Being Aware of Difference: Using Translation Theory
to help inform teaching in an ESL setting

by

Andrea Griggs

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Andrea Griggs (1999)
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-45485-1
Abstract

Andrea Griggs

Being Aware of Difference: Using translation theory to help inform teaching in an ESL setting.

Master of Arts in Education, 1999

Department of Theory and Policy Studies

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the

University of Toronto

In this thesis I argue that mainstream English as a second language (ESL) pedagogy, which is presented as a neutral and scientific field, is not only unhelpful in many situations in the classroom, but can also be detrimental to teachers and students. We risk infantilizing and/or losing our students because we have not been able to support them in their learning. In addition, we risk deskilling our jobs as teachers. Using ideas from the fields of translation theory and moral philosophy, I argue that teaching is not a neutral activity and language is a contested place where meaning is constructed. Since teachers share their role as “translator” with their students, their choices must be respected. Finally, teachers need to consider their social location. Teaching ESL is not, I argue, simply correctly applying scientific methodology, but is a creative process involving the whole person.
Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis was difficult, but figuring out what it was that I wanted to write was extremely difficult. There have been many people who have helped me with this process that I would like to thank.

My supervisor, Dwight Boyd, helped me shape the focus of the paper and reassured me that everyone goes through the “muddling about” phase and (more importantly) that they also come out of it! I appreciate his support and helpful comments.

I would like to thank my second reader, David Corson, for his comments, support and amazingly quick “turn-around” time.

I appreciate my parents’ ongoing support through this process. My mom, as always, has been interested in what I have been working on, has read some of my (very) rough drafts, and has been able to empathize with my struggles to formulate my ideas. My dad, despite his occasionally exhortations to “just sit down and get the damn thing done,” has also supportive and loving.

I would like to thank my grandparents, John and Marie Levitt, for their support and financial assistance.

My colleagues and supervisors at the Intensive ESL program have been understanding and supportive (especially when I had the “thesis blues”).

I have learned much from my students, past and present.

I would like to thank my friends who helped by listening and offering encouragement as I tried to find a path through the material I had read. They include: Lisa, Mindy, Sue, Anne,
Paula, Trish, Katja, and others who offered long distance support.

Arleen Schenke has shared her ideas, conversation, support and wine. She has helped me to go beyond my initial take on things.

My brother Jason has given me emotional support and has always been "open" when I needed to talk.

Gwen, my "second supervisor," has helped tremendously by meeting with me regularly, asking intelligent and probing questions, reading my drafts, giving me deadlines, and offering her warmth and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Afshin for his emotional support, belief in me, and love. Although he was sometimes bewildered by how I was feeling, he was always willing to listen and care.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of Contents v

**Introduction**

**Chapter One**

ESL Centre 11
Mainstream ESL Pedagogy 13
  Language 14
  Language Learning 19
Role of Teacher 22
Role of Methodology 24
The Student 30
Critical Pedagogy 35

**Chapter Two**

Traditional Translation Theory 39
Traditional Translation Theory and ESL 46
Different Translation Theory 48
  Language 49
Original, Translation, and Relationship v
Introduction
As an ESL teacher who has been working in the field for more than eight years, I have worked at many different kinds of schools. Most of the places I have worked have generally subscribed to a mainstream view of English as a second language (ESL) pedagogy which is a positivistic, mechanistic way of thinking about the teaching of English. Language tends to be seen as a neutral tool, which students need to acquire as quickly and efficiently as possible. Students are encouraged to express themselves; what they say isn't as important as simply saying something. In the communicative methodology of today, the prime role of the teacher in the classroom is providing sufficient comprehensible input for students to learn from. The content is unimportant: if messages are sent and received, learning will happen.

The mainstream methodology is presented as neutral and scientific. However, there are many, many situations in the classroom where drawing on this methodology is not helpful. Indeed, a reliance on only mainstream ESL pedagogy can be harmful to teachers and students. If teachers are confronted with students who dislike English and find it a threat to their own cultural identity, this theory can not help. According to this methodology, learning any language is a beneficial or at least neutral process. All a teacher can do, it seems, is sigh and say that those students should change their attitude or they are going to have a hard, if not impossible time learning the language. Despite the fact that ESL textbooks and activity books constantly suggest controversial topics for students to write or speak about, there is no serious talk about dealing

---

1 I have worked at: private language institutes in Canada, Japan and Colombia, an international high school in New Mexico, a government sponsored ESL class for immigrants in Ontario, and a school run by the continuing studies department of a large Canadian university.
with real conflict or controversy when it arises. ESL classes are meant to be happy places, and the teacher should be friendly, but neutral. There is no space in mainstream ESL pedagogy to consider how the teacher’s social location (i.e., her/his race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.) might influence her/his teaching. There is no space to ask questions like the following: If I, a young, white, middle-class, educated English speaking woman talk to immigrant students about finding a job, how might my experience and their perceptions of me influence what I do? What does it mean when a student who had a Chinese-Canadian as a teacher complained because she did not have a “real” Canadian teacher? And how do I, as a white English-Canadian, address that issue? How does mainstream methodology help us when students refuse to speak or do an activity which we know will be beneficial to their English? Can we assume we are able to know what is best for all of our students all of the time?

These kind of questions, I would argue, are extremely important for us as ESL teachers. These questions represent everyday situations which occur in the classroom. When we do not consider these questions, I believe we risk a number of things. We risk losing students because we have not been able to support them in their learning. We risk infantalizing our students because we often do not recognize the knowledge they bring with them (Schenke, 1991). We risk deskilling ourselves and reducing the role of a teacher to mindlessly applying the methods supplied to us from the applied linguists. We risk doing some form of moral harm to our students if we do not recognize the role of our social location.
In this thesis I would like to start developing a different pedagogy to address some of these concerns. I believe that it will help students learn the language better. *Better* is, of course, a loaded word. This kind of teaching focuses more on knowledge of "the culture of power" (Delpit, 1988) and leads to students making more informed choices for themselves. This model empowers the student and assigns them real responsibility. It leads teachers to become more self-reflective because it expands the concept of teaching a second language from a merely technical skill to a more holistic approach where issues like the social location of the teacher, conflict, difference and inequalities have to be considered. Finally, this model allows the asking of more and different questions than mainstream ESL pedagogy permits.

In this thesis, I use various theories and writings on (primarily literary) translation to help create a different model for teaching ESL. Using translation theory to examine second language teaching is an unusual step to take. However, I have found the many similarities between the two fields very helpful in thinking about second language teaching and learning. In addition to drawing on translation theory,² it is a multi-disciplinary field, and on the field of the teaching and learning of second languages, particularly English, including my own experiences in the classroom. I will also draw on work done by moral philosophers who try and answer questions about how we understand each other in the context of differences and inequalities.

² It’s important to note that the literature on translation is enormous and that translation has been seen many different ways over the centuries. This thesis is not a genealogy of translation; it is not an exhaustive overview of the translation literature. Rather, it is an examination of how various types of translation theory can contribute to a different model for ESL teaching.
In the first chapter, I explore the beliefs of mainstream ESL pedagogy and demonstrate, with examples mainly from my own experience, how these beliefs are inadequate in working with students in daily life. In addition to being inadequate, these beliefs harm both teachers and students because they tend to contribute to a situation where the teacher's role is deskilled and the student is infantalized. Mainstream ESL pedagogy, rooted in the field of applied linguistics, discourages any questions which challenge the "neutral" status of the discipline. One of the main ideas supporting the neutrality of second language teaching and acquisition is a belief in the neutrality of language. Essentially, language has been viewed as a tool, unconnected to identity or power. Learning a language is seen only as a beneficial process, with no negative effects. Given the neutrality of language and the origin of second language pedagogy in the field of applied linguistics, ESL teachers are seen as technicians who need only be concerned with the smooth acquisition of standard English. In mainstream ESL pedagogy, there is a belief that there is a method of teaching a language which is scientifically verifiable and somehow apolitical. If teachers work within this method, they need not be overly concerned with understanding others or thinking about differences and inequalities. The idea that an ESL teacher needn't be concerned with issues of morality and understanding the other is, I believe, a consequence of taking up a positivistic approach to teaching. Despite the scientific rhetoric of the discipline, inevitably situations arise in the classroom where the mainstream pedagogy is of no help. A different approach is necessary.

In the second chapter, I start by briefly summarizing the presumptions of traditional translation theorists in order to show both the similarity with mainstream ESL pedagogy and
from where newer ideas of translation have developed. Generally, there is a belief that language is determinate and translation is the transfer of that fixed meaning from one code to another. Mainstream translation theories developed in this century focus primarily on the product and make the following assumptions: 1) the original or foreign text is seen as a unified whole with a message that can be understood (by someone with the correct education), 2) language is seen as neutral and as composed of style and content which can be separated unproblematically, 3) a good translation is the same as the original, and 4) translators are able to be objective and do not allow their particular social location or ideological beliefs to affect the text. There are many similarities between mainstream ESL pedagogy and traditional translation theory in that they both see language as a neutral labeling system for universal experiences and the translator/teacher as an objective technician. They also tend to believe that there is a core meaning or “self” in the text or student which can be transferred to another language relatively unscathed.

Newer ideas of translation theory which challenge the presumptions of traditional translation are more helpful in creating a model for ESL teaching. Essentially, I argue that the traditional theories tend to rely on a belief of universality and seek similarities between different languages and cultures. The danger in assuming universality and seeking similarities is that differences which appear might be ignored and the more powerful language speakers might end up conveying their world view as the world view. The translation theory that I explore in the bulk of the second chapter tends to reject many of the assumptions of traditional theory and is in accord with Iris Young’s statement that there “is much that I do not understand about the other
person's experience and perspective” (Young, 1997, 53). The translation theory I explore sees languages not as neutral, but as “site[s] of struggle over meaning, access, and power” (Pierce in Pennycook, 1989, 594). Translation is seen not as simply a method of substitution, but as a transformation of the text. These theories call into question notions of identity, both of the idea of the whole, unitary meaning of the original, and the idea that a translation is an isomorphic copy of the text. Rather than hiding or ignoring the position of the translator, they seek to expose the position because they assert that knowledge is interested and political. A British translator translating Indian texts during the time of colonialization will have a different interest than a post-colonial translating the same texts. They seek to recognize the role that power inequities play in the transformation of the text. The newer views of translation are not as easily described because they are formed more as questions and focus more on the process rather than prescriptive methods for people to follow to arrive at a product. This makes them more difficult to classify and talk about, yet in that also lies their strength.

