culture is realized (Hirsch Jr., 1987). Significant here is that the breadth and depth of common reference is a cultural achievement, and as such, is subject to the vicissitudes of history and politics.

Neal Bissoondath (1994) echoes the understanding of the profound importance of a common culture in asking: "What efforts do our governments make to promote national values and symbols that would allow the country to more comfortably absorb immigrants with different values?" (p. 107) As Whitehead suggests, the erosion of common reference through shrinking allegiances and public neglect leads not only to social decline but to the degeneration of language itself.

One may consider here a language such as that of the sugar plantation workers of Hawaii which Derek Bickerton studied in his search for the *Roots Of Language* (1981). This Creole, which emerged as a *lingua franca* among a polyglot of uprooted immigrant labourers, may be regarded in a linguistic sense as a fully functional human language with as much creative potential as, for example, Chinese or English. Yet as cultural artifact, an oral language for realizing the instrumental needs of a few hundred is hardly equal to another which manifests thousands of years of shared meaning for billions of people across a broad range of discourses. Yet as *parole*, the language with thousands of years of

cultural embeddedness is no less dynamic and vulnerable than the most fragile Creole.

Undeniably, the threat which social fragmentation poses to English, the surging global *lingua franca*, bears little comparison to the threat that global homogenization poses to minority languages. Of course, the disintegration of any language represents the irreplaceable loss of a unique artifact of shared cultural meaning. The loss of minority languages and the cultural diversity they realize may be no less tragic to the common heritage of humanity than is the narrowing of the world's biological diversity. The point here is that the issues of protection and nurture of minority languages and distinct cultures are rendered meaningless in the absence of a broader-based social order.

Are there political models which may provide for both the nurture of the greater society and the protection of the marginalized cultures such as immigrants represent? In his critique of a multiculturalist view of democracy (1993), Albert Goldman challenges both the notions of an ethnocentrism which denies the authenticity of the culturally other, and a cultural relativism which denies comparison of cultural values in regard to difficulties of integration. Both extremes in his view, are unhealthy for the pluralistic democracy (p. 406).

Cultures, in Goldman's view, flourish or atrophy depending on 'soil' and 'season'. However splendidly adaptive in their original setting, certain cultural practices may be maladaptive in a new time and place. Refreshing the old organic metaphor, Goldman sees

immigration as a transplantation by which the immigrant's cultural practices may either take root or shrivel in their new setting. Assuming that there are 'objective' standards by which transplanted cultural practices may be evaluated, is demeaning to the culturally other (p. 400). On the other hand, failure to confront the fact that certain transplanted cultural practices may be self-defeating or dysfunctional denies opportunity for pruning and new growth.

Goldman suggests that criteria of well-being and adaptiveness can be applied to the functionality of cultural practices in a new environment. He justifies the use of such criteria on pragmatic grounds, arguing that judgements about the value of certain cultural practices should reflect their social value specific to time and place, rather than intrinsic worth. "The ideas, values, behaviours, and material products of which [a culture] is constructed", Goldman argues, "are instruments for the well-being of the group, as good habits and character are instruments for the survival and well-being of the individual" (p. 400). By such criteria, transplanted cultural practices which offend public decency (eg. public spitting), if not verging on the illegal, may be judged dysfunctional with respect to a new setting. It is equally possible that by similar criteria a transplanted cultural practice may be judged worthy of emulation by the mainstream. One might consider here, the worthiness of such an uncommon practice in mainstream North America as the caring for an aged relative in the immediate family home.

Goldman's ideal of a healthy society which successfully assimilates newcomers is one of an "emergent pluralism" (p. 404). In such a model, individual identities are neither mashed into a melting-pot, nor cemented apart in a cultural mosaic. Such a society would rather aim to draw out for the common good, the best of what is admirable and precious from the multiplicity of cultural identities which shape the greater society. Goldman suggests that the emergent pluralism model can balance the respect for ethnic 'roots' and minority languages with the celebration of the greater society's common "soil, atmosphere and sun" (p. 407). At the same time, by placing "greater interest in descendants than in ancestors" (p. 407) such a society can counter the despair of change with an optimism for the future.

If such hope for the future is characteristically American, then Goldman's ideal of nationhood does reflect something of the nationality of its author. Even though Canada is no less a nation of immigrants than is the U.S.A., the appropriateness of emergent pluralism for a future Canada may of course, be questioned. At the same time, it would be hard to argue that Canada's democracy is any less fragile than that of the U.S.A. Despite a century and a quarter of history, and official multiculturalism enshrined in a Charter of Rights (1982), Canada is still in many respects "an imagined community" (Lewcky, 1992). Surely, the tendency of sharpening group identity described by Goldman can be no less threatening to the future of Canadian democracy.

(v) Identity and recognition.

While considering the difficult question of Quebec's claim of a distinct society, Charles Taylor (1994) relates the problem of group identity within the multiethnic state to "the politics of recognition" (p. 25). The understanding that society is obliged to 'recognize' the individual's pursuit of an ideal of an 'authentic-self', Taylor argues, originates in Rousseauian romanticism. In a contemporary context, however, the recognition of equal choice is often confused with recognition of equal value. Thus, even when an individual chooses to make his or her affiliations purely instrumental to the ends of self-fulfilment (p, 58), such self-centredness is often justified as having equal value with any other pursuit of an authentic self. This understanding, of course, is a perversion of the pursuit of authenticity which is itself to be contrasted with Gadamer's ideal of self-formation, described in the previous chapter. Despite its distortions, the principle of public acknowledgment of individual dignity remains, in its best sense, a cornerstone of the western democratic tradition.

The demand for group recognition is often fuelled by the emotional sense that the authentic self is devalued or demeaned by the majority culture. The demand often made of the cultural mainstream to recognise the equality of group identities is, in Taylor's view, an extension of the principle of recognition of individual dignity to the demand for the equal respect of "actually evolved cultures" (p. 42). This extended demand leads to both the relativist and critical positions on political questions. Taylor

sees as equally problematic the demand for the recognition of the equality of the values and products of all cultures, and the greater claim that "the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles on the politics of equal dignity is itself a reflection of one hegemonic culture" (p. 43). Both positions challenge the moral understanding of rights in liberal democracy. Both even rebound against the accord of respect which is sought.

At the same time, Taylor emphasizes that misrecognition is indeed, a moral travesty. "A person or group can suffer real damage when the people around them mirror back a confining, demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (p. 25). Sadly enough, it is such a sense of misrecognition, based on initial impressions, that often leads the new immigrant to a negative view of mainstream culture which, in turn, may crush her interest in second language learning apart from instrumental purposes (Giles & Coupland, 1991). Yet despite the danger of misrecognition of which we are always at risk--whether situated within majority or marginalized culture--there is a greater danger in submitting to recognition-on-demand. Any attempt to avoid or redress misrecognition by the automatic assumption of equal value and worth of another's choices or cultural practices based on their group-identity is, in Taylor's view, "an act of breathtaking condescension" (p. 70).

In some instances, the view that the self-esteem of immigrants is threatened by mainstream assimilation may reflect such condescension. Within the discourse of second language education, for example, a position has been taken that second language

immersion for immigrants is subtractive--a threat to first language cultural identity and self-esteem (Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Auerbach, 1993). While such a position may presume to advocate immigrant rights (in this case, the right to bilingual education) and may be supported by selective research, the encouragement of a stereotype of fragility of certain cultural minorities can be no more 'empowering' to those minorities than is the denial of their cultural otherness. Particularly as it relates to the situations of individuals, the uninvited advocacy of another's group-rights may misrecognize as well as patronize.

While in a psychological sense stereotypes may be seen to fulfil the need for binary categorizations (Ellis, 1993) crude stereotypes, *ie.* distorted images of the culturally other, can cruelly misrecognize. When a person chooses to be publicly identified with the dominant characteristics, practices and values broadly presumed of a group, then a stereotype may take public precedence over the person's individual identity. Thus, those who make the demand of group recognition may well find themselves trapped, in terms of public recognition, within stereotyped group identities. In any case, group identities in the multicultural context are as much creations of the context itself as they are creations of their membership. In one's country of origin, identity may be derived from affiliations to clan, village, city quarter, region or occupation, while the multicultural context may offer an 'ethnic identity' based on some superficial characteristic, such as skin colour.

Of course, the social dynamic by which stereotypes and group loyalties are formed is extraordinarily complex (Giles and Coupland, 1991). It would be foolish to deny the cruel role played by racism, bigotry and historical grievance in the formation of group alliances. Yet the fact remains that in identifying the commonalities of real public importance, group identities based on ethnicity may be no more reliable than those based in gender, age, ability, or sexual orientation. Even group identities based in shared language, in the linguistic sense, do not necessarily identify the commonalities that realize understanding. As Neal Bissoondath notes: "If the individual is not to be betrayed, a larger humanity must prevail over the narrowness of ethnicity" (1994, p. 107). Both the seeking and the recognizing of identity within this larger humanity, arguably, is the hallmark of the democratic point of view.

(vi) Fusions of horizon.

"If by entering foreign language worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world... Like travellers, we return home with new experiences. Even if we emigrate and never return we can never wholly forget" (Gadamer, p. 448).

From the ontological perspective, differences in identity lie not so much in ethnic characteristics nor even in linguistic differences but in the bounded horizons of world views. Yet while

each world view is situated within prejudices, Gadamer insists that: "the multiplicity of these world views does not involve any relativization of the world". What the world is, rather, is not different from the views in which it presents itself" (p. 447). While ontologically, 'the same world' is realized, no single world view within a multiplicity is determined in isolation. The identity, wherein each world view is situated, presupposes a 'thou' or an 'it', and is realized through a 'we.' Charles Taylor also invokes something of the Gadamerian view that: "my own identity crucially depends upon my dialogic relation with others" (1994, p. 34).

Such conversation with others, or with otherness, is not without risk. There are risks of embarrassment, of 'culture shock'; risks to what psychologists may refer to as 'ego permeability' (Shumann, 1986). Yet the risks of openness to the other are not to be mistaken with the risks of purely instrumental encounters with others. There, 'skewed power relations' in the absence of good will and curiosity can certainly do harm to those less proficient in the communication-medium (Giles and Coupland, 1991). Yet in true conversation with otherness the identity is not likely to be twisted or swallowed up such as is suggested, for example, by the view that mainstream acculturation is threatening to native language and values. The important point is that the choice to open oneself to the risks and challenges demanded by 'in-betweenness' is one's personal choice. Although closure before the fear of change may seem the safest choice, only openness leads to *Erfahrung*, the

learning experience. Yet one must be prepared, as Gadamer stresses, to surrender something of the self therein: "openness to the other then involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me even though no one else forces me to do so" (p. 361).

Such openness to the other, Charles Taylor suggests, is the only honest approach to the problem of recognition. While condescension or denial may seem the less risky approach to the challenge of difference, such instrumentalist ploys are morally dishonest. What is needed, in Taylor's view, is to "move in a broader horizon within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuations can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formally unfamiliar culture" (Taylor, 1994, p. 67). Clearly invoked here is Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons.

As with hermeneutic conversation, there is always unpredictability in such fusions. At the edge of another cultural horizon, there is usually surprise. At the same time, by the very fact that the other cultural horizon, just as ours, has endured into the contemporary world we can assume that we have something valuable to learn by encountering it. However removed from the other, our realizations of 'the good', 'the admirable' or 'the beautiful'; the very being of such shared preschematizations can provide the common ground for comparison of what is epistemologically different.