In the third chapter, I explore how these ideas from translation theory can help inform both how people see teaching and how teachers relate to the cultural and linguistic differences between themselves and their students. I explore the link between translation and teaching a second language and argue that there are many similarities. One of the most important points that ESL (or second language) teachers need to recognize is that they share the role of translator with their students. If this is accepted, it leads to a recognition that teaching a second language is a non-neutral and moral activity and that we must respect the choices our students make. The emphasis translation theory places on process and uncovering difference and inequality
encourages teachers to be more open about their choices in the classroom and what effect they might have on students. The view of language as not neutral and as meaning and language being inextricably linked, as well as a belief that ESL teachers need to expose difference and inequality, implies that not only do teachers need to help students learn the standard language, but they also need to help them critique it. Since translating a text implies a transformation of identity, helping a person learn a new language involves negotiating a new identity. As opposed to the traditional view, these theories recognize that as well as things being "lost" (because of untranslatability), things are gained. Recognizing that language is involved with identity and is a site of conflict means that what we do in the classroom has a real effect on our students. Finally, the role of the teacher in this new model is greatly expanded. Teachers share the role of translator with their students, and they have to consider the impact/effect of their social location on their students and in the classroom. Finally, teaching is seen not so much as a science, a matter of correctly applying the correct principles, but as a creative process involving the whole person.

In the conclusion of my thesis, I suggest possible avenues to further explore these questions. In addition to theoretical suggestions, I also consider the dilemma of the teacher working within an institution which does not support any of these ideas. Institutional support is necessary for some of the other changes to come about.
Chapter One
My goal, in this chapter, is to explore the beliefs of mainstream second language teaching pedagogy and to show that they are of limited use to the teacher. I will start off with a description of an imaginary ESL school to set the scene. I will then delineate some of the assumptions mainstream ESL pedagogy, a positivistic model, makes about language, the role of teachers, methodology, and the ESL student. Interspersed with the outline of the assumptions, I will describe many situations, mainly from my own teaching experience, where the assumptions and guidelines presented by this model of teaching are contradicted by or of very limited help to teachers in the classroom. Through these examples, a picture of an alternative model for ESL teaching will begin to emerge. In the last part of this chapter, I will briefly explain why I have not resorted to the field of critical pedagogy, some of which directly addresses the field of ESL.

I will argue that traditional ESL pedagogy, based in the positivistic arena of applied linguistics, is structured so that certain questions can not be asked. There is no space, for example to ask: is learning a second language always a beneficial process? How does it affect my students who feel that the predominance of English has eroded or threatens to erode their culture? How does my position as a white, middle-class, young, educated, able-bodied, heterosexual woman affect my students? Does ESL teaching tend to infantalize students? How am I disempowering my students? In addition, this ESL pedagogy has limited use to teachers when they are confronted with problems in the classroom. There is no talk about approaches to take when working in a multicultural classroom where incidents of racism, sexism, or homophobia occur. There is no guidance on how to handle serious topics. The only guidance this pedagogy seems to offer is one of avoidance. Classes should be fun and "lite." As long as a
message is being exchanged, learning is happening. The content seems unimportant. Pennycook (1994) describes the communication which takes place in the communicative language class as "froth and empty babble."

Before going into a more systematic exploration of mainstream second language pedagogy, I would like to paint a picture of the "ESL Centre." a composite school made up of many of the private schools I have worked at. I think this sketch will help illustrate the details that follow.

The ESL Centre

This (cost-recovery) school has a variety of different courses: preparation to pass various ESL exams, a general course and a course for international students preparing to attend university. The students are mainly international students who have come to Canada for a short time (2 months to a year) to learn English (to improve their job prospects, to prepare for travel, to get into school) and, often, to experience living abroad. Some are immigrants who are too advanced for the free ESL training offered by the federal government. They range in age from 19-60 with the majority in their twenties. The school has a communicative approach and has been moving towards becoming accredited. In an effort to achieve this, an emphasis has been placed on designing standard curricula and evaluations. The students' evaluations are based

---

1 In addition to gaining acceptance at universities in English speaking countries, often students need a certain degree of English proficiency to be accepted at universities in their own countries.
heavily on the difference between their score on the entrance and exit Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). The curricula being developed are very heavily skill and strategy based, and there is not much concern about content. The general lack of concern about content is illustrated by a draft copy of a standard writing evaluation form written by several teachers. The form is divided into several areas - grammar, organization and coherency, but mentions nothing about the content or the ideas expressed in the text. Although the teachers are guided by the curricula, once they're in their classrooms, they have quite a bit of freedom.

The classes are divided into different skills: reading, writing, listening, talking, vocabulary, grammar, etc. Textbooks are pre-assigned and teachers are supposed to use them. (The school has even acquired a book of suggested activities which are “teacher-proof.”) Teachers are encouraged to avoid controversial topics, to avoid giving their own opinion, to keep the class fun and to be friendly. Along with standard student evaluations, there are standard teacher evaluations which seem to be the main means of appraising teachers. Teachers are evaluated on whether or not they are friendly (along with being well-prepared, organized, etc.). Sometimes the focus on receiving good evaluations seems to divert attention from more serious issues like planning a good class, trying to decide what is pedagogically appropriate, and interacting with

---

4 This test is administered by Educational Testing Service, the same company that administers the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). They have a very similar format and focus on listening, reading, and grammatical abilities. In various parts of Asia, both universities and companies sometimes demand a certain TOEIC score.

5 One teacher at this school, after carefully closing his door, uses the first day of class to teach his students how to ask for a refund!
students. Teachers sometimes use TV shows in class not necessarily because they believe they have any pedagogical value, but because it is perceived that they will lead to good evaluations.

Despite the worry over evaluations, the teachers are quite dedicated to their jobs. Unlike many ESL schools where low pay, high turnover and distrust of teachers by the administration create an unpleasant atmosphere where teachers are simply marking time to either finding a better ESL job or finding a job in their real field, the atmosphere at ESL Centre is fairly good. The teachers are enthusiastic and share materials and ideas with their colleagues. The sharing of ideas is sometimes difficult because there are only two or three times during the working year where all of the teachers are available to meet. When meetings do take place, they are usually to inform teachers of decisions already made and rarely a place to discuss pedagogical issues.

Every eight weeks, new students arrive, and a new session begins.

Mainstream ESL Pedagogy

The description above will help to anchor the following analysis of some of the assumptions underlying mainstream ESL pedagogy. In addition to drawing from academic material written about ESL, I will also be drawing from my professional knowledge from my training and my experience teaching ESL for the past eight years. First I will discuss how mainstream ESL pedagogy sees both language itself and the learning of language. There are two main assumptions: the assumption that there is a "standard" language which is politically neutral, and the assumption that learning another language is never harmful, but mostly beneficial and
sometimes neutral. I will challenge both of these assumptions with examples that contradict them. Next, I will examine the role of the teacher and of methodology. Teachers are generally seen as skilled and neutral technicians who use a scientific methodology to teach students English. I will demonstrate how this view of teachers is inadequate. Finally, I will explore how the ESL student is constructed by this model as someone uninterested in any serious or substantive topics.

Language

ESL pedagogy is based fairly strongly in applied linguistics, which has developed from positivistic and empiricist roots. Scholars developing the field of applied linguistics at the turn of the century, claimed it as a science, partly to establish it as a valid and separate discipline from linguistics (Pennycook. 1994. 135-145). One of the basic ideas of this discipline is that there is a standard language to study, describe and classify which is neutral. The idea that there is such a thing as "a" language that could be described is relatively new. Jill Bourne argues that it started occurring in and around the sixteenth century with the work of John Locke. She describes how Locke's beliefs about individuals having the right to decide based on their experience necessitated that language be "the representation of the world in an agreed code" (Bourne. 1988. 90). Alastair Pennycook argues that the relationship between the move to standardize education and language in the 19th century was crucial to the fixing of language. He also points out that the standardization of language was influenced greatly by the societal changes that were
happening at the time. During this time, despite a claim from linguists to be moving from a prescriptive viewpoint to a descriptive viewpoint, "there was a clear shift towards...prescription and proscription. That is, a clear discrimination between various forms of language and the banishment of certain forms." (Crowley in Pennycook, 1994, 114). Saussure's introduction of his linguistic theory which sees a language as a "fixed code shared by a homogeneous speech community as the guarantor of shared meanings" (Pennycook, 1994, 121) continued to enforce the idea of the existence of standard languages. In the 1960s, at the same time as the linguistic variation of English was becoming more and more evident, Noam Chomsky developed his philosophy of language and the concept of an innate universal grammar. Chomsky's ideas were used to re-establish language as a formal system by arguing that his concept of an innate universal grammar placed language in the mind of individuals, not in social interactions between individuals (Pennycook, 1994, 122). Although there are competing ideas of what language is, essentially words are seen as "conventional and arbitrary, created by human institutions and... not influenc[ing] ideas" (Bourne, 1988, 89).

Second language pedagogy continues to rely on the unquestioned existence of a standard language (both grammatically and rhetorically) in classes and in teacher training courses. Language is usually presented as if it were neutral and natural and had nothing to do with socio-economic power relationships. Grammatical texts tend to organize the language into rules which are unassailable. Occasionally, there is a nod of the head to differences. In the teacher training

\footnote{Thus in 1850, the use of "they" as a singular pronoun was replaced by 'he' (Pennycook, 1994, 112).}
course I took several years ago, we spent 45 minutes discussing how we would react to “incorrect” sentences such as, “If I was you, I wouldn’t do it.” The discussion focused on whether or not that form could now be considered correct because probably more than 50% of native English speakers now used it rather than as a spring board for discussing the huge variety of Englishes that exist, whether we can even talk about the existence of “English,” or the socio-economic reasons why certain forms are deemed correct. Within second language pedagogy, attempts to challenge the idea of a fixed neutral standard language were incorporated into the pedagogy. The concept of communicative competence, for example, was originally a radical critique that challenged the idea of language as a fixed static system and pushed for the examination of language that people actually use and have available. However, it was incorporated, made apolitical and now tends to mean “the transmission of fixed norms of appropriacy” (Bourne. 1988, 92).