Perhaps most significantly, the ideal of a fusion of cultural horizons challenges our public encounters wherein we work out, at the personal level, the arrangements of living together in a democratic state. The model of emergent pluralism, as previously described, resonates with this idea of the ongoing search for public commonality whereby citizens: "could embody the values of experimentation and democracy and could mediate many of the present conflicts in a process of forging a new and common future" (Goldman, 1993, p. 107). Of course, just as there is risk and surprise in interindividual conversation, there is no less unpredictability in this broad social conversation wherein democracy, ever challenging, may be shaped and reshaped. While the ever-emerging forms of such a pluralistic democracy are as uncertain as is the future itself, perhaps the best hope offered by such a model is for a common future. This is emphatically not to suggest that the representation of cultural diversity is likely to be lost within some hegemonic and homogenized whole. What is suggested rather is a social ideal wherein private affiliations will be protected by the very nurturing of public commonalities in which, as equal citizens, we all may share.

(vii) Identity in the ESL classroom.

How might this perspective inform the settlement ESL classroom? While there is certainly no straight prescription here for classroom relations or curricular approaches, understandings realized through this foregoing discussion will be explored in the

final two chapters. Most broadly, the political lessons have to do with values, and the sorts of values that are to be prized in the classroom encounter. The challenges for the classroom as I see them, might be summarized as follows:

There is the challenge of encouraging the classroom environment wherein open and respectful relations can flourish. The voice of every 'thou' must be heard primarily as that of a unique individual rather than as a representative of some group-interest. The honest recognition of otherness, I believe, offers the best hope of realizing fusions of horizons in the classroom, whereby different understandings of what is precious and admirable can be drawn forth for the benefit of all. No less demanding is the challenge of self-formation, which may inspire student and teacher alike. The values of "sensitivity, subtlety and a capacity for discrimination" (Warnke, 1987, p. 174) which are hallmarks of the cultured self as invoked in the understanding of *Bildung*, can be regarded as ideals of universal value, however realized within different cultural horizons. The critical corollary here is that the cultured self is not a product of natural growth but is an achievement. However rich a milieu which the ESL classroom may provide for such achievements, it is not the teacher--nor the mainstream culture--which may coerce or even direct a newcomer towards seeking a bicultural self. The will to fuse with other cultural horizons, as much as the will to close oneself to cultural otherness, lies with the individual. Furthermore, the ideal of

self-formation is not a birthright of privilege, but is a challenge for anyone committed to life-long education.

As regards curricular content, the challenge may be to identify national values and symbols pertaining to Canadian culture in terms of teachable schemas for the immigrant learner of Canadian English. With all due respect to Mounties, maple leaves and beavers; the cultural icons of countries like France, Mexico or Korea are hardly as elusive as those of this country. I prefer to sidestep the debate as to whether or not a mainstream culture based in the English language exists at all in Canada. But I will suggest, in passing, that the very soul-searching which goes on in regard to the question of identity in this country may be the hallmark of the Canadian identity itself. Even given its negative tendencies--self-doubt, gloominess--the promotion of this ever-questioning Canadian attitude among newcomers may not be a bad thing.

However 'practical' the engagement of learning and teaching ESL, the value of such insights can surely find applicability. Before exploring curricular choices which in some sense, take on these challenges, I will examine the presumptions implicit in the 'needs-based' approach to curricula which is currently influential in the field.

Finally, on a more personal note, while working on this chapter I have come to view in a new light, the poster in my school hallway. Below a mosaic of photos and above the official emblem of

federal sponsorship of "The International Year of the Family, 1994", it bears the message:

Every family is different. What does yours look like?

Despite the charm of children's smiles among the blur of faces, I have become a little saddened by this official message which is meant to offer, one guesses, hope and welcome to newcomers.

Yet what can be more obvious than the fact of difference? Perhaps a generation ago in this country, before demographic and technological shiftings bore the multiplicity of cultural otherness into daily life, perhaps then the fact of difference came shooting like a comet into the mainstream horizon.

Perhaps that 'revelation' of difference within mainstream consciousness was morally appropriate for the time, and perhaps a generation later, in its best sense, the message still challenges stereotypes. But now that loyalties have so narrowed, now that there is so little acknowledgement of what is held in common--how much does an invocation of difference really inspire?

In all the superficial aspects--in number, in dress, in colour, in habits--of course, every family is 'different'. Yet the fact remains that every family is a family. Every family shares, aspires to share, or if not, should aspire to share in the commonalities of familyhood: in security, in concern, in trust, and in love.

I have also been reminded in the midst of this writing, of two new students who entered my class last month: a young man from

Sarajero, Bosnia, and another from Split, on the Adriatic coast. Two former Yugoslav compatriots, now refugees, they take on the challenge of a new life in a land where another multicultural 'experiment', one hundred and twenty-eight years old, is still in the making.

In trying to see the poster in the hallway as one of these two young men might see it, I ask myself: how welcome would I feel in being officially informed that I have come to live in a country which primarily recognizes that *Every family is different?* Might I not take more heart in reading: *Every family is the same?*

CHAPTER THREE:

WHAT DOES THE IMMIGRANT ESL LEARNER REALLY NEED?

(i) Introduction.

Computers and audio labs aside, perhaps less has changed over five centuries of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) than one might suppose. The situational dialogue, for example, still widely used in TESL was the mainstay of the 'severely practical' phrase books developed by Huguenot refugee teachers in England in the 1570's (Howatt, 1984). Admittedly, a 16th century prescriptive for *Dinner Conversation* seems quaint beside a situational dialogue for *The Fast Food Restaurant*. Still, despite the limitations of their technology and human science, the English teachers of the 1600's were no less ready to address the language needs of their students than modern ESL teachers are keen to meet the needs of theirs. In fact, in the teaching of English to wool merchants in the Antwerp quaysides in the 1650's we see two notable beginnings-- English as *lingua franca* of international business and the teaching of English for special purposes (ESP). The severely-practical focus of both remain with us today.

While I believe the claim that the ideas accessible to language teachers "have not changed in 2,000 years" (Kelly in Stern, 1983) to be somewhat exaggerated, I agree that a longer view

of the teaching of ESL does put into better perspective the seemingly radical changes witnessed in the field of TESL over the last few decades. Since the mid-1960's, the field has witnessed the rise and decline in popularity of several teaching methodologies (eg. audio-lingual, cognitive code) each of which was billed by its proponents as representing a paradigm shift in the field (Rivers, 1980; Sheen, 1994).

Still, teachers in the field can ill afford to neglect these purported revolutions in methodology. Since so much of adult TESL exists outside the public school system, 'being on the cutting edge' often has as much to do with funding and market survival as with openness to innovation (Richards in Pennycook 1984). Perhaps the 16th century ESL teacher in Antwerp was just as nervous about whether the new teacher down the quayside was attracting more students.

In any case, as Pennycook suggests, the clues to the changing fortunes of particular teaching approaches may lie more in "shifts in the social, political and philosophical climate" than in their efficacy in the classroom (Pennycook, 1989). In this regard, it is interesting to consider how changing social and political currents are manifested in settlement ESL curricula, which is the area of teaching upon which discussion in this chapter will be focused.

Since the 1960's, the government of Canada has demonstrated its official interest in the "adjustment and adaptation" of immigrants who speak neither official language by funding a range of language training programs in both English and French

(Citizenship and Immigration Canada document, 1995, p. 2). While some of these programmes are designed for particular ethnic groups or aimed at immigrants with particular employment interests, the largest sector of settlement language training still brings together in broad proficiency-based groupings, adults from a wide diversity of backgrounds.

Critics from within the field itself have questioned whether the teaching of generic ESL in segregated multicultural classes is effectively meeting the English language needs of newcomers. Laura Ho (1992) points out that approaches prescribed for immigrant language education in *The Handbook For New Canadians* used in the 1920's bear remarkable similarity with approaches used in Survival ESL today. She further suggests that underlying this similarity may be a disturbing view of assimilation, which has too little evolved from an era when 'Canadianization' implied the acceptance of Anglo-hegemony (p. 77).

This criticism of both the efficacy and the aims of generic ESL for immigrants is not to be taken lightly. Supporting it are studies which show that large numbers of immigrants who take settlement ESL classes make slow progress towards functional ability. Larger numbers apparently, are reaching 'threshold' proficiency but failing to progress much beyond that (d'Anglejan & Painchaud, 1986; Cumming, 1994; Burnaby, 1992). By getting stuck at a low level of proficiency in English, these immigrants are unable to qualify for specialized training opportunities (Wong-Fillmore, 1982; Pendakur & Ledoux, 1991). Such dismal evidence suggests that

the generic multicultural language training programmes are at best inefficient in helping immigrants adjust and adapt. At worst, as implied by more severe critics, such programmes may be perpetrating in some modern form, an old-fashioned insensitivity to cultural otherness.

While acknowledging these disturbing trends, I still support the continuance of the broad, as opposed to the narrowly-focused, ESL classroom as the best *first* step for the immigrant's adaptation and adjustment in Canada. At the same time, I believe that needed improvement in the generic multicultural programmes must begin with a closer look at what is too often regarded as received wisdom about content and approaches. In this regard, I will question the conventional determination of 'survival' language needs for new immigrants. I will further contend that attempts to customize ESL curricula at lower levels through the narrow focus on seemingly practical needs often reinforce the learners' instrumental (Lambert, 1967) resistance to learn English beyond the merely functional level. Finally, I will make the case that along with addressing instrumental needs, settlement ESL curricular choices could do much better in addressing what I consider to be **ontological needs**. Primarily, these include difficulties of the immigrant's induction into an unfamiliar culture and the problems of changing identity brought on by the immigration experience. Addressing ontological issues as early as possible, I will argue, can better motivate the learner to push beyond functional proficiency and build the foundation for the independent learning

required to succeed in this challenge. Addressing ontological issues of language learning in a multicultural classroom context, I will contend, can better serve the social ideal of emergent pluralism described in the previous chapter.

(ii) Sciencism and theories of language learning.

The essence of a paradigm often lies in its metaphor. In second language acquisition theory (S.L.A.) which broadly informs ESL at the present time, the sounds which go into the ear are often referred to as 'input'. The sounds which come out of the mouth are 'output'. From 'interface position' (Krashen, 1980) to 'affective filter' (Duley & Burt, 1982) or 'projection device' (Zolb, 1980) to 'channel capacity' (R. Ellis, 1988) the language of S.L.A. theory is often more suggestive of computer functions than of human learning.

The fondness for mechanical models even extends to the pragmatics domain of S.L.A. wherein, for example, the social world may be described as being 'constructed' by the 'tools' of language and discourse. (Schiefflin & Ochs, 1986). Too often in such sociolinguistic description, the technical term is used to give the patina of scientific precision to phenomena more appropriately described by *Verstehen*, or even better suited to literary description. Unlike the inert gases in a near-vacuum, concepts such as 'acculturation', denoting the phenomena attending a learner's adaptation to the culture of a target language, hardly lend themselves to empirical measurement. Yet this has not deterred

S.L.A. researchers from schematizing acculturation along with other so-called learning variables on graphs and charts which purport to offer models for predicting second language achievement (R. Ellis 1985; Shumann, 1986). As an ESL teacher, I welcome the insight that such models offer. At the same time, in seeing a shy ESL learner flounder in a conversation with a more outgoing one 'asymmetrical divergence between mixed dyads' is hardly the kind of language which comes to mind.

Although far removed from curricula-as-lived (Aoki, 1984), the scientism of S.L.A. research often seeps into views of ESL curricula. One may hear English described as a 'tool' for learning subject matter (Chamot and O'Malley, 1987, p. 228) or hear references to background information about learners as 'biodata' (Celce-Murcia, 1989). Eisner (1985) sees something of a model of industrial efficiency reflected in such views of 'curriculum as technology'. Here the value of a lesson lies in the predicability and productivity of its learning outcomes, however one determines learning outcomes to be measured (Taba, 1962; Dunkin & Biddle 1974).

While mechanistic views of mind and learning are at least as old as Newton's clockwork universe, the popularity of viewing human thinking in terms of the digital computer, as Charles Taylor has noted, is a typically modern view of mind (1991). The sense of a 'disengaged reason' enhances, in Taylor's view, a false sense of power whereby others and otherness may be treated as instruments of one's satisfaction, curiosity or need. Such instrumental views of

mind, language and human interaction are, in my view, at odds with the dialogical view of understanding described in Chapter One.

Gadamer strongly rejects the view of language as an 'instrument' (Gadamer, 1966, p. 63). In the ontological view, language is not an objectifiable sign-system through which disengaged subjects communicate or negotiate. It is rather the communicative mediation by which fusions with otherness may be realized. While Gadamer's ideal of hermeneutic conversation pertains primarily to dialogue with others on fairly equal footing in a common language, entering a new language world beyond the threshold of bare functionality also demands dialogical engagements. In my view, Gadamer's critique of the instrumentalist view of language can be extended to a critique of instrumentalist presumptions in second language curricula.

Before further discussing the ontological challenge for settlement ESL, in this next section I turn attention to the evolution of the needs-based settlement ESL curricula and the efficacy of functional-notional approaches (van Ek, Richterich, Wilkins, 1978; Yalden, 1983; Nunan, 1988) in settlement ESL curricula. I will also consider some striking socio-psychological assumptions in the common prioritizing of needs, and consider some assumptions in the conventional assessment of the relative difficulty of certain second language performances. I will briefly discuss the challenge which a semiotic perspective presents to common assumptions about language difficulty.

(iii) The instrumentality of functional language needs.

Needs-based curricula attempt to focus instruction on meeting the practical language needs of adult learners. The idea of practical language needs is based in the pragmatics domain of linguistics which regards language use as dependent upon context of situation (Firth in Yalden, 1983). In the mid-seventies, in response to the freer movement of people throughout the European Community, the Council of Europe undertook an educational research project to delineate the particular language abilities needed for threshold (entry-level) proficiency in a variety of social contexts (van Ek, Richterich, D.A. Wilkins, 1975). This research has been one strong influence in the development of a number of notional-functional curricula models for the teaching of English to adults (Wilkins, 1976; Mumby, 1987; Finnocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Yalden, 1987; Nunan, 1988).

The general approach is to determine the target language performances a learner or a group of learners is likely to need in order to function in the contexts of daily life and work, and to develop a curriculum for teaching those particular performance objectives. Such notions as 'requesting', 'asking for clarification' or 'complaining', for example, are often needed in the context of *shopping*. To this end, classroom activities can be designed to simulate a shopping situation. This might involve a student role play of a customer asking a check-out cashier about the regular pricing of an item which was advertised to be on sale. At a lower level, students might follow teacher directions by

miming in Total Physical Response (Asher, 1977) fashion, a series of shopping activities (weighing vegetables, pushing a shopping cart etc.). Other language-learning activities may be planned around the functional theme. With regard to *shopping*, for example, students might practice comparative forms of adjectives (eg. 'cheaper than'... 'not as expensive as'...) or practice idiomatic language ('a good deal', 'rock-bottom prices'; 'in-season') Students might as well compare prices on grocery flyers, clip coupons or write grocery lists. A beginner class might even take a field trip to a grocery store to look for items on a checklist or to compare prices of real items.

The particular functional themes selected for a particular class, as will be discussed, depends upon some form of assessment of a group of students' initial language needs. As would be expected, however, both curriculum developers and teachers in settlement ESL make broad assumptions about what newcomers' most pressing functional needs are likely to be. It is insightful to consider the views of social and cognitive development implied in such assumptions.

In a manner suggestive of Maslow's hierarchial view of needs (1978), an immigrant's psychological needs are commonly viewed as spiralling outwards from primary physiological concerns ('survival' functions) to less urgent 'self-actualization' needs often relating to the pursuit of non-material interests. As he gains proficiency in the new language, an immigrant's investment in the new culture is often presumed to spiral outwards from the self and the

classroom towards the wider community and the larger world (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983). Similar hierarchial notions are implicit in settlement ESL curricula in the common tendency to focus on such themes as *food and shopping* or *health and emergencies* at beginners' levels, while reserving *entertainment* and *citizenship* for students at higher levels of proficiency.

At the same time, presumptions are often made about the particular order in which grammatical structures should be taught and how the teaching of particular structures can be fitted into particular functional themes. At a beginners' level, for example, simple question patterns might be drilled through *asking for directions*, while passive voice may be introduced at an intermediate level through a topic such as *the highway code*. Further, the treatment of a survival theme is often presumed to require less complex language than is the treatment of a self-actualization theme. For example, the teaching of deictic language ('This/that', 'these/those'; 'here is/there is') may be presumed useful for low beginners for pointing out the fruits and vegetables in supermarket bins, whereas 'hope' or 'wish' clauses might be presumed useful for low-intermediate students to speculate about their future in Canada. Such conflation of theories about social and psychological needs with ideas about grammatical acquisition readiness is problematic. While theories about the 'order' of second language acquisition are complex and tangential to this discussion, it can be noted in any case that theories of hierarchial language development have been challenged in both

S.L.A. (R. Ellis, 1988) and psychology (Vygotsky in Landolf & Appel, 1994).

Even when the activities relating to social functions are performed competently in the ESL classroom, it is interesting to speculate how such performances may relate to the *Dasein*, the life-world of particular students. Some students no doubt enjoy and benefit from the interactive practice around such a theme as *shopping*. Yet other students might smile through gritted teeth as they sort plastic fruits from vegetables or walk shepherded through the public market. Others, although unruffled by such experiences, might simply not relate to the class activities as alternative approaches to pointing and gesturing at the supermarket or having someone else buy their groceries. Still others, who may be tempted to try out classroom dialogue at the checkout, are mortified at making a fool of themselves in public.

Neither the desire to express self-actualization interests in a second language nor the desire to perform more inconspicuously in second language functions bear relationship, in my view, to a general level of second language proficiency. One commonly sees students at an upper intermediate level of general proficiency who handle themselves well in group discussion yet who are barely able to ask a bus driver for a transfer. Then there are the 'low beginners', who are far more eager to know what English-speaking Canadians generally expect of immigrants than to learn the 'language' for pointing at fruits and vegetables. The challenge, as shall be explored in the final chapter, is how to deal better with

students' self-actualization needs at all levels of general proficiency.

Valuable insight into the relative difficulty and need of functional language in particular contexts is offered, in my view, by a semiotic perspective (from Gk. *semion*: sign). In his celebrated *Cours de Linguistiques* (1916) de Saussure described the linguistic relationship between a 'signifier' (a word) a 'signified' (a concept) and a referent (a 'thing'). 'The sign', he regarded as the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Building on Saussure's atomistic conception of first-order signification, Barthes and others have described semiotic systems in which signs, like mirrors held within reflecting mirrors, image multiple references beyond first-order meaning. The consideration of higher-order signification expands semiotics from a study of signs to the study of cultural meaning (Harris & Taylor, 1989; Tobin, 1990). Along with the study of language in context, semiotic study may include the study of the signs and codes of art forms, of modes of exchange, of dress or of family structure (Halliday & Hassan, 1989). In the social field of education, semiotics may consider the signs and codes of relationships between a teacher and students within the larger context of value systems and ideology. Without needing to delve too deeply in this often enigmatic field, it should be clear that cultural codes and orders of language use are much less accessible to culturally-uninitiated ESL learners than are the grammatical patterns or functional formulae such students have to learn.

For example, an ESL classroom role-play of *at the checkout counter* may be more complex from a semiotic perspective than a classroom discussion of *what Canadians generally expect of immigrants*. The context of the classroom discussion, although much more demanding of second language proficiency in grammar, is readily understood by those participants who have attained their level of proficiency by understanding, in some measure, the semiotic codes of classroom procedure. The role-play, although apparently much easier to perform, encompasses denotative language (names of objects, participants) which signify a second-order code ('supermarket shopping') which represents a third-order semiotic system ('the roleplay') which in turn represents a fourth semiotic system (classroom registers, teacher expectations). All these codes intermingle within a strange new system of signifiers (English) the formal properties of which a learner is expected to discover and practise through simulation. Yet no function in a real context ever goes according to script. Even given this semiotic labyrinth to be negotiated within the "reproduction, simulation and artifice" of the classroom (Edelhoff, 1981), the roleplay can at best be a dim simulacrum of the real shopping experience.

As already implied, an immigrant student's deficit in the language of a social function--particularly as assessed in terms of a classroom activity--is not necessarily to be equated with a problem with that social function. It is not only recently that many immigrants in Canada, especially those in urban areas, have been able to conduct their daily affairs with little or no English.

This is certainly not to slight the severity of the ghettoizing effect of learning to cope outside the mainstream. What is being questioned here is whether teaching English for performing social functions to newcomers is the best way to help them develop their actual communicative competence in English, and start them toward broader social participation. As Widdowson has noted in questioning the efficacy of the notional-functional approach: "Communicative competence is not a compilation of items in memory but a set of strategies or creative procedures" (Widdowson in Yalden, 1987). Indeed, it is questionable that a grab-bag of functional language, offers newcomers the best preparation for the unpredictability of real second language discourse.

(iv) The 'negotiated curriculum' model.

The negotiated curriculum model aims to address the difficulties arising from poorly informed judgements of students' language needs (Nunan, 1988). Rather than proceeding to teach from a prescribed body of notions, social functions or themes, the teacher following this model carefully engages students in ongoing dialogue about their perception of their second language needs as well as their expectations for their ESL class. Following this, the teacher attempts to negotiate between her perceptions of the students' language needs and the students' own perceptions of such. In proceeding to plan learning activities, the teacher tries to ensure that the diversity of perceived needs and interests among the students is fairly balanced. Such an approach seems, *prima*

facie, ideally suited to the settlement language classroom. Indeed, David Nunan's model was developed especially for immigrant language education in Australia. Yet like the mice's problem with belling the cat in the Aesop's fable, the authentically negotiated curriculum-- however well-conceived--is hardly easy to implement.

The first difficulties lie with the means of getting reliable information from students. Viewed from the perspective of the immigrants themselves, a teacher's initial invitation to students for help in planning curricula might well seem bizarre (Ho, 1989; Cumming, 1993). Even where a teacher is able to get information in relaxed first-language interviews there is still the possibility, as discussed with regard to the semiotic perspective, that the cultural codes implicit in these consultations will be poorly understood by the students. While the argument is made that students learn to negotiate through the process of negotiation (Nunan, 1988) there may be more cultural resistance to the concept itself, as shall be discussed, than one may judge from students' compliance. Even where good information is elicited, the task of organizing a curriculum from a tangle of individual preferences can be overwhelming. And just as overwhelmed--often by the fear of anarchy--are the students. It is not uncommon (I offer here my own experience) for 'needs surveys' to come back with all options dutifully checked, or with some telling scribble such as: *need everything english, teacher please!*

To be fair, Nunan addresses the practical difficulties of collection and analysis of information from students and offers

within his model, suggestions for learner training. Yet it is not the need for teaching learning strategies or the principle of negotiation--primarily questions of means--with which I take issue. I question, rather, what I regard to be underlying instrumentalist presumptions of the model.

I question whether a newcomer who has not yet, in the ontological sense, entered the horizon of a new language would have any idea about what to expect or how he may benefit from entering its new world of meaning. This is certainly not to suggest that adult immigrants are without a shrewd grasp of the instrumental problems of their resettlement. It is clearly prudent for the immigrant in the first months of resettlement to learn to deal with such practical problems as answering the telephone, making sense of the classified ads, or writing a resume in a new language. Indeed, the settlement ESL class can help the student to strategically cope with such functional needs. If the choice of second language learning options is restricted to a range of instrumental functions, however, the newcomer's first impressions of the possibilities of personal growth and change through the new language will likewise be restricted. ESL classes, in my view, should serve a broader purpose of providing newcomers with glimpses of a world of meaning beyond the language pertaining merely to "satisfaction of material needs" (Halliday in Yalden, 1987).