There are many examples of how this attitude towards language plays out in an actual classroom. Study books for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) teach students that they should use he when they do not know the gender of the person speaking or acting. There is no acknowledgment of the debate around this issue: this is simply presented as correct English. In addition to grammatical rules, students are also taught the correct socio-linguistic way to communicate. For example, students might be taught not to say “shut the door,” but to

---

7 How that percentage was arrived at, I don’t know. Of course, the whole issue of who counts as a native speaker is also contentious.
say "would you mind shutting the door" without an acknowledgment that veiled commands are used much more often by whites and the middle-class (Delpit, 1988, 288-291).\(^8\) Vocabulary is often taught without any reference to alternate meanings of words or to contested meanings of words. Corson points out that this view of language as a fixed medium of expression is reinforced by dictionaries which "routinely promote an illusion of agreement on lexical usage" (Corson, 1997, 176).

As I mentioned above, the reasons for teaching this way are partly because of the acceptance that there is a standard, neutral form of English and partly because of the need to offer an agreed curriculum of defined subject matter. However, there are also other reasons. Many second language schools are corporations as much as schools and tend to focus on measurable results. They resort to using standardize tests like the TOEIC, TOEFL, or Michigan Proficiency test. All of these tests measure, in a limited way the listening and reading abilities of students. Although there are tests available\(^9\) which undertake to examine the students' ability in all aspects of English in a more thorough manner, these tests take more time and more money to administer.\(^10\) The language on the TOEIC and TOEFL tests is standard, therefore teachers sometimes "teach to the test." In addition, students often need a certain score on a TOEIC or TOEFL test in order to

---

\(^8\) Obviously, there is overlap between the two groups.

\(^9\) These include the Cambridge exams, and the Certificate of Proficiency of English (COPE) test.

\(^10\) At the University of Toronto, students used to take the COPE test which was designed to test students' abilities to do the sort of things they would be required to do at a university. Recently, this test was cut because of the cost of administering it.
gain admission to university or get a good job. Standard tests like the TOEIC and TOEFL are often used as gatekeepers. As Delpit points out, "pretending that gatekeeping points don’t exist is to ensure that many students will not pass through them" (Delpit, 1988, 292). Finally, most ESL teachers tend to be well-educated and extremely fluent in standard English. They/We have participated in the privileges of speaking this language. It is often harder for those in a privileged position to recognize that privilege.  

In addition to my own recognition that grammatically standard language is not neutral, students sometimes challenge the assumption of the neutrality of standard rhetorical language. I will describe an example from my experience which gave me an opportunity to think about my own assumptions about language. Ji Hae, a student from Korea, was doing a presentation she had been assigned the previous week. To start her presentation, she stood up and apologized to the class saying that she hadn’t been able to prepare her presentation the night before, so her presentation would be poor. She then continued with her presentation which, while not excellent, was solid. After her presentation when I was giving her feedback, I said that her apology was not appropriate for two reasons: first, she had obviously worked hard on her presentation, and second, hearing the apology beforehand made me view her presentation more critically. Had she not apologized, I continued. I would have become more engaged in her

---

11 Applebaum & Boyd (in press) describe examples in their own lives where their privileged positions have blinded them (temporarily) from seeing the impact of their decisions. See also Ford & Peppersmith (in press) for a similar exploration.

12 All students’ names are pseudonyms.
presentation. After some hesitation, she explained that apologizing before a presentation was the polite thing to do among Koreans. In this particular class, more than half of the students were Koreans. If Ji Hae had not apologized, she would have come across as very arrogant to her fellow Koreans. We continued the discussion with the whole class on the impressions apologies make on a North American audience versus a Korean audience and discussed how arrogant North American English speakers sometimes appear to Koreans. The main idea in this example is that the standard discourse norms and rhetorical patterns used when giving a presentation are not neutral. The discomfort that Ji Hae felt using this language among primarily Korean speakers was such that she chose not to use it.

Language Learning

Because of the idea that there is a standard language and that it is neutral, there is a belief that the acquisition of languages is an entirely beneficial process with no negative effects. Language is seen as simply a tool used to explain the world, and the speaker has complete control of that tool. After all, if language is seen as a code and meaning is seen as transparent (Bourne, 1988, 89), then acquiring a new language should be a neutral experience. Although there is now some acknowledgment about the affective filters a person might experience when learning another language, the focus is mainly on frustration rather than questioning the basic belief in the beneficial process of learning another language. Additionally, the acquisition of the English language is seen as particularly important and beneficial. ESL teaching has been seen
mainly in a positive light, often as a form of development work and as a service industry, both contributing to the ‘global village’ and allowing people and countries develop (Pennycook, 1994). The school where I work, like many others, is moving toward a corporate model where our students are metamorphasizing into clients. As the effect of corporatization increases, English is increasingly seen as ”a commodity that is offered unproblematically to apparently eager and grateful consumers” (Schenke, 1998, 3).

I will refer to three examples which challenge this assumption that learning another language is always a beneficial experience. The first two examples are from encounters with various students who have had feelings of great ambivalence around the learning of English. While it might have some beneficial effects for them, it is sometimes undertaken with a mixture of feelings. Joon Sung, a Korean man I befriended in Seoul, told me he was studying both English and Japanese. I asked him if he liked the languages and why he had chosen to study them. Rather than giving the common answer of studying them to get a good job or because he liked to travel, or found English interesting, he replied that he was studying them for self-defence. He felt that the United States and Japan were the two countries who had posed and continued to pose a threat to his country’s culture. By studying the languages, he hoped to protect himself and his culture against the encroachments of the other two countries. On other occasions, some of my Quebecois students have sometimes talked about the frustration they’ve felt about the dominance of the English language and North American culture and the reluctance with which they study English. Another example comes from an article by Giltrow and Colhoun (1992) about their experience with a group of Mayan Guatemalans immigrants to Canada who ultimately stopped
attending their ESL classes. The Mayans do “not see the acquisition of additional languages in itself as a beneficial or even neutral experience” (Giltrow and Colhoun, 1992, 52). In Guatemala, they explain, Mayans who choose to learn Spanish sometimes consign themselves to the group of outsiders, of non-Indians. This loss of identity is anything but beneficial. Giltrow and Colhoun point out that English enables Mayans access “to low-paying, temporary employment in the Canadian community....Mastery of English does not necessarily entail mastery of their own lives” (Giltrow and Colhoun, 1992, 53-54). In the end of the paper, most of Giltrow and Colhoun’s informants had stopped attending their ESL class, and some had established a self-study group to read an important text of the Mayan in Quiché, a language they were learning (Giltrow and Colhoun, 1992, 63). These examples suggest that learning another language is not always a simply beneficial experience. They also suggest that attitudes might be different depending on the language a student is learning. Second language pedagogy tends to treat all languages as interchangeable. However, these examples suggest that the language being learned can make a difference.

As well as questioning the beneficial or neutral process of learning another language, these examples also suggest that learning another language, depending on the circumstances, can also lead to a change of identity. This change in identity, obviously, is not always welcome. For the

---

13 See Tollerson (1988) for an argument that ESL classes sponsored by the government for refugees are, in fact, designed to create a group of people only able to compete for unskilled and poorly paid jobs.

14 See also Goldstein (1997). She argues that recent Chinese immigrant high school students have many reasons to resist learning or using English in a Toronto high school.
Mayans in Canada, the challenge to their identity was so strong that they decided to stop studying English despite the seemingly obvious advantages to learning the language. In her book *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman describes some of the (less traumatic) changes which happen to her when she immigrates to Canada as a young teenager and learns English:

English kindness has a whole system of morality behind it, a system that makes “kindness” an entirely positive virtue....I’m beginning to feel the tug of prohibition, in English, against uncharitable words....Yes, in Polish these people might tend toward “silly” and “dull”- but I force myself toward “kindly” and “pleasant.” The cultural unconsciousness is beginning to exercise its subliminal influence (Hoffman, 1989, 108).

These examples challenge the idea that learning a language is essentially a beneficial or neutral process. For many people, learning a language is fraught with ambiguities, ambiguities which are rarely considered in the classroom.

*Role of Teacher*

The view of language as neutral and language learning as neutral or beneficial has an enormous impact on how mainstream ESL/Second language pedagogy sees the role of the teacher and the role of methodology. In general, second language teachers, particularly those who work outside of the public school system, are seen as somewhat secondary compared to “regular” teachers. A high school teacher, for example, might be seen as an educator who has to teach content as well as critical thinking skills. In a discussion on an electronic listserver, T. Mason illustrates this feeling that ESL teachers are not “real” teachers. He says, “unlike our
colleagues in other disciplines, who have real subjects to teach- facts and formulae and such like- we have to teach the unteachable. It's a hard life!” (personal communication, TESL list, Sept. 1996). In addition, the public school teacher might be expected to deal with larger issues in society\textsuperscript{15} such as racism, sexism, and so on. The ESL teacher, on the other hand, tends to be seen more as a trained, objective technician who should help her/his students reach their goals as quickly as possible. Although s/he sometimes has relative freedom in the classroom, other times, s/he is trained to simply follow the methodology of the particular school and does not have much freedom in creating her/his own style.\textsuperscript{16} Pennycook describes this idea:

The construction of the teacher within the discourse of English as an International Language is of a technician, development worker or supplier of a product, of someone engaged in using the latest and most scientific methods to convey the much sought-after neutral medium of communication. English. (Pennycook, 1992. 381)

There is a strong emphasis on the teacher adopting a neutral position and simply focusing on her/his students’ language needs and developing material to satisfy those needs.

\textsuperscript{15} I have to acknowledge that this view of teaching is under attack in many public schools across Ontario and North America. The roles of high school teachers are also being severely restricted. However, I think the gap that I am describing still exists.

\textsuperscript{16} Although there are quite a few schools where this is the case, perhaps the most controlled environment I have taught in was at Berlitz. After a three day training session in the Berlitz method, basically a set of drills we did with the students, we were presented with the Berlitz book and were told that there were microphones in each of the classrooms and that, periodically, our lessons would be monitored to ensure we were using the Berlitz method properly. Interestingly, the Berlitz book, which is used in many countries, had only one picture of a person of colour (who was a mechanic).
As Pennycook says above, there is a perception that the teacher uses the "latest and most scientific methods" to teach English. At the moment, the latest scientific method to teach ESL is the communicative, learner-centred classroom loosely based on the ideas of Stephen Krashen. Krashen's hypothesis in a nutshell is that people will acquire a language if they receive comprehensible input, in other words, a message they understand (Griggs, Progosh, van Slyck & Wagner. 1997, 2). A teacher's role within this approach is to design comfortable situations where comprehensible messages can be exchanged. Krashen believes in a division of acquisition and learning and that any knowledge gained through learning, studying grammatical rules, for example, will not help the learner to become a proficient speaker of English. Some schools have such a strict rule against teaching grammar that teachers are not allowed to use metalanguage (such as noun or present perfect) to explain anything. When teachers and teacher trainers talk about older methods, like Grammar-Translation or Audio-lingual approaches, there is a sense, sometimes explicit, that now we have a much more enlightened approach. There is an assumption that there is a teleological progression of methods which is based on scientific

---

17 I feel I need to emphasize here that although I will be criticizing these assumptions, some of the ideas and training that second language teachers receive help immensely in teaching. Encouraging teachers to focus on, for example, the purpose of the activity, how to help students with strategies, trying to focus on salient features of the language, etc. is extremely useful when teaching. Adopting a different frame does not entail getting rid of everything in the old frame.