I also question the appeal to personal relevance in the survey of instrumental language needs. In discussing the limits of self-determined needs in 'the personal relevance' view of curricula,

Eisner (1985) points out that learner choice is possible only when the learner understands a wide range of options. The framing of the new language and culture within the context of the personally relevant certainly does offer the learner options of immediate and practical appeal. Some students faced with appealing 'menus' of language functions may even be hopeful of having their second language needs served quickly and efficiently. Others may be amused--possibly suspicious--in sniffing in the ESL needs survey, something of the code of the fast food restaurant. From the educational experiences of some ethnic Chinese newcomers, for example, the invitation to indulge in self-interest and consumer choice in the classroom may be viewed with puzzlement, surprise--even disappointment (Sampson, 1984; Pennycook 1984; Li Chuang Paper, 1990).

The possibility that expectations change as students are transformed by their learning is not an understanding privileged to one ethnic group. For all newcomers, regardless of origin, it is questionable whether a foundation in language functions of personal relevance offers the best support for entering a new language world beyond the threshold. It is also questionable whether an instrumentalist foundation can accommodate the greater society's long-term interest in integrating newcomers.

(v) Instrumentalist learning outcomes.

Too many of the clients of settlement ESL classes, as suggested in the introduction, fail to get far beyond functional

proficiency in English. In this section, I will address the complex phenomenon which is referred to in S.L.A. as the 'fossilization' (Selinker, 1972) of second language ability. I will broadly survey a few useful explanations for fossilization and consider their consequences. I will argue that conventional approaches in settlement ESL can do more in building the foundation to help adult newcomers learn English beyond merely threshold proficiency.

Settlement language training it should be noted, is not intended as an end--but only a beginning--towards second language learning and resettlement goals. Yet when learners end their ESL learning where they should be beginning, they are unlikely to fully participate in the social dialogue of emergent pluralism described in the previous chapter. With barely functional English they are often shut out from pursuing community participation, citizenship, vocational training, professional requalification and academic upgrading--those integrative outcomes intended by the Canadian Government's mandate for settlement language training (Citizenship and Immigration Canada document, 1995).

There is no easy answer as to why adult second language learners stop making progress. Educational interest, of course, depends on the extent to which particular cases of fossilization presents a 'problem'. The retired person's loss of interest in his hobby of learning Attic Greek, for example, hardly bears either the personal or social consequences as does the case of the immigrant's failing to progress in the mainstream language. In such cases as the latter one begins to look for theories which offer some hope of

remediation. Not all S.L.A. theories are of equal value in this pragmatic regard. For example, the hypothesis that the language learning capacity of the brain atrophies with age (Johnson & Newport 1989; Long, 1990), or the hypothesis that some brains are innately 'dyslexic' in regard to second language learning (Sparks, 1989) offer little hope for the grandmother in the front row who leafs aimlessly through her overfilled binder. Since she will still unfailingly attend her morning ESL class, her instructor's duty remains both to better understand her difficulties and to afford her help.

Although every problematic case of fossilization is certainly as different as the situation of every learner, it is nevertheless interesting that the plateau of ESL learning for many adult immigrants occurs at the threshold level of proficiency (d'Anglejan & Painchaud; 1986). This tendency has been explained in terms of an attitudinal problem and a literacy problem--two ideas which are relevant to this discussion.

After researching adult learners' attitudes towards language learning, Lambert (1967) proposed that motivation for language learning should be viewed along a continuum--with an 'instrumental' attitude as one extreme and an 'integrative' one at the other. He concluded that learners who are mainly concerned with their instrumental needs for a target language tend not to be as successful as those learners with greater integrative interests in the culture of the target language (Lambert 1967; Gardener, 1985). According to this hypothesis, the interlanguage (Selinker, 1972;

Hatch, 1978) of the immigrant who wants English for getting a job but who has little interest in mainstream Canadian culture, is more likely to fossilize at a lower level of proficiency than is the interlanguage of the immigrant who wants to pursue friendships with English-speaking Canadians. Further, the integratively-oriented learner is likely to be open to English and more likely to be challenged to improve her proficiency. Meanwhile, the immigrant with a markedly instrumental attitude towards English and Canadian culture, is likely to limit his English encounters to situations narrowly bounded by his functional needs. Within such narrow contexts his proficiency in English is subject to a downward spiralling effect. When he is faced with situations demanding more English, rather than opening himself to the challenge, this immigrant is likely to look for compensatory strategies to avoid its use (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

The insight for settlement language curricula is clear. The class which too little appeals to a newcomer's integrative interests, however effectively it addresses instrumental needs, is less likely to make a difference in challenging its learners to aspire beyond the merely functional threshold. This is not to deny the influence of a host of other learner variables (Shumann, 1975; Stern, 1983) which more often than not elude measurement. Still, too often the hope which many immigrants first bring to a settlement ESL class is soured by the frustrations of slow progress (d'Angeljan & Painchaud, 1986). While the few hours spent in the classroom are a small part of the adult immigrant's social

experience, and even the most ideally individualised curriculum can only be a contributing factor in any individual's language learning, the damage done to learning morale by classroom boredom or frustration cannot be underestimated (Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980; Oxford, 1990). The teaching challenge is not only to provide interesting and affirming learning experiences but to help students cope with some of the unavoidable boredom and frustration of language learning.

At the same time, it should be recognized that even incremental gains in self-confidence in learning can provide ESL students with quantum openings to undiscovered social contexts. The success of settlement ESL, teachers should not fail to remind themselves, lies in the eventual integration of immigrants and the contribution of their talent and energy to the common good. In this social view, the task of the 'ontologically responsible' settlement ESL curriculum is to ensure that along with the functional language content, newcomers are offered content that is likely to arouse their curiosity in mainstream culture and their interest in mainstream integration. Proposals for such content will be explored in the final chapter.

In discussing the difficulties of improving second language proficiency from a more cognitive perspective, it is useful to distinguish between different modes of proficiency. For this discussion, Cummins' distinction (1980) between interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) is helpful. BICS is based more in oral skills

and CALP in reading and writing ability. Second language BICS is most useful in coping outside the classroom, whereas second language CALP is needed for classroom learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Carrell, 1989; Wesche & Paribakt, 1993). In order to move beyond merely functional ability a learner requires flexibility in both modes of second language proficiency. BICS is needed for the satisfying social encounters in English which encourage further encounters, while CALP is needed to actively monitor and regulate such learning.

Such monitoring and regulation of language learning is a strange balancing act. One must be immersed in the target language while staying alert to the language's unfamiliar formal properties. Such monitoring and control of language use beyond language itself is often referred to as metalinguistic awareness (Flavell, 1976; Bialystok, 1981; Gombert, 1989). Of course, in learning to listen to, speak, read or write another language one tends to be rather more aware of the new language's awkwardness than of its meaning. Even the ability to posit a language as object, for the purposes of understanding something of its structure, is a 'simple' mode of metalinguistic awareness which must be learnt. To paraphrase an analogy provided by Barthes (1972): the woodcutter of folklore becomes aware of his axe as 'object' or 'tool' only when it needs sharpening. Otherwise the axe, the tree and the cutting are seldom considered apart from his daily work. Similarly, one becomes aware of particular aspects of language use only in the break-down of comprehension strategies. While some forms of such metalinguistic

awareness may be universal to higher cognitive operations across cultures (Gombert, 1989), other modes may be tied to culturally specific modes of literacy (Havelock, 1976; Read et. al., 1986). Modes of metacognitive awareness needed for reading or writing in another language are certainly of a different order than those needed for the sharpening of axes.

The insight here for settlement language curricula is that students are unlikely to benefit from classroom activities designed to develop their BICS--the primary focus of functional notional approaches--without their having some background in first language CALP (Carrell, 1989; Olstain et. al., 1990; Wesche & Paribakt, 1993). In other words, it can certainly not be taken for granted that adult newcomers will initially make sense of classroom learning in the Canadian context.

Obviously, not all adult immigrants will be interested in developing CALP to an high degree in English. Still, some degree of CALP is needed even for functioning in most work settings in a second language context. The minimal degree of second language literacy which allows progress beyond threshold proficiency depends in turn upon aspects of metalinguistic skill. For example, Chinese students oriented to idiographic script who have little grounding in the alphabetic mode of literacy will have difficulty in decoding the written word (Read, et al., 1986). Unless they are explicitly instructed in phonics, they may fail to even understand the concept of sound-letter correspondence which is a skill necessary for reading alphabetic script. There are, fortunately, a

range of approaches for teaching metalinguistic enabling skills and learning strategies in reading. Most of these approaches are aimed specifically at genres of text and content areas (Mohan, 1895; G. Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Celce-Murcia, 1989; Vacca & Vacca, 1993).

Teaching to increase cultural awareness is rather more challenging. Only very slowly and gradually do newcomers grasp the codes of common everyday situations in another language world. Most cultural understanding must be absorbed from the ocean of English culture beyond the classroom. Still, the ESL classroom can provide learners with suggestions for staying afloat in that unfamiliar cultural ocean. The key--as must be continuously practised in class--is that learners use good learning strategies and remain open to cultural otherness. Suggestions for cultivating such openness will be offered in Chapter Four.

Unquestionably, ESL teachers need to be at least as open as students to the culturally other. While teachers should make every effort to make classroom content interesting and 'relevant', appeal to personal relevance alone cannot drive curriculum planning. The dual teaching goals for the settlement ESL class, in my view, should be to offer students enabling skills for learning English and to teach to an integrative interest--both of which are necessary to move beyond the threshold of proficiency. Just as necessary as learning a core of sound patterns and grammatical structures in English, newcomers need to acquire background knowledge, which shall be further discussed, in the common cultural preschematizations of the language. Yet in the ontological view of

language learning, the idea of 'language needs' itself may need to be reconceived.

(vi) Towards a reconception of language needs.

I suggest that such a reconception should begin with new metaphors. Rather than employing the old mechanistic analogies in educational settings, I suggest that metaphors of *cultivation*, such as those that Goldman employs in regard to assimilation (discussed in Chapter Two) are fitting in ESL learning for immigrants. The attainment of fluency and literacy in another cultural mode, rather than being regarded as neural retooling or social reprogramming, can be better appreciated as a reinvention of self--a metaphorical rebirth. The challenge of second language learning, as shall be explored in the final chapter, needs as well to be recast within the growth of personal identity. More pointedly, the personal identity expanded through the horizon of a new language must be an achievement of self-formation. For many, such a new identity may emerge only after a long and sometimes painful 'labour' of learning to which the personally-relevant needs of the old self may be initially resistant.

To invoke here something of Heidegger's notion of the dread of choice (Hoy, 1993) the prospect of losing something of the old self, for many adult immigrants, may be fraught with guilt and dread. Yet if the immigrant accepts the challenge of authentic immigration--if he endures the self-doubt and frustration of change--there is no doubt his expanded Canadian self will be

spiritually richer than the old. At the same time, the old self is not lost. One may be still, for example, proudly Chinese or Guatemalan. One's new English-speaking Canadian identity can be, rather, the realization of a wiser bicultural self.

Perhaps instead of having to rank survival topics according to levels of interest, the first needs survey of new ESL students in their own languages should pose such questions as: *Think of yourself reading and speaking English fluently... How would you be different? In which ways would you be less--and more--than who you are now? Are you prepared to risk becoming that person?*

Of course, the taking on of such a project of self-formation for any adult can only be a deeply personal choice. An immigrant might well choose to regard the mainstream language as an awkward tool for situations where the use of English cannot be avoided. She may choose to be satisfied with merely functioning in English while growing increasingly defensive of her ethnic identity (Giles & Coupland, 1991). This is certainly not to suggest, as emphasized in the previous chapter, that the role of the ESL teacher is to persuade the newcomer about the 'advantages' of mainstream integration. What is suggested rather, is that the needs for calling the plumber about the leaky sink or reading the medicine bottle should be situated within the Dasein of immigration. Therein, the challenges of a changing self is the larger issue at stake. In the classroom, the challenges of self-formation within the immigration experience can only be addressed, as shall be explored, with utmost regard for personal identity and privacy.

Finally, I need to acknowledge a view of ESL well-represented in the field. It is a view which in a sense, focused my preparation of this chapter.