18 This led to the ridiculous situation of renaming the present perfect tense. "Let's just call it 'George.' Now, why do we use George in this sentence?" Unfortunately, it also led to a teacher being fired because she answered a student's question.
studies of language acquisition.

This belief in the supreme importance of methodology has been supported in different ways. First, the belief that language itself is a standard, neutral thing lends support to the idea that there is a best way for students to acquire it and for teachers to teach it. Second, as I have mentioned, the methodology itself has tended to come from outside the field from the academic discipline of applied linguistics. The frustration with this state can be seen in many comments teachers make both in staffrooms and on the Internet. Ronald Green says:

From my talks at conferences and at universities in Europe, I can verify the deep well of discontent of *EFL* [English as a Foreign Language] (as opposed to ESL) teachers with an approach that is thrust upon them from above. What they say is that the extreme form of communicativity which the "experts" continually exhort them to adopt, [sic] has not been found a very efficient way of getting students to learn (personal communication. TESL List. Aug. 1996).

Applied linguistics is in turn based on the positivist field of linguistics. Professors working in the field of applied linguistics have, partly in an attempt to establish the field as legitimate and separate from linguistics, focused on creating supposedly scientific methods of learning and teaching another language. However, Pennycook (1996) argues convincingly that when the concept of "Method" is examined closely, there is little coherency in the idea. He believes that

---

19 Many teachers feel that teaching English as a foreign language, i.e., in a country where English is not spoken, requires a different approach than teaching English as a second language. See Sampson (1983) and Burnaby & Sun (1989) for more discussion on this issue.

20 Ronald Sheen says, "This field has been dominated by applied linguists such as Krashen, Widdowson, Candlin and Long who appear more concerned with theorizing about SLA [Second Language Acquisition] and advocating doctrinaire teaching principles WITHOUT concerning themselves with the necessity of demonstrating by means of long term pilot studies the greater efficacy of their proposed methods" (personal communication. TESL list, August 1996).
so-called scientific methods "serve the advancement of academic careers and limit the practice of teachers" (Pennycook. 1996. 609). Third, in the last few years, there has been an attempt to professionalize ESL teaching amongst practitioners. Organizations like Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have started a process of accreditation for Intensive English Programs (IEPs) and have written various documents outlining the minimal conditions of treatment of ESL teachers. This has been done in an attempt to win more respect and money for the job. During this time, the academic requirements to obtain a good ESL job in North America (and other parts of the world) have been expanding from a short certificate course to a Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), Education, or Linguistics. In addition, ESL teachers themselves have felt it necessary to focus on methodology to distinguish themselves from the 500 million other English-as-a-first-language speakers. After all, if ESL teachers do not have any "real" things to teach, as Mason asserts, and if teaching grammar is seen as not useful, the only thing left is a thorough knowledge and grasp of the scientific methods to teach the language.

There are quite a few implications that follow, given the assumption that the teacher is a neutral technician that simply follows the most advanced scientific methods to teach a neutral means of communication. An important one is that the teacher does not have to acknowledge or think about her/his social position. The fact that s/he is, for example, white, middle class.

21 ESL teachers are generally paid less than public school teachers (sometimes quite a bit less). The going rate in Toronto at a private language school is as low as $12 per teaching hour. Colleges and Universities tend to pay between $30-50.
heterosexual, etc., is seen as completely unrelated to her/his teaching. In addition, these assumptions imply that the actual content of the class is not at all important. If all that matters is that messages are being exchanged, what the messages are about is seen as unimportant. This leads to such "typical" ESL activities as "describe the qualities of a perfect spouse" or "euthanasia is a positive thing, discuss." When students are asked, again and again, to talk about the typical food of their country, or their favourite movie, they get frustrated and begin to feel infantalized. One student said, "I was sick and tired of telling 'my future spouse' things" (Student in Schenke, 1996.3). Byung Kuk, another student, annoyed with the silly topics he had to discuss in class commented that he supposed ESL students had to talk about those topics because they were like children (personal communication, August 1998). Finally, if teaching ESL is seen as a politically neutral activity, then any teacher who makes her/his approach explicit or who acknowledges her/his position as a political one tends to be defined against the rest of teachers who are teaching in a "neutral" way. This is both difficult for the "political" teacher and for other teachers who might wish to explore different ideas but fear ostracization or losing their job for doing so.

There are many situations in the classroom and in the staff-room where relying on the tenants of mainstream ESL pedagogy is unhelpful or even negative. I will talk about two examples here. First, at a staff meeting at the school where I work, we had a (brief) discussion about controversial issues and racism. The two incidents sparking the discussion were complaints of racism from students. The first involved two (Jewish) students from Israel who reacted to particular way a textbook assignment comparing the middle passage from the slave trade to the
Holocaust was handled by the (Christian) teacher. The other complaints were a few comments on the evaluation form which suggested that the teachers were giving the European students preferential treatment (as compared to the Asian students). The program director briefly outlined the two situations and then said, essentially, to be careful about introducing controversial issues and about treating everyone equally. There was a short discussion following this announcement where teachers talked about the ways they attempted to deal with controversial issues. Some teachers said they avoided controversial issues; others said they were very careful never to reveal their personal opinions in class; others talked about developing a teacher persona to be used in the classroom. The meeting ended with another admonishment to be careful. After all, some teachers said, the students were here to have fun. Schenke notes:

while in an educational model (albeit a North American educational model), controversy is held to be a resource for learning and a forum for dialogue and student voice, in a corporate climate, it can be seen to run the risk of upsetting client interests or of teachers imposing their personal opinions (Schenke, 1998, 4)

I, and several colleagues, left the meeting feel dissatisfied. What did “being careful” mean? Should we avoid all controversial issues? Should we keep ourselves out of the classroom? (Whatever that means?) Is having fun the main motivation of our students? Presumably, all of us are already trying to treat our students fairly. Why is it that some people felt we were behaving in racist ways? How could they be seeing things differently from us? Was this a place where we should consider how our social location might effect the way our students see us and how we see them? This is a situation where it is evident that the mainstream pedagogy is not neutral nor helpful. Indeed, it seems to stop discussion rather than encourage it. Controversy,
conflict, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., do occur in second language classrooms. Within a pedagogy where conflict is meant to be avoided, there is no guidance on how to deal with it if it occurs.

The other example I would like to discuss also challenges the assumptions that the prevailing ESL methodology is neutral. At the moment, I am teaching a new course designed for ESL students who are or who wish to be ESL teachers in their own countries. The course focuses on developing the students' language skills through teacher training materials. Recently, my class was discussing what kind of feedback teachers should give to students on their writing. We were discussing feedback on organization when Jonathan, a Taiwanese student, said that he had an experience where he felt insulted when a teacher told him he had to re-write his essay because it was written in a Chinese style. He felt an attack on his organization was an attack on his way of thinking and his culture. Sandra, a Mexican student, said that she felt it was very important to teach her students standard English. We then got into a discussion about what constituted standard written English. Some students mentioned the five paragraphs essay that they had all learned to write as standard. I mentioned that, in fact, at a university level, the five paragraph essay was not standard. I also talked about how I felt that various authors (such as Gloria Anzaldua and some of the French feminists) had challenged the standard. Jonathan said that he expected he would use English primarily to communicate with other Asian speakers; therefore.

---

22 See Atkinson & Ramanthan (1995). They studied the writing course offered to English and non-English speaking students at a University. While non-English speaking students studied five-paragraph essays in the course designed for native English speakers, it is “considered anathema to the full and natural development of ideas and, as a result, is highly proscribed” (Atkinson and Ramanthan, 1995, 547).
he thought retaining the Chinese rhetorical style would perhaps suit his purposes better. It is clear from the description of this discussion that the seemingly neutral suggestion of teaching standard English organization is not so neutral, and standard English might not be so standard.  

The Student

I would like to conclude this section by examining how the ESL student is seen by the prevailing approach. ESL students are often seen as uninterested in any serious, substantive topics, or if they are seen as interested, they are seen as unable or unwilling to demonstrate any sustained interest in a particular topic. This can be seen by looking at ESL textbooks or teacher resource books which are either full of trivial topics, or address serious topics but in a very cursory way. This attitude was also demonstrated by the reaction at my workplace to an issue of the student newspaper for which I am co-editor. That particular session, there were many dedicated students who wrote and rewrote their pieces. One wrote a report on the first sexual harassment case in Korea; another, a critical look at multi-culturalism in Canada; and a group of students wrote letters to the editor expressing their thoughts on a murder committed by a child. My co-editor and I were told that the students couldn’t have written the articles because they were too well-written, too sophisticated and on topics that were too serious. In addition, we were told that the articles in the paper weren’t interesting or appropriate for our students. The paper

---

23 See Corson & Van Lier (1997) and Corson & Wodak (1997) for a review of the critical work done on non-standard language use and the social marginalization of the speakers of non-standard language.
wasn’t sufficiently “fun” or “interactive.” However, the students were the ones who had chosen the topics and had been willing to spend the time re-writing, editing and polishing their work. Another example which illustrates the paternalistic attitude some teachers take involves a student who had written a mystery story with some reference to lesbianism. Her teacher was reluctant to distribute the story to the rest of the class (her original plan) because she felt she needed to protect her students from the idea of lesbianism.

The assumption that ESL students “just wanna have fun” is emblematic of the general assumption that we can know and understand our students thoroughly and that they are more like frivolous children than adults. That is, there is a temptation to “explain” the Japanese, the Koreans or the Latin Americans. This was very evident when I was teaching in Japan. Foreign teachers would gather at a bar after work and talk about how the Japanese were like this and like that. Often times in an ESL staff-room, you will hear how Koreans, for example, don’t think critically, or Latin Americans are lazy. Sometimes all of our students will get lumped together. Recently, in the staff-room, there was a discussion about how our students reacted to older female teachers who were single or closeted (to their students) lesbians. Phrases like “they can’t understand,” “they feel sorry for me,” and “I get frustrated with their attitude” were flying around. In another situation, a teacher, frustrated at her students’ difficulties in writing a Test of Written English (TWE) exam, exclaimed “our students can’t think!” This tendency to lump

---

24 The TWE is part of the TOEFL test, which is used extensively by Universities in North America. The test is 30 minutes and students must be able to write a well-organized and supported 5 paragraph essay. Little depth of thought is required.
students into one group, or even into ethnic groups is unhelpful and untrue. Our students come from as many different ideological positions as we do.

The mainstream ESL approach is said to be a learner-centred one, but, in reality, it is teacher-controlled. As I mentioned, in some schools, students want grammar explanations, but teachers are not allowed to give them. Students are often the object of teaching. When there are problems, i.e., students not doing what the teacher has organized, or students talking about something else, there is a tendency to try and further restrict the situation. Giltrow and Colhoun (1992) describe how the initially critical research carried out by Pica, a second language acquisition researcher, ends up reinforcing power inequities. Pica suggests that the remedy for teacher questions which are mostly used to test students, rather than to clarify meaning, is to design an "activity which requires that they exchange information" (Pica, 1987, 16). In other words, there is a tendency to try and create stricter controls rather than to suggest a different way of going about things.

Another example of a teacher controlled exercise, which purports to be about students positively influencing each other, was developed by Tim Murphey (Murphey, 1998). Murphey's goal was to use near peer models to help students adjust their zone of proximal development (Murphey, 1998). In other words, he wanted students to encourage each other to be open to various ideas for improving their English. His ideas seemed to work well with his students; however, the way he implemented his ideas seemed paternalistic. His goal was both to increase the time his students spent speaking English and to improve their attitude about their ability and
the desirability to speak English. He asked his students to call each other and talk on the phone for 10 minutes once a week. His students keep action logs in which they reported their feelings about the activities they did in class and for homework. Most (90%) of the comments about the phone exercise were negative. However, Murphey selected the positive comments, published them in a newsletter, and distributed the paper, telling his students that these were only some of the comments made (Murphey, 1996, 3). He repeated the phone exercise several times, always following up with only the positive comments that students made. He found that more and more students were reporting that they enjoyed the exercise.

Mruphey was excited about the change in students' attitudes, the fact that they were speaking more English and the fact that the students had influenced each other. If students are speaking more English, this is a positive change. However, the method that Murphey used seems problematic. Although students did write the comments he published, Murphey completely controlled which comments were published. If I had been a student in his class, I think I would have felt manipulated. Did students genuinely change their attitude or did they simply realize the kind of comments he wanted to hear? If all the negative or critical comments are ignored, does the student get the message that what they say is not important? Writing an action log seems to be only another way for the teacher to control his students.

There are many cases where both teachers and students resist this picture of students as uninterested in serious topics, as knowable and as objects to be controlled. Sometimes, in the case of the Mayans in Vancouver, it leads to students dropping out of classes. Elizabeth, a
Chinese woman I tutor who was in a low intermediate class of English, told me about her
decision to drop out of ESL classes and seek help in a literacy program at Parkdale Project
Read because she was frustrated by the silly games she played in the classroom which, she felt,
didn’t help her. She showed me her vocabulary list which contained some of the following
words: ubiquitous, panacea, voluptuous, void. These were the words that were interesting to her.
She wanted to engage in English at the intellectual level she was capable of. Arleen Schenke, a
teacher at the school I work at, started a class organized and run like an undergraduate university
class called “Perspectives on Multiculturalism: A Canadian Context.” The class combined
content, critical thought, language skills and the students’ knowledge. Schenke comments that
"the cross-cultural studies focus attempts to offer a context where students are challenged to
build on the intelligence and complexity of their existing knowledges...in short, the approach
implies taking students seriously” (Schenke, 1996, 4). Students in the class made the following
comments about the class: “I highly recommend this type of course because it’s the real way to
learn language. Language is the idea of thinking” (Student in Schenke, 1996, 3). “It’s better.
Even though we learned about some skill to say something in other class, we didn’t have chance
to use it freely and seriously. And if we don’t use that expression, we will forget everything
naturally. It’s not useful.” (Student in Schenke, 1996, 6). Despite the success of this course,
there was no administrative support to establish this as a regular class. Teachers need the support
of the administration.

---

24 The program is actually intended for only English speaking clients. However, she managed to
persuade them to accept her- a task not normally assumed to be within the ability of a low-intermediate
student.
Critical Pedagogy

As I have been describing and criticizing the mainstream ESL pedagogical approach, an alternative model has been emerging. In this new model, language is seen as political, and learning a new language involves changes in identity and is sometimes a difficult, ambiguous process. Teachers are seen as educators in the broad sense and might have to deal with issues such as discrimination. They consider how their social location might affect their choices and their students. The neutrality and stability of the concept of methodology are questioned and the role of controversy within teaching is being reconsidered. The view of the student as only interested in having a good time is also questioned. This alternative model has developed through objections to the mainstream model from both experiences I have had and from ideas and experiences described by scholars working within the framework of critical pedagogy and ESL. Critical pedagogy does have much to offer. It is important to consider why I am turning to translation theory to develop these ideas rather than continuing to work with critical pedagogy. While critical pedagogy is very helpful in that it exposes the myth of a natural and neutral pedagogy and acknowledges issues of racism, sexism, etc., in the critical pedagogy that I have read,26 I feel there is an implicit belief that teachers have the power to “liberate” their students. Rachel Martin’s comment on (Freirean) critical pedagogy resonates with me:

the only role it [Freirean teaching] left me (as a teacher) was that of facilitator...whose consciousness was already raised. This despite the rhetoric of co-learning to which many radical teachers appeal, but in which I’ve felt many of us have had no more than a token

26 Mainly Friere (1970) and Giroux.
belief (Martin in Schenke, 1991, 113). 27

Despite my reservations about some of the field of critical pedagogy, the main reason why I have turned to translation theory is I believe using it to develop a model of teaching is simply a different route to arrive at some of the same considerations and some new insights. This route might be politically advantageous because it might be more compelling to ESL teachers. Critical pedagogy, from what I have seen, tends to alienate teachers (myself included) because it is perceived as rejecting traditional ESL pedagogy outright rather than incorporating some of the useful techniques or ideas. 28 Seeing teaching a second language as a kind of translation and then considering the implications for teaching might be a less threatening, more successful move to make. I will not be making the argument that my model might be more effective directly because it requires a different sort of proof, one beyond the scope of this paper; however, I believe it is important to consider this type of issue as well.

27 Having made the previous point, I do have to acknowledge that there are many scholars working in the field of critical pedagogy or greatly influenced by critical pedagogy who have worked towards an alternative model. See Schenke (1991), Pennycook (1989, 1994, 1996), Morgan (1997), Bourne (1988), Scollon (1997) and Peirce (1995) among others.

28 When I first read the article quoted earlier by Giltrow and Colhoun (1992) about the Mayan studying English in Vancouver, I was very angry with the tone of the article. It seemed to me like the authors applauded the Mayan efforts to resist learning English and, at the same time, ridiculed the efforts of their English teacher. The authors did not seem to acknowledge the reasons why the teacher was acting the way she or he was. My first reaction was defensive, and I couldn’t hear another point of view. As I returned to the article several times over the next few years, I was able to get beyond the tone of the article and listen to what the authors were saying. I was able to ask myself how I would react if I had been their teacher. Would I have been able to hear their point of view? Would they have expressed it to me? Would I have dismissed them as not serious?
Chapter Two
In the first chapter, I explored how mainstream ESL pedagogy sees language, the role of the teacher and the student. Using examples mainly from my teaching experience, I argued that this view was inadequate. Through my examples and objections to mainstream ESL pedagogy, a picture of the approach I favour has begun to emerge. However, I have not yet justified the new approach. What I will do in this chapter is justify this approach, using work done in translation theory and moral philosophy.

First, I will present a sketch of traditional translation theory\textsuperscript{29} from which and against which the translation theory I will be using to make my argument has developed. Traditional theory bears a remarkable resemblance in philosophical approach to mainstream ESL pedagogy. Traditional translation theory is persuasive, pervasive, and it makes a powerful appeal to “common sense.” Most people would probably agree, on first thinking, with the premise that translation is a mimetic process where the message is read, understood, and then re-coded in another language. It seems to make sense to evaluate translations by comparing the translation to the original. After all, a translation is meant to be a substitution for the original. Moreover, if the translation is meant to be a

\textsuperscript{29}It is important to note that what I am collapsing into the term “traditional translation theory” is a variety of different schools of thought about translation. In creating this picture, I have drawn on literature from Eugene Nida (Nida, 1969, Gentzler, 1993 and Venuti, 1995) and others who have focused on the science of translation, I.A. Richards (Gentzler, 1993) and others who have focused on the “American translation workshop”, as well as Gideon Toury (Gentzler, 1993), Itamar Even-Zohar (Even-Zohar, 1979) and others involved in Polystream theory and translation studies. For an excellent overview of the field, see Gentzler (1993). I have focused slightly more on Nida because of his enormous and continuing influence on the field.
substitution, translators should try and keep themselves out of the picture as much as possible. This view of translation is based on seeing language as neutral code or tool. I will argue, drawing on particular moral philosophers such as Young and Boyd, that this theory tends to ignore or diminish difference. Ignoring difference, I will argue, is harmful. I will then explore how different translation theories are more helpful because they make more of an attempt to deal with difference and inequality. In the third chapter, I will use the work I do with these theorists to help me to clarify some of the ideas introduced in the first chapter. I will also show why the consideration of translation theory is fruitful for ESL teachers.