In concluding her critical survey of immigrant ESL programming in Canada (1993) Laura Ho invokes a rather post-modern outlook: "In a culturally diverse democratic society such as Canada's, the shape of the body politic itself must become curriculum as we struggle for ways to acknowledge the differences among us" (Mouff in Ho, 1988).

This is simply not the struggle as I have known it.

While no settlement class as I have known it, is typical, one might typically include a seamstress from Beijing and an engineer from Poland. It might include a socialist from El Salvador and a free-enterpriser from Taiwan; a Muslim from Bosnia and a Jehovah's Witness from Honduras. It is never difficult--certainly not in the beginning--to acknowledge the differences among us.

As days go by, differences come to be based more on classroom habits: those of us who need more time copying, and those of us who finish our tasks quickly. Those of us who like to help others, and those of us who prefer to work alone. Those of us who like to laugh, and those who are more contemplative.

Only over weeks do commonalities emerge. There is the Vietnamese secretary who pools her knowledge of vocabulary with the Polish nurses's knowledge of pronunciation. The plumber who likes to talk soccer with the short-order cook. The engineer and the seamstress's common pleasure in a particular piece of music. It is

not uncommon to see after a month or two, students who may have bristled in one another's presence on the first day, walking arm and arm to the cafeteria.

Indeed, as the experts argue, the bottom-line planners who are tightening the public purse often don't have a clue about who's getting hurt by cut-backs and how they're suffering. Yes, if there were more public money for ESL, the diversity of clients' language needs could well be better addressed. Still, whatever weaknesses lie in the bringing together of diverse groups of immigrants for generic language training, it is still amazing that from such profound diversity, common ground can emerge. The fusions of uncommon horizon which commonly do occur in multicultural ESL classes represent, in my estimation, a little of the hope for forging something like a future Canadian identity.

CHAPTER FOUR:
FUSIONS THROUGH AESTHETIC TEXTS

(i) Introduction.

It's been a long day "At the doctor's office". There have been crossword puzzles, picture sorting, telephone training--even role-play with plastic stethoscopes. Now it's late in the afternoon. Still, around the horseshoe of desks fingers follow lines as pairs lean together to murmur through their oral work. ("Sore throat. I have a sore throat... Temperature. I have a temperature... Head ache. My head aches...") A Beijing accountant taps her pencil on her electronic dictionary. A Vietnamese seamstress rubs her glasses on the corner of her blouse and sighs. After six hours of immersion perhaps a few heads really do ache. The doctor from Taiwan looks up towards the window, rubbing her temples. If so much weren't at stake--how much easier the classroom part of this would be!

Notional-functional approaches, as described in the previous chapter, address with some success the instrumental language needs of the ESL learner. However, in taking a hierarchial view of needs, such approaches tend to be less considerate of the self-formative interests of the newcomer. I have argued for a broadened view of the settlement ESL curriculum which recognizes matters of personal identity and self-formation to be just as critical as functional language needs for adult ESL beginners. The recognition that

language learning for many immigrants is primarily a challenge of self-formation, in my view, demands changes in conventional settlement ESL curriculum planning and content.

In this last chapter, I will explore curricular content which resonates with the critical issues of self-formation and cultural orientation. In discussing Erik Erikson's theory of adult psychological development (1982) as well as drawing ideas from Allan Chinen's psychology of adulthood (1989) I will look more closely at issues of personal identity and learning in regard to older students. After considering the best conditions for adult learning, I will make the case for the supplementary use of aesthetic texts in settlement ESL. I will discuss three categories of such texts which are not only relevant to the immigrant experience, but which can provide adult ESL beginners with cultural information needed for the development of second language literacy. I will offer suggestions for using such texts in helping learners to get beyond the bare threshold of second language proficiency.

(ii) Identity, self-formation and the adult mind.

Understanding, as discussed in the first chapter, is realized though the capacity "to recognize one's own in the alien" (Gadamer, p. 14). The movement towards self-improvement though understanding is guided by *Bildung*, the ideal image of self. Significantly, self-formation for Gadamer "describes more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself" (p. 11). Thus, the unending task of self-formation is not a means to any possible state of

completion or perfection, but is a realization that is in continuous renewal as long as one lives and learns.

While personal identity, as previously discussed, is a cultural phenomenon realized through language, the distinction of that which pertains to the cultural from that which is natural is itself a distinction realized through language. Descriptions of cultural phenomena, not surprisingly, often invoke the imagery of natural processes: cities 'grow' or 'decay'; languages or cultures 'flower' or become 'corrupt'. The lack of control over natural processes of growth and decline is, of course, a fact of the human condition. Thus, organic imagery is also often applied to a changing sense of self across a span of years. The apprehension of being and becoming within the natural cycle of growth and decline is well reflected in folk wisdom and literary tradition. In this sense, there may be a conceptual link between the medieval idea of the seven ages of man, for example, and more recent theories of cognition which identify stages of psychological development, such as that of Piaget's.

While Piaget's studies have focused primarily on psychological development from birth until early adolescence (Joyce & Weil, 1986) such studies offer little insight into continuing processes of psychological change after the body is in decline. In this regard, Erik Erikson's theory of socio-psychological development (1964, 1982) is relevant to the situation of the adult language learner. Even though the crises of personal identity are not necessarily apparent in classroom behaviours, there is considerable practical

value, as shall be shown, is recognizing that difficulties in language learning often stem from the struggles of being and becoming, such as described in Erikson's theory.

Erikson contends that there are eight psychosocial crises throughout the human lifespan through which we must pass in order to obtain the 'virtues', or strengths, by which our happiness and the greater good of society may be nurtured. The virtues needed until physical maturity are hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity and love. As the developing child resolves each crisis of a broadening life, the child will be strengthened for the next phase. The infant, for example, must resolve the opposition of the trust and mistrust of care-givers in order to be strengthened by the virtue of hope needed for the first steps away from physical dependence. The toddler must resolve the crisis of his growing autonomy with the guilt of being less dependent upon his care givers.

According to Erikson, the core strengths we need for fulfilment in life and work in adulthood and in old age are 'care' and 'wisdom'. As a social virtue, care must extend beyond a circle of family and friends toward a broader social responsibility. This virtue is derived from a resolution of the opposing forces of 'generativity', ie. the procreative and creative powers of the mature adult, and stagnation, the resistance to change particularly as manifested in the onset of physical decline. The last virtue to be won is that of wisdom. With the onset of old age, the person

needs to resolve the despair of the approach of death with the assurance that she has helped nurture a future beyond herself.

Each of the eight virtues of Erikson's theory is opposed by a core weakness. A corresponding stamp of such weakness is likely to be left on the personality of one who has failed to resolve a particular life crisis. The adult with a marked cynicism, for example, may have failed (probably through no fault of his own) to have successfully resolved the 'trust-mistrust' crisis of his infancy. The notably inhibited person may have failed to work through the play-age need to experiment with different identity roles. The embittered middle-aged person may have failed in nurturing or sacrificing beyond himself. Such a 'loss of linkages' (Erikson, 1982) between self and society or between past and future may lead to bitterness in old age. Particularly where there is no circumstantial evidence to explain deep unhappiness, Erikson's psychosocial theory has therapeutic value in helping certain people better understand themselves.

The loss of personal linkages resulting from immigration, as described in Chapter Two, are not of the same order as those described by Erikson. In fact, it may well be argued that Erikson's view of psychological development is bound to a western cultural perspective. It might be further argued from a cultural relativist position that psychological development theorizing *per se*, is bound to a culturally-specific outlook. In any case, there are alternative theories (Roland 1988; Obeyesekere, 1990; Shweder,

1991) which attempt to explain psychosocial development and personal identity in non-western cultures.

So why should a theory of eight crises offer any more insight for immigrant language learning than one of seven deadly sins? As suggested in the previous discussion of motivation, flexibility of mind, openness to the other and acceptance of a changing self seem characteristic of the more successful adult ESL learners. No theory, certainly, can entirely explain the timidity, the defensiveness, or the fear of change which too often seems to inhibit those ESL learners who fail to make much progress. Still, the language of Erikson affords a rather more humanistic understanding of ESL learning difficulties than do the mechanistic models of fossilization referred to in the last chapter. I offer his psychosocial view of motivation not as foundational wisdom, but as a view of personal identity which not only resonates with the ontological view of adult language learning, but as a view which supports the curricular choices I am about to describe.

Concerning adult learning, Allan Chinen's developmental theory of adult cognition (1989, 1992) is similarly insightful. Arguing that different stages of maturity are characterized by predominantly different modes of reasoning for learning and for problem solving, Chinen distinguishes between 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' reasoning. Quantitative reasoning, as he sees it, is precise, reductive, focused and specialized. Characteristic of early adult maturity, this mode can be associated with Piaget's formal operational mode (Joyce & Weil, 1986) which allows for

abstract, logical thinking. Chinen suggests that as a person grows from maturity to middle age, he tends to approach problems and to learn through a more qualitative mode. Such a mode is more concrete, more tolerant of ambiguity; more contextually-oriented and pragmatic.

The idealism of youth, it is commonly observed, becomes the compromise of middle age. One might well prefer the proverbial language of common sense to Chinen's psychological distinctions. At the same time, there are issues of cultural literacy as shall be explored, which are assumed in his theory. Still, Chinen's ideas afford some ground for distinguishing between optimal classroom conditions for older, as opposed to younger, adult ESL learners.

Appealing to the qualitative mode of reasoning of older learners, for example, may require that grammar and rules always be embedded in specific language contexts. This justifies, to some extent, a task and content-based approach (Mohan, 1986; Pugh, 1989) as opposed to a structurally-based approach to ESL learning. The content to be offered, optimally at a more leisurely pace, should also appeal to the older person's attraction to the anecdotal, the ironic, the humorous and the ambiguous. Aesthetic texts, as shall be discussed, can provide such content.

(iii) Identity in adult education theory.

The issues of self-esteem and personal identity in the classroom have certainly been addressed by adult education theory. Indeed, the term andragogy (Gk.: 'guiding of the adult') has been

coined in the understanding that the same principles for guiding the immature person (pedagogy) cannot be assumed in the education of the mature person. Unlike the child learner, the adult usually comes to the classroom with a strong sense of personal identity often defined in terms of family or career (Burge, 1988; Selman & Dampier, 1991). With a sense of a finite future, the adult is often eager to move rapidly in the direction of a concept of self-as-learner (Kidd, 1973; Brundage & MacKeracher, 1980). It is this acute sense of one's *Dasein* which often results, somewhat paradoxically, in the practical goal-orientation so often ascribed to the adult learner.

Yet classroom learning for many adults, can be an ordeal of self-confidence (Knowles, 1973; Fuhrman & Grasha, 1983). While risk is unavoidable in any challenge, the adult learner tends to be particularly sensitive to opening himself to the possibility of failure. Classroom failure for many is hardly a temporary setback. What is perceived as failure, rather, often calls into question the skills and strategies--even the very values--by which one has formed one's identity and conducted one's life. The paradox here, *prima facie*, is that learning involves change--changing realizations of self--to which the adult learner is likely to be resistant. Yet as psychosocial theory suggests, without openness to change and redefinition of self, especially in the waning years, there may be stagnation and bitterness.

In view of the paradox of the resistance to change, it should be appreciated that the 'task' of self-formation through learning

is a crucible even in a context of one's own language and culture. When the adult facing mid-life crises is at the same time undergoing the trial of immigration, one may begin to appreciate why such a person may be reluctant to open herself to the uncertainties of a new language and culture. As I have suggested in previous chapters, few contexts provide such rich opportunities for fusion of horizons as does the settlement ESL language classroom. Yet for those students who have not had much experience or success in classroom learning what is demanded for such fusions is a questioning of self-concept, along with the trust to enter into learning activity which may result in "an as yet unknown transformation of that self-concept" (Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980).