Traditional Translation Theory

If we examine the Latin roots of the word translation which are trans (across) and latus (past participle of the verb to carry), the definition of translation, to carry across, commits us to seeing meaning as something like an object which is transportable. Eugene Nida, an influential translation theorist who worked on the science of translation, supports this view. He says, “words may be likened to suitcases used for carrying various articles of clothing” (Nida, 1969, 492). In this view, the meaning or content and the form are completely separable. This view of language commits us to the belief that there is an unchanging object in the world to which many labels are attached: bread, pain, brot, pita,
etc. Words are simply labels for a content that remains unchanged throughout time and across cultures. Andrew Benjamin (1989) has said that this view of language dates back to the Platonic separation of form and content. Benjamin argues that Plato’s warning about the dangers of poetry in the Republic is based on a belief of an underlying singularity. Plato sees literal meaning as coming first and then being “dressed up” into poetry. The reason why poetry might be harmful for people is because the figurative language will obfuscate the literal or “real” meaning. The figurative language of poetry is seen as dependent on the literal utterance. Benjamin points out that this implies that “ambiguity may exist, polysemy is possible, however each must always be viewed as a secondary effect prior to which is the singularity of the literal” (Benjamin, 1989, 13). This singularity is presumed to underlie all languages. These views of language explored above assume both that it is neutral and that “we all live in a common nonlinguistic world.... which different languages happen to label differently, with different sounds” (White, 1990, 243-254).

The assumption that language is neutral and that the form and content are easily separable affects the way the foreign (or original) text, the translated text and the

---

30 Benjamin (1992) uses the example of “brot and pita” when he argues that although they both refer to a similar object, the mode of intention is very different. He says the words “are not interchangeable....They strive to exclude each other” (Benjamin, 1992, 75).

31 Pennycook argues that in second language teaching language is seen as “a fixed code shared by a homogeneous speech community as the guarantor of shared meanings...This suggests, therefore, that there is some kind of tacit agreement on meanings in English that is shared by speakers the world over” (Pennycook, 1994, 121)
relationship between the two are seen. In addition, traditional translation sees the original as "a form of self-expression appropriate to the author, a copy true to his personality or intention, an image endowed with resemblance" (Venuti, 1992, 3). There is a belief that the meaning of the foreign text is eternal, static, monosemic and knowable (if the reader is properly educated) (Gentzler, 1993, 13). There are no ambiguities; there is a correct reading and a correct translation possible. Gregory Rabassa illustrates the belief in the eternal nature of the original as well as the belief in the genius of the creator with the following observation:

The fact is that there is a kind of continental drift that slowly works on language as words wander away from their original spot in the lexicon and suffer the accretion of subtle new nuances.... The choice made by an earlier translator, then, no longer obtains, and we must choose again. Through some instinct wrought of genius, the author’s original choice of word and idiom seem to endure (Rabassa in Venuti, 1992, 3).

The translation is juxtaposed to the original and is seen as no more than "a copy of a copy, derivative, simulacral, false, an image without resemblance" (Venuti, 1992, 3). It is a derivative piece of work not even owned by the translator.\footnote{Translators usually do not have the copyright to their translations (Venuti, 1995, 8-9).} Although there are particularities and beauty of form which might get lost in translation, these are not important to translating the core meaning. This view of the relationship between the original and the translation is based on the view of language as neutral and a belief in some sort of backdrop of universality. Some translators subscribe to belief in a kind of universal language; others draw on the idea of the
“universal” human experience. Any cultural and/or linguistic differences are seen as secondary to the core meaning which underlies all text. This is clear in Nida’s assertion that the translator’s job is to “draw aside the curtains of linguistic and cultural differences so that people may see clearly the relevance of the original message” (Nida in Venuti, 1995, 21). The underlying idea is that there is a core text or meaning which transcends all particular features: it is untouched by the nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual preference, and language of the author, as well as the time and place it was written.

The evaluation of the translated text proceeds on two levels. First, the translated text is evaluated in comparison with the original; it has to be the “same” as the original. Since there are obviously many differences between the two texts, Nida suggests the aim should be to produce “in the ultimate receptors a response similar to that of the original receptors” (Nida in Venuti, 1995, 21). As mentioned above, the original is treated as somehow unchanging and beyond interpretation, a reference that everyone can refer to and agree upon. The difficulty in making the comparison has nothing to do with trying to understand why the translator made one choice rather than another and everything to do with deciding if the translation is “proper,” if the meaning has been carried over. According to Nida, the comparison is unproblematic, except that the person who is verifying the translation might be so familiar with the original that they might read into the translation what isn’t there (Nida, 1969, 495).

---

1 Nida’s belief in the universality of the message stems, in part, from his work as a missionary and bible translator. For Nida, God is the source of meaning and, hence, meaning can be trusted to be stable and unitary (See Venuti, 1995, 22-23 and Gentzler, 1993, 44-60).
The main point is that there seems to be one "correct" translation. To be judged a correct translation, in addition to being the same as the original, the text has to fit into the literary norms of the target or receiving culture. The text has to sound like an English text. This view is clear in the assertion by Frederic Will that the translations of some poems by Gyula Illyes written in Hungarian, a language and literature that he did not know well, were not good translations because they didn't "feel" like English poems (Gentzler, 1992, 32). Lawrence Venuti agrees that the text has to sound like an English text to be successful. He argues that a translated book is seen as successful "when it gives the appearance that it is not translated, that it is the original" (Venuti, 1992 4).

Given that language is neutral and that a translation should be an accurate "copy" of the original, what should the job of the translator be? The translator has to move beyond the actual words of the text to grasp the Platonic idea of the piece which lurks somewhere behind or over the text. Although this seems exaggerated, there are schools of translation that seem to think this way. Indeed, in some schools of traditional translation theory, it was not considered essential for a translator to have a thorough knowledge of the language to be translated. Milan Kundera tells of meeting one of his translators who didn’t know any Czech. He asks the translator, "‘Then how did you translate it?’ ‘With my heart.’ And he [the translator] pulls a photo of me from his wallet” (Kundera in Gentzler, 1992, 38). Translators often call on a long tradition of being sympathetic to the author, abnegating their voice to that of the original author and, in effect,
becoming the author. In the 17th century, the Earl of Roscommon writes of this sentiment:

Chuse an author as you chuse a friend....
You grow Familiar, Intimate, and Fond;
Your thoughts, your Words, your Stiles, your Souls agree
No longer his Interpreter, but He.
(Earl of Roscommon, in Chamberlain, 1992, 58)

Minimizing any effect that their personality or social location might have on the text is very important because translators are merely the medium through which the voice of the author must shine. According to Nida, the translator is a technician who must make every attempt to reduce the impact of his "personality" on the translated text. The translator can reduce his influence through the scientific process of analyzing the source language into its kernel structures, or core meanings, transferring them and then re-coding them into the target or receptor language (See diagram below). This process is meant to reduce the chance of a mistake in the transfer of meaning. Similar to the idea of the original text as a coherent whole which transcends all particular features, so too, the social location (gender, race, class, etc.) of the translator is seen as irrelevant because it does not affect the text.

(Nida, 1969, 483-493)
Finally, the translator is clearly unimportant in comparison to the original author. This is illustrated in different ways: copyright law, pay and acknowledgment of the translator.

Translators, particularly literary translators, are paid poorly and do not have copyrights to their translations. Venuti points out that copyright laws in British and the United States are careful to define translation as a “second-order product” whose copyright is vested in the (original) author.

In the United States, a translation can be defined as a “work for hire” which means that the owner and therefore, “author” of the translation is the person who hired the translator. (Venuti, 1992, 2).

The translator is not usually mentioned in a review of a book other than in one or two sentences which tend to either praise the “clear, fluent, transparent” prose or criticize the “translationese”.

The translator is contrasted to the original author who is seen as creative and expressive. The translator, on the other hand, is often seen as a second-rate writer doing an uncreative task or a kind of technician who must always remember that s/he is working for someone else. This view of the translator is eloquently summarized by John Dryden in the 16th century. He wrote:

---

34 The rate in 1990 was from forty to ninety American dollars per thousand English words. Venuti points out that the translation of a 300 page novel would pay between $3,000 to $6,000. (Venuti, 1995, 11). If translators build up a reputation, they have some power to negotiate their rates; however, in order to build up a reputation, they have to focus almost exclusively on preparing manuscripts. They have no time to do any “sustained methodological reflection” (Venuti, 1992, 1).

35 It is important to point out that although this vision of the work of a translator has dominated translation theory, there have been challenges to this image at the same time. For example, in 1540, Etienne Dolet published a treatise on translation where he insisted that “the translator must 'not enter into slavery'...[and] the role of the translator is an active one” (Bassnett, 1996, 14). I draw attention to this because although all of the theorists I will make reference to are from the 20th century, I do not want to imply that it is only now that people have “seen the light.”
But slaves we are, and labor in another man’s plantation; we dress the vineyard, but the wine is the owner’s…..He, who invents, is master of his thoughts and words: he can turn and vary them as he pleases, till he renders them harmonious; but the wretched translator has no such privilege: for, being tied to the thoughts, he must make what music he can in the expression; and, for this reason, it cannot always be so sweet as that of the original (Dryden in Lefevere, 1992, 24).

Traditional Translation and ESL

As is obvious from the description of traditional translation theory and the description in the previous chapter about mainstream second language pedagogy, there are many similarities between the two. First, they both stress the neutrality of language and see it as a tool. Translating a foreign text or learning a language should not affect the core identity of the text or student because there is a belief that language and meaning are separated. In ESL pedagogy, consequently, learning another language is always seen as a beneficial, or at the very least, neutral process. Although traditional translation theory recognizes that something is lost from the original, there is a belief that the core message can be transferred relatively untouched. So the beneficial aspects of translation such as: translating the bible, and other holy books, enriching the mother tongue, encouraging cross-cultural communication, etc., have usually been seen as outweighing the negative. The role of the teacher and translator, given the belief in the neutrality of language and the belief that both are positive things, is that of a skilled, knowledgeable, but uncreative technician who must strive to reduce the impact of her personality and social location on the text/student. The translator either “becomes one” with the author to act as the author’s voice or utilizes a scientific methodology. Likewise, the teacher must seek to
be neutral, follow the latest scientific method developed by applied linguistics and simply allow the student to find his/her voice. The product of teaching and translating, the student or text, must fit into the receiving culture, in this case, the standard English culture. The text must read like an English book, while the student will be judged on how closely s/he approximates the (mythical) native English speaker. There is a belief that the process can be neutral.

The underlying similarity between the two approaches, and where I believe the problem lies, is the way each of them approaches difference and inequality. Both approaches tend to subscribe to a belief in universality and a belief that the differences that do exist are relatively trivial, more questions of lifestyle than real difference. This is clearly evident when Nida talks about revealing the original message of the text by simply opening “the curtains of linguistic and cultural differences” (Nida in Venuti, 1995, 21). In the ESL classroom, difference and diversity are reduced to what Dwight Boyd calls the “munch, stomp, and dress up” (Boyd, 1996, 612) approach, focusing only on superficial aspects of cultural difference like food, traditional dress, art, music and dance. The problem with these approaches is that a reliance on universal experience or beliefs tends to lead to a situation where the dominant group\(^{36}\) in society presents its view as the universal one and is reluctant to probe any further. Boyd points out that any potentially threatening questions of difference...are banned by the Pollyanna-ish belief that it can only be misguided to focus on what might pull people apart when, in fact, they really are essentially the same. The ‘searching’ [for universals] need not go on because the universals are already within the walls, provided by the dominant moral view (Boyd, 1996, 626).

\(^{36}\) In the case of ESL, the dominant group is usually white, middle-class English-speaking women.
Accepting that there is such a thing as "reasonable pluralism" and that there are differences in belief that are incommensurable is more likely to lead to a situation where people continue to attempt to understand others rather than stopping, assuming that we are all more or less the same.

Different Translation Theory

In this section I argue that traditional translation relies on this view of fundamental similarity and suggest that other translation theorists offer us a way to think about language, difference, inequality in a way that does accept the existence of reasonable pluralism and that does recognize difference and inequality. One important thing to acknowledge at the beginning is that the ideas I have taken from translation theorists are from a wide range of multidisciplinary approaches. Scholars in this field draw from disciplines as varied as linguistics, philosophy, literary criticism, law, and performance art (not strictly a discipline). My goal in this thesis is not to provide a comprehensive overview of translation theory, nor to explain, in detail, the positions of key theorists. Rather, I am interested in taking various ideas articulated by certain translation theorists who resist the approach of traditional translation theory in order to create a new model for second language teachers. As I said in the introduction, I hope this model will create a situation for teachers where they are encouraged to be more self-reflective, consider the impact their social location has, and see the job as creative. This different view on teaching will

---

37 Boyd defines this as "the recognition that any number of comprehensive doctrines about how humans ought to lead their lives may be held by equally reasonable people, even though these doctrines can and do provide fundamentally incompatible guidance" (Boyd, 1996, 614).
empower students, assign them real responsibility, and enable students to learn the language in a more thorough fashion.

Language

The first issue to tackle is that of language because the view of language a particular theorist holds substantially shapes their view of translation. As I argued in the first section, the view of language given by traditional translation theorists is that of a common world with different labels attached to all the objects. To go back to the same example, imagine a loaf of bread sitting on the counter. Attached to the bread are all sorts of labels: pain, brot, pan, pannir, pita, naan, etc. However, it is obvious that if a loaf of bread is pictured, we've already imposed some sort of linguistic reality on it because naan, pannir and pita do not come in loaves. This view of language forces us to resort to a kind of Platonic concept of bread. It might be argued that there is some concept of bread that exists cut off from any particular shape; however, can we make the same argument for a concept like freedom? Can we say that there is a concept freedom which all of the labels in different languages refer to? Clearly the concept freedom is quite meaningless without being integrated into the "complex, dynamic web of meaning and justification that constitutes different cultures" (Boyd, 1996, 625). As Wittgenstein (1963) asserts, the rules of use of a particular word will vary according to the situation or the language game. In each

---

38 Corson (1995) demonstrates Wittgenstein's idea with the sentence: "Sheep are carnivorous." In most language games, this sentence is senseless because the "rules governing the use of the sign SHEEP and the sign CARNIVOROUS are incompatible with placing the two words together" (Corson, 1995, 24). However, in a science fiction or cartoon language game, the sentence could make sense. To talk about a concept like freedom without considering the "game" being played is not helpful.
language and culture (and even within cultures), the word and concept freedom means something different. The consequence of seeing language as a transparent, neutral medium is having to assume "that linguistic and cultural differences do not exist at a fundamental level" (Venuti, 1995, 63-73). The danger in assuming fundamental similarity is that the differences that do exist will be ignored and paved over.

The translation theorists who challenge the neutral view of language see it as being polysemic, constitutive of identity and reflecting power relationships in the world. Their view of language allows for recognition of some of the fundamental differences between languages and cultures. Meaning does not exist independently of language in some nonlinguistic realm. Meaning is tied up with the words and with the culture. These theorists reject the idea that there is a "core" meaning to a particular word which then can be transferred to another language. Among others, Derrida (1985), Johnson (1992), Benjamin (1989) and White (1990) have argued that all words have many different primary meanings and a potentially different meaning every time they are used. White describes the discussion of the two words polis and state in the preface of a translation of Aristotle's Politics by Sir Ernest Barker. Originally, Barker states that

---

59 See Becker (1995) for a fascinating look at translating the word silence into Malay.

40 Andrew Benjamin considers the meanings the word translation has. It provides a way to think about transmitting culture: it is evoked when considering claims of universality. Many of these ideas and more are intertwined when using this word. Translation is "both a plurality of activities and has a plurality of significations" (Benjamin, 1989, 35). He extends this example and argues that all words are "of necessity, over-determined and as such [are] always the site of a range of semantic possibilities" (Benjamin, 1989, 35).
the overtones and associations of the two words *polis* and *state* are different. This implies that the core meaning of the words are the same. However, as he continues describing the origin and significance of the two words, it becomes obvious that the two words are completely different words. White states: "it is not their secondary meanings that are different but their primary meanings; they are different all the way through" (White, 1990, 250). Johnson (1992) quotes Derrida’s example of the Greek word *pharmakon* which can be translated as either poison, remedy, drug, or recipe (Johnson, 1985, 145). The word does not have one core or univocal meaning and additional denotative meanings; it has many meanings. When translating *pharmakon*, translators have to choose which meaning to translate and end up “deciding what in Plato remains undecidable” (Johnson 1985, 145). Rather than an original semantic unity, we have a picture of a word as “a site of differential meanings in which potential and actual meanings are present” (Benjamin, 1989, 35). If the words are not reducible to core or single meanings but are places of multiple meaning, then translating a text will necessarily change its identity.

Traditional translation theory advocates that books translated into English should “feel” like English books. The necessity for translations to fit into “standard English” has led Spivak to comment that “the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan” (Spivak, 1992, 180). This erasing of difference is a problem because it leads us to assume that all other cultures are like us, more or less.41 Other theorists

41 When I first realized the existence of different languages as a child, I felt sorry for people who spoke other languages. I assumed that the speaker used English (the only “real” language) in their head and was forced to translate. I thought they must have been exhausted from the continuous effort.
suggest a more careful approach. Lawrence Venuti strongly criticizes the consistent use of fluent, standard English in translation. In his books and articles, he argues strenuously against the invisibility of the translator and the tradition of translating foreign texts into fluid, standard English because he believes such strategies tend to erase the differences in cultures and allow the reader of the translation "the narcissistic experience of recognizing his or her own culture in a cultural other, enacting an imperialism that extends the dominion of transparency with other ideological discourses over a different culture" (Venuti, 1992, 5). Venuti's argument is that if the text reads very clearly and fluently in standard English, the reader will be encouraged to over identify with it. He argues that the fluent strategies evoke

the illusion of authorial presence, maintain...the cultural dominance of Anglo-American individualism. represent...foreign cultures with ideological discourse specific to English-language cultures- but conceal...all these determinations and effects under the veil of transparency (Venuti, 1992, 6).

Venuti compares two translations to illustrate his point. First he considers the translation (Venuti, 1995, 29-34) of Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars* by Robert Graves, a British translator working in the 50s. His translation, according to Venuti, smoothes out the text and creates a coherent account from a less than coherent foreign text. Venuti points out that although the fluent style of translation was partly a decision of Graves, it was conditioned by other considerations such as the contemporary English-language values, the decline of the study of the classics, the growth of a mass market, the perception that readers are not interested in reading footnotes, etc. In addition to creating a more coherent text, Graves imposes a moralizing tone
and homophobic attitudes on the text which in Latin only makes "general and non-committal references to Caesar's sexuality" (Venuti, 1995, 33). The Latin text itself is a collection of information about the rulers of Rome presented without a moralizing bias. Graves creates a text which is slanted against Caesar (Venuti, 1995, 32). When translating an account of a same-sex sexual relationship Caesar, Graves chooses words which stigmatize the relationship as perverse. Venuti contrasts this example with a translation (Venuti, 1995, 34-38) of "The Seafarer" by Pound. Pound "foreignizes" the translation by focusing on the sounds of the language and by using archaisms to focus attention on the language. As a result, the translation is less fluent and more difficult to understand. Venuti does not mean to suggest that non-fluent translations, like those of Pound, are free of bias, but that the bias tends to be more visible. Indeed, Venuti does believe that Pound imposes a certain view of individualism on the text. Venuti says: "foreignizing translations that are not transparent, that eschew fluency for a more heterogeneous mix of discourses are equally partial in their interpretation of the foreign text, but they tend to flaunt their partiality instead of concealing it" (Venuti, 1995, 34).

The important point that Venuti makes is that standard language (whether grammatically, rhetorically or stylistically) is not neutral. Translation is not a neutral activity; it will change the identity of the text. Venuti argues for a form of non-fluent translation to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the text has been mediated. Many other translation theorists call for "foreignizing" translation. However, one of possible dangers of this decision, as Carol Maier

---

considers, is whether or not anyone will take the time to read a translation which is non-fluent or "strange" (Maier, 1989, 631). What is attempted in translation, according to Maier, is to achieve a balance between writing a poem which reflects the author's language and culture and which also risks being rejected by the reader because of the awkwardness or strangeness of the language, and writing a good English poem where often the poet's voice is subsumed to that of the translator. Maier warns us against the uncritical acceptance or embracing of Venuti's ideas. She is concerned with holding both cultures simultaneously in the poem and avoiding both extremes: overfamiliarity and complete foreignness.\footnote{1}

\textit{Original, Translation and Relationship}

Given the recognition that language is not neutral and that translation changes the identity of the text, these translators reject the idea put forth by traditional translation theory that the translation is a matching or equivalent product. Rather than focusing on the product and how closely it matches the original and how well it fits into the receiving culture, these theorists focus on the process of translating, the choices the translator makes and what can be learned through translation. The purpose of focusing on the process is twofold: it is to allow the translator time to explore the unchosen alternatives,\footnote{4} and it is to allow the translator space to explore differences

\footnotetext{1}{I will return to Maier's dilemma in the last section of the chapter which focuses on the role of the translator.}

\footnotetext{4}{Maier describes how students studying translation for the first time tend to feel a sense of loss when translating. The greatest sense of loss, contrary to common assumptions, is not that of the "meaning" of}
and inequalities of languages and cultures. It gives them space to explore what is erased and what is added when translating. Mary Layoun agrees and argues

the space-between is crucial to translation. It is decisive to the end “product” of translation and to the consumption of that product. For who can make it between and across? And bearing what? From whom (and not just from where) do they come? To whom do they arrive? (Layoun, 1995, 270)

One of the things we can learn by exploring the choices the translator made is “the canons of accuracy by which [the text] is produced” (Venuti, 1995, 37). Venuti explores several examples of what he calls symptomatic readings, one of which is Bruno Bettelheim's critique of the translations of Freud’s texts. Bettelheim argues that Freud was translated into an abstract, highly theoretical scientific discourse in English, whereas in German he wrote with colloquial terms, focused on his own experience and attempted to develop a humanistic/spiritualist approach.