So what has the older language-learner to gain then, by taking on such risk and uncertainty? Perhaps nothing less than a better self. Learning English beyond the threshold for the aging immigrant promises a new horizon expanded through the shadings of a different tradition. To move within a new world of handed-down meaning, to adapt the language of Erikson, offers the potential for deeper generativity and wisdom.

Despite this emphasis on personal identity in learning, I am not suggesting any direct counselling model for the settlement ESL classroom. Although I strongly support the view that adult learning thrives best in the atmosphere of trust, safety and support (Kidd, 1973; Selman & Dampier, 1991) I do not see ESL learning as involving personal or group therapy in a psychosocial sense. While

centring the issues of self-formation, I firmly believe in the cultivation of what Gadamer refers to as *tact*: "The ability to preserve distance... (which) avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person" (Gadamer, p. 16). I believe that such a respect for privacy is essential for addressing the ontological issues of language learning in the classroom context.

(iv) Andragogy and the play of language.

My emphasis on the rigours of adult learning, may leave the impression that the learner has only to stiffen his upper lip and bear on. Of course, if one takes the instrumentalist view of language learning, then one may well regard the means to an uncertain end to be endured rather than enjoyed. Yet if one regards the continuous renewal of understanding as an end-in-itself, then there will certainly be more delight than despair in the journey.

In discussing the metaphoricity of language, Gadamer notes that to regard the metaphorical use of the word as not its real sense is "the prejudice of a theory of logic that is alien to language" (p. 429). For Gadamer, there is no logically-precise metalanguage which can 'unveil' symbolic or metaphorical expression. While there are certainly varying degrees of precision and clarity in different language contexts, all language is inherently metaphorical. Further to this metaphoricity is what Gadamer calls "the clue to ontological explanation"--that being the *play of language* (Gadamer, p. 101).

All languages, whether they employ a mode of literacy or not, engage in some capacity in language play. Gadamer's idea of the play of language harkens somewhat to Wittgenstein's description of fields of discourse as language 'games'. Playing a language game, that is performing adeptly within a field of discourse, demands a broad understanding of 'the rules' of a specific language context (Flew, 1984). In Gadamer's ontological sense, the potential pleasure taken in language--the pleasure taken in metaphor and allegory, the delight in paradox and ambiguity; the sweetness in word-play, joke and story--is delight in living itself. Beginning in the delight of meaning-making, language play often realises *Erfahrung*, the transformative experience.

However practically-oriented the language curricula, the play of language should not be denied. Of course, the first tentative entries to the world of meaning in a new language are unlikely to realize the subtlety or range of aesthetic pleasures known within one's familiar cultural horizon. Still, there is no barrier, even for beginners with the most concrete learning goals, for engaging in the delight of meaning-making within a broadened horizon.

The ontological view of the metaphoricity of language and the play of meaning-making resonates with what cognitive theorists may describe as the inseparability of feeling and thought in action (Bruner in Vacca & Vacca, 1993). While affect may be regarded separately from cognition for the purposes of theory or research, in *Dasein*, the life-world, feeling and thought are inseparable. As noted with regard to qualitative reasoning, the mind capable of

abstract reasoning also surges with an intermingling of thought and desire; the rational and non-rational (Tyson & Tyson, 1990; Chinen, 1993).

The question is--how can curricular choices which promote the play of language be wedded with the recognition of a rich and private inner life of the adult learner within the 'severely practical' engagement of settlement ESL? What is too often overlooked in settlement ESL curricula, in my view, is the spice of aesthetic appeal. I will argue that it is possible to adapt aesthetic texts for all levels of settlement ESL instruction.

Gadamer quotes Droysen in regarding texts as: "enduringly fixed expressions of life that are to be understood" (p. 387). I regard aesthetic texts as those which have the capacity to realize understanding through the play of language. Such texts may comprise both literary and non-literary genres. Thus, along with short stories, poetry or sketches; aesthetic texts may encompass jokes, puns, word plays, ironies, paradox or verbal ambiguities. In a linguistic sense, the determining feature of such textual unities, whether long or short, written or spoken, is that their meaning is realized within a phenomenological context (Halliday & Hassan, 1976). While texts are linguistically realized, they may be generated by visual images or by a combination of other contextual elements. The context of an aesthetic text presented in the classroom may be enriched by elements of taste, smell, sound or touch. A line of poetry, for example, combined with a visual image and a piece of music could be regarded for teaching purposes as a

unitary aesthetic text. Students' proficiency in English will, of course, initially determine the range and type of aesthetic texts they can comfortably handle.

By providing rich contexts for holistic learning, aesthetic texts can both invite and incite immigrants to fusions of horizon in English. An apt selection of aesthetic texts, such as I will exemplify, can address the issues of self-formation through the tactful distancing of metaphor and analogy. Moreover, aesthetic texts can augment literacy training where necessary and provide preschematizations of the new culture.

At the same time, I do not believe that a settlement ESL curricula should dispense with functional and notional approaches. This view, it should be noted, does not reflect a resistance to change. In fact, having taught literature to young and gifted learners outside the English-speaking world, I do not need to be convinced that English can be learnt, in certain situations, entirely through aesthetic texts. Yet my focus in this discussion is not on the younger, gifted student but on the older learner who needs to be put at ease in the classroom milieu. While I have argued that the needs of self-formation must be the primary concerns of settlement curricula, I have neither denied that immigrant learners do want language formulae to cope with emergencies or to complain to their landlords. Clearly, such instrumental demands must also be addressed.

Where possible, functional language can be taught within the context of aesthetic texts. A story or poem about work, for

example, can be supplemented by functional language for making small talk on the job. A dialogue about the first day on a job can similarly be followed by a poem or story on the same theme. Such a contrast of texts within the same thematic context can provide the learner with a telling comparison between the instrumental and the ontological approaches to language learning.

In these final pages I will explore three categories of aesthetic texts suitable for learners near a threshold level of general proficiency. I will also offer suggestions for their adaptation to adult settlement ESL.

(v) The rationale for semiotic images.

It's been a long day. A few students lean back from their listening groups and pull off their headsets. A few snap papers into binders. One student thoughtfully rubs her knuckles...

Why not a little conspiracy of understanding?

Tape recorders are snapped off as the teacher digs through the set of placards at the side of the room. This time, the picture she holds up is of a man in the clothing of a past century who is tied down by ropes pulled on by a horde of little people. After a pause, there are whispers, smiles and knowing laughs. Who hasn't for a moment or two today, felt rather like this character called Gulliver?

I suggest that along with the conventional props and realia, along with the cue cards and placards used in beginner's ESL, sets of more subtle visual referents can be invaluable. Such a set might

include images from Greek mythology, such as one of Sisyphus rolling a boulder up the hill. It might have one of Circe, turning the crew of Ulysses into swine; or possibly another of Ulysses' ship moving between the sea monster Scylla, and the whirlpool of Charybdis. Other images might portray classic characters of western literature such as Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe or Captain Ahab.

Unlike the conventional pictures which learners work with in the ESL classroom, these images not only point at things, but serve as texts for ontological understanding. I consider such pictures as semiotic images in that they are rich with handed-down meaning pertaining both to the English language and the much broader tradition of western 'cultural literacy' (Havelock, 1976; Hirsch Jr. 1987).

While particular social groupings draw upon particular sets of common references in private discourse, public discourse demands a foundation of commonly identifiable images, associations and storylines (Frye, 1963; Havelock, 1976; Hirsch Jr., 1987; Gardner, 1991). Being culturally literate in North America probably means, for example, that one will associate pictures of the space shuttle Challenger, the Titanic and the mythical Icarus falling into the sea. Such associations which are generally held in common--however sketchily--by literate Canadians can be viewed as the foundational schemata needed for the development of CALP, cognitive academic language proficiency (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Vacca & Vacca, 1993). While the pervasive images of pop-culture and advertising are undeniably part of the base of common cultural reference, so are

the much less pervasive yet more enduring images and story texts of literature and folk tradition. It is the deeper aesthetic qualities of the latter which make them, in my view, more suitable for the classroom.

At the same time as such aesthetic texts are presented in the ESL classroom, one should not fail to be aware of the challenge of interpretation they pose to the culturally uninitiated learner. Barthes has pointed out that "a whole system of values... a history, a geography, a morality" is encompassed in the mythic level of semiotics (1972, p. 118). While the myth is vastly more complex than the single semiotic image, the manner in which a culturally initiated person relates the concept of 'wisdom', for example, to a depiction of the biblical Solomon, involves familiarity with a specific tradition of handed down meaning.

It is absurd to suppose that a familiarity with a finite set of culturally-embedded images and story-lines will afford cultural literacy. A myriad of factors, as suggested in the previous chapter, are involved in adult S.L.A. beyond the threshold. Still, the educational value of well-selected sets of such images is not to be underestimated. Used opportunely even at the rudimentary level of second language instruction, semiotic images can not only provide background knowledge but can realize epiphanies of insight into some of the oldest preschematizations of the new culture. Of course, acquiring an operational knowledge of a culture's common semiotic patterns is a lifetime effort, even for the native of that cultural tradition. Offering the newcomer, a series of images and

story outlines which provide a few broad cultural references is at best a humble beginning. Nonetheless, it is a beginning which might arouse curiosity in seeking further fusions of horizon.

(vi) Using semiotic images in the classroom.

Large picture cards depicting classic images or tableaux can be presented as storyboards or offered as simple images to teach or reinforce (possibly with musical background) vocabulary items. Such pictures, with a few words of explanation can lighten a class mood as it shifts from attention to fatigue. After a challenging listening cloze, for example, the picture of Gulliver or one of Sisyphus could break the tension with just the right touch of ironic humour. The picture of Scylla and Charybdis could be used to highlight risky alternatives, or the picture of Ulysses' sailors being turned into pigs could capture the fear of change, which so often inhibits the immigrant ESL learner. Such tactful adult to adult acknowledgments of the struggle of self-formation is more likely to gain support and encouragement, in my view, than are less subtle displays of sympathy.

The new learner can be afforded semiotic images even as she is being introduced to English orthography and phonics. A set of Canadian semiotic ABCs can even be developed for the teaching of ESL literacy. In such a set 'C', possibly for 'courage', could be illustrated by a picture of Sharon Wood, the first Canadian woman to reach the top of Mount Everest. 'D', for 'determination', might show the runner, Terry Fox, on a lonely stretch of Ontario highway.

Although such associations are unlikely to be initially memorable, their presence in the classroom can arouse curiosity in free moments for students' own dictionary searches. At a later stage, the pictures can serve as schema activators before reading the stories behind the images (Vacca & Vacca, 1993).

Such semiotic images can be most striking and memorable for the second language learner if arranged in contrasting pairs. Claude Levi-Strauss, from a cultural anthropological perspective on language and cognition, suggests that some basic concepts are schematized in the memory in terms of paired opposites (Leach, 1970; Egan, 1993). We have an understanding of 'black', for example, only by comparison with 'white'. Further distinctions such as 'light grey' may be regarded as mediations along a 'black-white' continuum. Accordingly, our most culturally-embedded concepts like 'hope' or 'wisdom' (J. Ellis, 1993) may be schematized in terms of their conceptual opposites, 'despair' and 'foolishness'. Paired pictures offering culturally specific referents for such universal categorizations can fix vocabulary in memory, and provide the second language learner rich cultural insight.

Literary images can be particularly apt in suggesting binary understandings. A picture, for example, of the old fisherman from Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea* bringing back the skeleton of the big fish can suggest both triumph and defeat. A picture of Don Quixote tilting the windmill may suggest both courage and foolishness. While the learner needs, of course, some inkling of the story behind these images to make the thematic connection, the

arresting image in itself can provide the hook of interest for further investigation. Contrasting images which resonate with changing identity, as described in the first section of this chapter--images suggestive of courage/ cowardice, grace/ disgrace, contempt/ respect, hope/despair, security/insecurity--can be particularly powerful for adult learners.

The display of such semiotic images can also provide for a more stimulating and relaxed classroom atmosphere. Such an ambience, as suggested by teaching approaches as that of Suggestopedia or Superlearning (Onstrander, 1982; Lozanov, 1982; Larsen-Freeman, 1986), provide mnemonic cues for easier retention and can increase subliminal learning. Displayed images can be periodically changed to reflect class interest and thematic study. Images pertaining to Canadian geography, for example, might display a single farm on an expanse of a open prairie beside a picture of Newfoundland fishermen hauling up a near-empty net. A set of pictures pertaining to Canadian history might include a picture of the St. Roch breaking through the Northwest Passage, beside another of the first cross-continental passenger train pulling alongside a crowded platform in Vancouver. By such pairings some sense of the contrasting themes of Canadian cultural life--themes such as exile and community, individuality and cooperation--might be evoked. Lists of questions can be generated to get at the common historicity of such images. eg.: *How old is the picture? What is the place in the picture? Who is in the picture? What are they*

doing? How do many Canadians feel about this picture? Why is this picture important to many Canadians?

While the idea is to offer cultural insight through such questioning, students can also learn from playing more freely with pictures. Students can match pictures and captions, pair up and justify their own binary opposites, or write their own captions. They should be invited to bring to class and share with others, images which have struck their curiosity or those which reflect their own notions of 'the good', 'the admirable' or 'the beautiful'. Most importantly such exercises can cultivate a habit of looking for the general in the particular and seeking out the recurrent element(s) in the unfamiliar--key metacognitive skills for the success of independent learning.

(vii) Poetic texts for the settlement ESL classroom.

One may look away, Gadamer notes, but never 'hear away' (p. 462). Given this primacy of the aural in living language, it is particularly unfortunate that so many ESL students are frustrated in listening comprehension. Even some students who master the basics of English structure and who have a fairly broad reading vocabulary often continue to have difficulties in listening (Dunkel, 1991).

In one's own language one may spontaneously twitch in hearing the word 'itchy' or one may shudder against the word 'death'. As Plato discussed in the *Cratylus* dialogue (Robbins, 1979), within the horizon of one's native language it is difficult to accept that

the word, *onoma*, (Gk.: 'the name') in the linguistic sense may be an arbitrary signifier. One senses this arbitrariness, of course, in listening to an unfamiliar language. As a native speaker of English I can never share my beginner students' experience of hearing this language only as sound. Yet as anyone who has struggled in other languages, I know well the shock in the unexpected glottal, the harshness of a fricative, or the surprise in the subtlety of a vowel. Even when one grasps the referent, the name in the foreign language sounds anything but 'natural'.

The onomatopoeia (Gk. 'name-making') of different languages is surprisingly--often amusingly--different (Traugott & Pratt, 1980). To the French ear, for example, the dog's bark sounds more like *oua-oua!* than *bow-wow!* When pinched, the Japanese person (in the absence of another expletive) is likely to exclaim *aita!* rather than *ouch!* Attuning the ear to common sound-sense correspondences in a target language is essential, in my view, for entering that language's world of meaning.

From the beginning, ESL students should be better encouraged to sharpen their ears to the onomatopoeic associations common to native English speakers. With a little comic miming, for example, learners can begin to hear the rage in 'angry', or the vileness of 'evil'. With the real articles to feel or smell, the smoothness of 'silk' can be felt or the sweetness in 'fragrance' smelt. Realia can be put to even more elaborate use in generating multi-sensory experiences. Using a T.P.R. method (Total Physical Response) method, students can exaggerate facial expressions as they go

through a series of story-related actions (eg. sweet/sour; grateful/scornful; bored/interested). Entire units can be organized around a festivity such as Christmas, wherein students can be offered new tastes, smells, and sounds in English, as part of their initiating experience into mainstream Canadian culture.

Students should as well register their own reactions--however eccentric--to particular sound-meaning correspondences in English. Mario Rinvoluceri (1984) suggests that under columns of 'Ugg!' 'Nice!' and 'why?' students can offer examples of English grammatical patterns which strike their ear or their sense of symmetry in a notable way. Even where unable to verbalise aesthetic reaction in English, students can point out 'how the words feel' through pictures of facial expressions showing a range of emotions.

Students should be encouraged to cultivate an aesthetic response to the spoken word. Even as the basic phonology of the language is taught, students should be guided in attending to the aesthetic rhythms of English speech. Focusing learners on rhythm and intonation, along with attuning ears to the flow of faster speech, can aid students in learning both phonics and grammar. Since the logic of phonology is fundamental to the logic of grammatical patterns (eg. article choice depending on vowel/consonant patterns) attendance to patterns of speech often evidences the aptness of grammatical patterns. Although children can practice rhythm and intonation through nursery rhyme, play-time chanting and song-alongs (Hill, 1986) such approaches are not generally suited to the adult learner.

Fortunately, there has been considerable activity in the last few years in the production of listening and pronunciation materials which appeal to the ear of the adult ESL learner. Amusing dialogues, tongue-twisters, doggerel and limericks are offered for practice of word stress, rhythm and intonation in such recent ESL textbooks as *Pronunciation Pairs* (Baker & Goldstein, 1990), *Sounds And Rhythm* (Sheeler & Markley, 1991) and *Sound Advantage* (Hagan & Grogan, 1992). Long popular in ESL, Carolyn Graham's books (*Jazz Chants* (1978) *Small Talk* (1986) and *Grammar Chants* (1993) have afforded engaging aural/oral practice through her ESL poems set to music.

The language play prescribed by such admirably designed ESL materials, however, rarely exceeds the mirthful or the tongue in cheek. While there are obvious reasons for cultivating an upbeat mood in the ESL classroom, there is no need to assume emotional risk is extending the range of language play beyond the amusing. Material which may evoke more varied and subtle aesthetic responses, rather than dredging forth unpleasantness, can offer a refreshing change of mood. Also, students appreciate an occasional change from materials aimed at an ESL audience. Authentic texts which fulfil the same criteria as basalized materials (high-frequency vocabulary, simple structure and brevity) are much richer cultural artifacts than are simulations of the real (Mohan, 1986; Hill, 1986; Pugh, 1989) Thus, along with the simulations of ESL poetry- why not the real thing?

The mysterious power of poetry to engage what unpoetic psychologists might refer to *Gestalten* of cognition and affect, has been recognized since time immemorial. In addition to providing entertainment, poetry served oral cultures as a tool for remembering family histories and significant events long before the advent of the recording technology of literacy. The common features of poetic language--rhythm, rhyme and repetition, blended with striking imagery and narrative element appealing to both heart and mind--seemed to anchor memories more forcefully than did any lesser attempt to memorize facts (Havelock, 1976; Egan, 1987). Today, poetry is too often regarded as a narrow academic interest. In ESL curricula, authentic poetry is similarly relegated to the context of academic learning. In this regard, a powerful tool of memory may well be denied those learners who might benefit best by it--older learners and those struggling with second language literacy.

Poetic texts should be offered tactfully to students geared initially towards instrumental learning. At the lower levels, short texts of authentic poetry selected for high-frequency vocabulary and simplicity of structure may be offered along with semiotic images to highlight a subtle mood, extend moral support or provide cultural insight. I suggest that a set of laminated placards with poetic texts be made to correspond with a set of semiotic ABC's (eg. 'B' is for beauty, 'C' is for 'courage'.) On each card a line or two of verse, or a proverb which succinctly distills an idea or mood in vocabulary accessible to an ESL learner, can be copied boldly. For example, corresponding to a picture of a

Grecian urn on the card captioned 'beauty' can be one with the concluding line from John Keats' "Ode To A Grecian Urn" ("Beauty Is Truth/ truth beauty"). Fitting with the picture of a sweeping vista of virgin B.C. forest ('W' is for wildness) might be a card printed with the celebrated line of Thoreau's: "In wildness is the preservation of the world". However challenging to the culturally uninitiated, even a glimmer of the profound handed-down cultural meaning distilled in such brief texts can be tremendously informative to the immigrant seeking insight into Canadian values.

Engaging values and identity issues through the mediation of poetic texts is more respectful of fellow adults, in my view, than is approaching cultural orientation from a social-science perspective. For example, within a thematic unit such as *aging and health*, the usual content (eg. Medicare, social services, nutrition) can be addressed through more conventional ESL content and activities. The self-actualization issues (aging in exile, identity crises), however, can be dealt with more comfortably from a tactful distance. In this regard, consider the potential for discussion offered by the following few lines: "We learn our lessons/ wrinkle by wrinkle/ humbly planting behind us now and then/ the milestone of a missing tooth" ("*The Happy, Hungry Man*", George Jonas, 1975).

Such lines can be written on the blackboard for group discussion as a pre-writing activity. They might be presented as a schema-activator before a longer reading passage or juxtaposed with thematically-related or contrasting lines of verse such as the

following: "Some people letting their hair turn white/stand still forever/Others in a single day/ have conquered many peaks" (*"Different Time Tables"*, T'en Chien, 1975). Small groups can be asked to rank the most optimistic or pessimistic, the funniest or the most profound (etc.) commentary on aging from among several such short poetic texts, semiotic images, or cartoons.

Occasionally, lessons can be planned entirely around a shorter poem depending, as always, upon the variables of the class situation. For special occasions, even the texts sometimes used for the handing down of tradition in public schools can be adapted for adult settlement ESL. For example, John MacCrae's enduring "*In Flanders Field*" (1917) presented along with a selection of pictures and music can well afford immigrants a sense of Remembrance Day in Canada. While the subtleties of tone, sense and intention of such a poem may not be wholly accessible to ESL learners at the beginners' stage, after several repetitions, most students will feel something of the sombreness of the occasion and get a broad understanding of the theme of 'sacrifice'.

At higher levels, students should be invited to commit to memory a stanza of such a well-known Canadian poem. Students may well be pleasantly surprised at the relative ease of memorizing such verse compared, say, with memorizing lists of irregular past participles. Memorized verses can later be used for pronunciation practice. Even selected lines of Shakespeare may be suitable for stress and intonation practice (possibly before the bathroom mirror!). Consider for example, a large picture of King Lear on the

moor, before which students roar out the following lines while slapping the beat on their desktops: "Blow winds, blow, crack your cheeks, rage blow!... Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire, spout rain...". While the English here is obviously not as colloquial as that of a *Jazz Chant*, there is added motivation for the students accustomed to a steady diet of simplified material, in knowing they are tasting a raw bit of some of the most enduring text English has to offer.

If modest offerings whet students' appetites for more authentic poetry, short texts of translated poetry familiar to students in their first language(s) are sure to generate interest. Greg Whincup's collection of translated Chinese poetry (1987), for example, includes in double-translation, classical poets with which many Chinese students will be familiar (eg.: Du Fu, Li Bai, Meng Hau-Ran). Moreover, the themes and imagery of several of the poems in this fine collection are particularly relevant to the immigrant experience: exile, loneliness, the beauty of northern landscape and the bitter-sweetness of memory. At higher levels, students may be asked to try to translate and present to others, a few lines of a favourite poem from their own languages. Playing a short tape of favourite music from one's former homeland can be a less demanding presentation of a cultural artifact from one's own tradition. Through such presentations, a classroom culture of aesthetic appreciation and openness to the other can be cultivated.

(viii) ESL writing through poetic texts.

It is in writing, Gadamer suggests, that language achieves "its true sovereignty" (p. 391). In settlement ESL classes, as discussed in the previous chapter, writing tends to be determined by instrumental needs. While the production of resumes and the filling of forms are clearly useful for newcomers, learners who are not given opportunity to engage in more playful writing in the new language may well be denied even a glimmer of its sovereign power.

The American poet, Kenneth Koch (1975), offers a wealth of ideas for writing activities aimed at sharpening imagination and broadening aesthetic interest in audiences who may be initially uncomfortable in engaging written texts. While his ideas are aimed primarily at multiethnic school children, some can be adapted for adult ESL. In "thirteen ways of seeing" students are urged to view and to write about a commonplace object from a number of novel perspectives. While even five ways of seeing in a second language will be a challenge for many ESL adults (even with the help of dictionaries), an interesting adaptation is in asking students to describe Canada in a number of ways, each in a single sentence. At lower levels, students can describe in single phrases, or even in a word. Offerings can be remarkably poignant. In a listening/writing activity also adaptable from Koch, students can be encouraged to imagine the colour of particular sounds, and afterwards write their sound-colours as a poem, following the pattern of Artur Rimbaud's "Voyelles" (eg. "the 'o' in boat is red, a maple leaf and a September moon").

One of the most accessible forms for ESL poetry writing may be that of the Koan (Sampson, 1987). Most Asian students will be familiar with its simple metrical pattern and structure wherein an image, a mood or insight is hauntingly captured. Models from the Chinese such as those offered in Whincup's collection can be followed (eg. Meng Hau-Ran's "*Spring Sunrise*") or even versions such as Canadian poet Al Purdy's "*The six quart Basket*" (From Gustafson, 1977). As with all other products of writing activities, students can offer their koans to other students in small groups or even display them decoratively on the classroom bulletin board. Such writing activities not only develop confidence and skills, and are certainly a welcome break from the résumés and shopping lists.

Most ESL immigrants are keen to enter--or have already entered--the Canadian workplace. Thus, work experience is a particularly rich source for poetic fusions in English. A good anthology of poems about the rawer edge of the working world in Canada is Tom Wayman's *A Government Job at Last* (1975). Herein, on-the-job experiences from door-framing to waitressing are given comic--sometimes ribald--treatment. Without necessarily following particular models, students can try their hand at describing their own work experiences, amusing or otherwise, in free verse form. Poetry, then, can provide excellent context for integrating discussion, reading, and writing around a common theme (Widdowson, 1978; Mohan, 1985).

(ix) Fusions through story texts.

The narrative form, like the poetic text with which it is often combined, has also served as a powerful tool of memory in oral cultures and in childhood learning (Egan, 1987). However different the folk tales imparted to children in different traditions, the story schema, like language itself, may well be common to humanity. The common preschematization of such elements as character, setting, beginnings, middles and endings within the context of 'story' offers reliable common ground for the language classroom. The very expectation that students will intuitively grasp story as aesthetic text rather than as the simulacrum of something else, establishes a ready context for further exploration.

It may also be argued that the well-selected story offers newcomers cultural insight by "epitomizing the thoughts, feelings and values of the target culture in memorable ways" (Stern, 1992). Here a distinction must be drawn between the learning of cultural patterns for adaptation and the understanding of cultural preschematizations. Obviously, few story texts afford the kind of information about manners and behaviour which is likely to directly benefit the student's communication abilities (BICS). The storyline of Dickens' *The Christmas Carol* for example, is no guide to Christmas customs in contemporary Canada. Yet in initial engagements with new customs, the newcomer may not even know what to look for, let alone what to see (Seelye, 1984). The "distilled symbolic representations" (Stern, 1992) of the new culture provided

by certain stories can build the foundation for seeing and hearing more deeply within the new cultural horizon. By their broad acceptance as classics, the better-known stories of literature and folk tradition most reliably afford this distillation of meaning.

An apt selection of classic stories can as well resonate with the themes of self-formation and changing identity previously discussed. Indeed, there is no need to argue here for the value of stories in adult ESL learning. If the range of structurally-graded ESL texts on the market is an indication, there is a flourishing interest in stories within the scope of adult ESL. The classic stories of English and world literature are well-represented in a variety of illustrated and simplified versions. I do not share the purist distaste for these simplified texts, provided that they hold the kernel of the original story. Indeed, I believe students should be encouraged to see video or film adaptations of classics, as well as being encouraged to read translations of classic English stories in their own languages. Getting a few of the most enduring stories of English Literature and folk tradition by whatever means necessary, is the important thing.

A class library can also afford the culturally-uninitiated ESL learner a taste of stories familiar to English speakers from around the world. I suggest that over a term, a selection of twenty-five titles should provide a sufficient range of interest and challenge for even the multi-level class. Providing audio tapes of the shorter texts affords interest and support for lower level students. *Robinson Crusoe* (isolation and friendship) *The Odyssey*

(the epic journey) *The Old Man and The Sea* (Triumph and defeat) and *The Pearl* (luck and disaster) *A House for Mr. Biswas* (tragicomedy) are a few of the simplified texts which I have found to be popular with adult immigrants.

While students should be encouraged to browse, they should also be initially guided in selecting a story. Going over a number of dust-cover blurbs, pictures or opening pages with the ESL beginner can prompt a good selection. When a student asks the teacher for a recommendation, a suggestion should be tactfully made more on the basis of a student's background and interests than on considerations of a text's structural difficulty. However interesting the content, second language reading still demands persistence. The student should be persuaded to read through a chapter before deciding a selection is too difficult. Comprehension and vocabulary exercises should be carefully designed with the aim of clarifying meaning for the student. Literal questions, which require little more than the copying of sentence patterns from word-form recognition, afford little learning. Evaluative questions, on the other hand, may presuppose background information which must be explicitly taught (Ellis & Tomlinson, 1980; Vacca and Vacca, 1993).

There are few unsimplified stories in English, unfortunately, which are accessible to the lower-level ESL reader. Still, provided with scaffolding (Vacca & Vacca, 1993) such as schematic outlines and pre-reading discussion, ESL readers can occasionally be guided through shorter authentic narrative texts. At higher levels,

thematic lessons can be based on short stories. There are a number of good collections of shorter short stories which offer authentic or near-authentic text with marginalized vocabulary glosses as well as post-reading exercises. Two short stories I used from Robert Dixson's collection (1984) in a low-intermediate class a few years ago generated particularly enthusiastic discussion. In the context of a unit on *aging and health* I assigned the reading of "The Necklace" and "The Last Leaf". De Maupassant's well-known story (translated from French) involves a futile sacrifice by a vain woman, whereas the lesser-known story of O. Henry involves a heroic sacrifice by an old man. While I would not then have explained the class's lively interest in the motivation of two fictional characters in the terms I now discuss, I believe that these two stories struck a deep chord of relevance within a group of adults undergoing the personal sacrifices of immigration.

Folk tales are broadly acknowledged to be particularly rich in allegorical and symbolic meaning. While a fairy tale suitable for adult immigrants needs to be chosen with care, there is great potential for such stories to resonate deeply with private struggles of identity and self-formation. Allan Chinen's collection, *Once Upon a Midlife* (1993) offers folk tales from around the world, most of which are under 1000 words in length and relatively simple in structure and vocabulary. These stories are arranged in such thematic categories as 'settling down', 'reversals' and 'common crises.' A typical offering is that of "the Bonesetter", a traditional Japanese tale in the category of

'reconciliation and renewal'. Barely 600 words long, it tells of a husband and his wife's acquisition of the magical skill of setting bones--even of reattaching amputated limbs--after the wife's chance encounter with a lecherous water demon. Although I have not yet used this story in a class, I can well imagine the adult appeal of its ambiguity and humour.

Learning styles (Fuhrman & Grasha, 1983) obviously need to be considered in deciding whether students are likely to better handle a story alone, or to work with one in a small group. Within groups, cooperative models (Johnson & Johnson, 1991) may be adapted whereby students pool their knowledge or work on complementary tasks. With adults learners, however, looser structures tend to work far better than constricting ones. After a reading assignment is finished, students (or groups) can write summaries in preparation for an oral presentation of their story to another group. A fairly standardized set of 'WH' questions or pictures can guide story retelling at lower levels. An approach which can be adapted for the longer story is that of the 'jigsaw' (Aronson, 1978) method whereby students are separately assigned a fairly unitary section of a story for summary. When ready, separated students come together in a group to piece together their whole story.

While the short-lived classroom engagement, unfortunately, can not allow for the ideal representation of tastes and interests, the value of stories from students' own cultural backgrounds is not to be slighted. A familiar story from home in English translation, much more than providing ESL vocabulary enrichment, can be

powerfully affirming to the newcomer. A collection such as *Stories we brought with us* (1986) provides simplified and illustrated stories from a number of countries which can be shared even among ESL beginners. Such stories, however, are to be recommended on aesthetic merit and thematic appeal, rather than on some calculated effort to broaden group representation. Such efforts, as discussed in Chapter Two, are likely to seem patronizing to the adult learner. A better approach is to guide students in using library resources to select a simplified story familiar to their tradition, suitably illustrated, which they can share with a group.

It is in such small group discussions, it must be emphasised, where fusions of horizon are most likely to be realized. It is here where the initial clashes of values, and differing notions of 'the good', 'the beautiful' or 'the admirable' are most likely to result in epiphanies of understanding. The richer the text which mediates these discussions, the richer is the potential for fusion of horizons.

(x) Conclusion.

Given the political delicacy of issues of identity, particularly as discussed in Chapter Two, it is not surprising that many teachers in settlement ESL are more comfortable working with authentic grocery flyers than with a poem like "*In Flanders Field*". Comparing Safeway prices is, after all, considerably safer than comparing sacrifice or atrocity.

In regard to the notion of the disengaged self, Gadamer invokes a Hegelian idea whereby "the essence of work is to form the thing rather than to consume it" (p. 13). This is meant to indict the disengaged view of reason which regards the world as object to be consumed for instrumental ends. The moral sense here, as suggested in earlier chapters, is that in experience (*Erfahrung*) there is always a dialogical engagement with the world. In the classroom, there is dialogue among fellow students, between student and teacher and between students and texts. Thus, the materials and content of learning are not simply tools to be gathered up in a bag of skills and used at arm's length. However innocuous in appearance, an engagement with the text of the grocery flyer, just as the engagement with a more aesthetic text, realizes an end in itself. Like the poem, the grocery flyer manifests culture and values.

It cannot be denied that it is possible to teach immigrants a set of context specific skills without inviting them to enter a new cultural horizon. It is possible to 'use' this language with only a glimmer of the emotional weight and the sedimented meaning its arbitrary sounds carry. It is also possible for students to attain BICS without compromising, in any significant way, the integrity of their old identities. Sadly, one can hardly blame students for taking an instrumentalist view of a language which has been presented to them as little more than a tool. Teachers of immigrants have no obligation, of course, to present English as anything other than the global language of commerce and pop-

culture. Perhaps unless otherwise informed, this instrumentalist presentation is what most immigrants expect.

This is not to suggest that having the functional language for getting one's sink or teeth fixed is less important for the immigrant than dealing with the frustration of coping with such functions in another cultural milieu. Aesthetic texts, apart from the reasons discussed throughout this chapter, can also serve to make the instrumental language learning more bearable. Most importantly, by offering immigrants glimpses of a better part of ourselves--glimpses of a culture which encompasses enduring works of beauty and wonder--we present them with the view of a culture worth sharing. In his history of the Oxford English dictionary (1994), John Willinsky refers to "the fascinating castle" that is the English language. Even those newcomers who have no desire to enter, might still receive tiny epiphanies, in a view from the courtyard.

For those colleagues already using literature and the arts creatively in settlement ESL classrooms, I offer this thesis as a justification for continuing to promote cultural fusions through aesthetic texts. Whatever errors or omissions may lie in my reasoning, my hope is that the heart of this argument is sound: that an ontological view of language challenges the instrumentalist orthodoxy of adult second language teaching. If the insight from Gadamer which has inspired me should be of any interest to another in my field, perhaps she or he can carry it forward through more

imaginative--indeed more practical--ideas for ESL teaching than I offer here.

In ending, I emphasise as I did in my Preface, that I write as a teacher, not as a professional scholar. I have engaged these foundational issues of my work primarily in the hope of cultivating a little *phronesis*, practical wisdom, not only for the classroom, but for daily life. While the teachable moment is not always to be grasped, I hope this exploration has strengthened in some way, my ability to tactfully help students like the one described in the Preface, who so conspicuously declined to try something new.

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