Although Bettelheim’s critique involved a close comparison between the German and English, Venuti argues that a close reading of the translation alone suffices to explore the gaps and inconsistencies. In one section, the inconsistencies in the register of certain words and terms alert the reader to the mediation of the translator. Along with very common and even colloquial terms, such as forgetting and go out of my head, is an academic word like parapraxis. In the same text both the academic and common words were used. For example, “‘id’ vs.

\[\text{the original, or the inability to find “equivalences,” but the loss of “the opportunity to explore available possibilities and to discover new ones” (Maier, 1995, 21).}\]

4 Later on in the chapter when exploring the role of the translator, I will examine another symptomatic reading which suggest that the translator's social location might also influence the translation.

46 The word ‘Parapraxis’ was created in order to describe the German ‘Fehlleistung’ (Venuti 1995, 26).
‘unconscious’; ‘cathexis’ vs. ‘charge,’ or ‘energy’; ‘libidinal’ vs. ‘sexual’” (Venuti, 1995, 26).
Bettelheim argues that the translation made Freud’s text appear to be an abstract, scientific theory best understood in the framework of medicine in order, partly, to “facilitate the institutionalization of psychoanalysis in the medical profession and in academic psychology” (Venuti, 1995, 27). Although Venuti praises Bettelheim’s discovery and exposure of the inconsistencies of diction in the translations of Freud’s text, he rejects Bettelheim’s assumption that there is a true, accurate translation possible. The inconsistent diction could be seen as a series of interpretive choices, conscious and unconscious, that the translator made to highlight an alternative reading of Freud. The important issue is not that the translation is inaccurate, but that it has been done within certain assumptions about translation and about psychology and science. The important thing is not to judge the translation as right or wrong, correct or incorrect, but to investigate what sorts of criteria the translator was employing.47 Venuti summarizes: “a symptomatic reading...is historicizing: it assumes a concept of determinate subjectivity that exposes both the ethnocentric violence of translating and the interested nature of its own historicist approach” (Venuti, 1995, 39).

With a focus on the process of translation and the recognition of language as political, and meaning as more amorphous, the view of the original or foreign text and the translated text also changes from the traditional view. Rather than a hierarchical positioning of the foreign text as

47 See also Jacob’s note when comparing her translation of Benjamin’s article to that of Harry Zohn. She says, “the criticism that appears here and there in my text should be recognized more as a play between possible versions than as a claim to establish a more ‘correct’ translation” (Jacobs, 1975, 755).
the good, the pure and the translation as the bad, the impure, the simulacrum (in Plato's sense), the hierarchy has been upset. One of the theorists who has challenged this idea is Walter Benjamin (1992). In his essay, "The Task of the Translator," (Benjamin, 1992) Benjamin introduces a temporal element to the discussion of translation. He believes that if the original is translatable, it makes a claim to be translated in order to continue its life or afterlife. Benjamin makes it clear that by life, he does not mean anything organic or connected to the soul. Rather, the idea of the life of a piece of art is associated with its survival throughout history. When the original begins to attain fame, it is translated. The translation, then, marks a continuing life for the original and emerges from the afterlife of the original. The translation does not serve the original, but owes its existence to it (Benjamin, 1992, 73). The original, on the other hand, is indebted to the translation because the translation ensures its survival. Venuti explains:

> a translation canonizes the foreign text, validating its fame by enabling its survival. Yet the afterlife made possible by translation simultaneously cancels the originality of the foreign text by revealing its dependence on a derivative form: translation does not so much validate literary fame as create it (Venuti, 1992, 7).

In addition to upsetting the traditional relationship between the foreign and translated text, the introduction of time also upsets the notion that the original, because it is "created by genius," somehow remains static, and eternal. Benjamin explains that "in its afterlife - which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living - the original undergoes a change" (Benjamin, 1992, 74). The implication of this, as Derrida points out, is

48 Afterlife (Fortleben) as opposed to the life (Leben) of the original.

49 Sieburth succinctly expresses the idea: "In short, Benjamin insists that the original is in no way fixed; as it moves through the various avatars of its afterlife, it is subject to any number of ramifications. And the same holds true of translations" (Sieburth, 1989, 241)
that translation "is writing; that is it is not translation only in the sense of transcription. It is a productive writing called forth by the original text" (Derrida, 1985, 153).

There are other theorists who upset the hierarchy by questioning the status of the original and by suggesting that the translation affects the original. Suzanne Jill Levine (1989) quotes Jorge Luis Borges who, in a number of his writings,\(^5\) has challenged the idea of an original. Borges suggests that "the only real difference between original and translation......is that the translator’s referent is a visible text against which the translation can be judged; the original escapes this scrutiny (and mistrust) because its referent is unspoken, perhaps forgotten, and probably embarrassingly banal" (Borges in Levine, 1989, 31). Richard Rand, in his essay "o’er-brimm’d" (Rand, 1985), illustrates this semi-comical remark by Borges by examining John Keats’ poem "To Autumn" for references to other texts. His goal is to upset the rigid concept of translation as strictly between texts in different languages by an acknowledged author and translator. Through analysis of the text and a search for the origin of the ideas or images in the poem, he makes the point that the poem could be said to be a translation because there are many references to other texts. Also, Rand argues that in the poem Keats is "translating" Autumn, but at the same time, the concept *Autumn* is translating various aspects of the poem. He says that "to speak of some decisive ‘original’ here....is absolutely out of the question. The cherished values of originality

---

\(^5\) In “Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote”, Borges (1962) writes an (invented) bibliographical homage to Pierre Menard, a modern French citizen whose goal is to rewrite (not translate, plagiarize, or copy, but re-create) *Don Quixote* in Cervantes’ Spanish. Through the story, Borges makes us think about the slippery existence of the original.
and identity are truly undecidable" (Rand, 1985, 95). Jacqueline Risset, amongst others, has
drawn on the (self) translations done by James Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake* to make a similar point
about the unfinished or unstable state of the original. Joyce translated several passages of
*Finnegan's Wake* from an English stretched to the point of incomprehensibility by the inclusion
of other languages into only Italian.51 Joyce does not see his translation as a rewriting which
exists as a poor copy next to the sanctified original. Rather, the original itself is now viewed as a
"work in progress" (Risset, 1984, 3). Risset concludes,

What emerges above all from the detailed analysis of the Italian version is that *this*
translation is no pursuit of hypothetical equivalents of the original text (as given,
definitive) but a later elaboration representing (in relation to the first text as seen as really
-literally - "work in progress") a kind of extension, a new stage, a more daring variation
on the text in process (Risset, 1984, 6).

The work that the above theorists do to destabilize the hierarchical arrangement between
original and translation is very important. Although polyglot authors like Joyce have more
authority to subvert the original, particularly when it is their own original (Levine, 1989, 32) than
most translators do, they still create a model of translation which is more like transcreation. The
original text itself becomes recognized as one in which difference already exists. The translation
theorists that I have chosen always work with a respect for the difference in the foreign text.
They recognize that it is never possible to "cover" a text completely, that there is always
something "left over" in the text which is unknowable. Richard Sieburth (1989) explores this

---

51 In this passage, for example, the allusions to German, Latin and Greek and completely dropped in the
translation: "Annona geboren aroostodrat Nivia, dochter of Sense and Art with Spark's pirryphlikathims
funkling her fran" and the translation "Annona genata arusticrata Nivea, laureolata in Senso e Arte, il
ventaglio costellato di filigettanti" (Joyce in Risset, 1984, 9).
idea rather poetically when he talks about how Hölderlin’s poems passed through his English translation to continue their “life.” While he was translating, he arrived at the point when he felt his translation covered the German originals. After the initial euphoria of finishing his translations, he returned, again and again, to both the originals and translations (his translations were published in an *en face* edition) and found, to his surprise, that the originals were “gradually erasing or obscuring the versions [he] had created in their stead....the originals were once again reasserting their place alongside [his] translations to such an extent that the light emitted by Hölderlin’s German on the left page was now blinding [his] parallel English version on the right” (Sieburth. 1989. 240). He realized that what he had written did not and could not cover the original and that the original could always tell itself in a different way. Maier (1995) describes the work done by Venuti, Niranjana and Sieburth as done within Noël Valis’ definition of respect as “the ability to approach a work knowing you can’t explain it away or ‘know’ it entirely...acknowledging that the work does not belong to you. that the work is in some fundamental way alien to you the critic” (Noël Valis in Maier. 1995. 25). This notion that the translator does not have complete knowledge of the text is a recognition of the difference and unstability in the original text, a recognition of the difficulties a translator from another time, place and culture will have with a text, and a recognition that the translations created will always be interpretations, subject to revision.

In addition to the notion of “difference” between texts and cultures, Maier insists on considering inequality. She argues that it is important to realize that the translator is often within
“radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Maier. 1995, 29). She argues, with reference to Prasad, Radhakrishnan, Shohat and Mohanty (Maier. 1995, 25), that difference and inequality are not the same thing and that simply resisting difference is not enough to guarantee that inequalities will be erased. She believes that translation has to be made visible as “an activity that occurs within an explicit context or compact of difference and inequality” (Maier. 1995, 29). If this situation is recognized and made visible, there will be more chance that a translation that holds the two cultures in a balance (rather than a withholding of translation or a translation which erases either culture) might emerge. Although she does not explicitly state her arguments for the importance of talking about inequality, I believe she is working with a similar argument that Iris Young constructs.

The idea that translators can never completely know the foreign text and must realize they often work within “radically asymmetrical relations of power” is diametrically opposed to the advice from traditional translation to become one with the author. Iris Young’s notion of understanding others through asymmetrical reciprocity (Young, 1997) is helpful in exploring these differences. Young rejects the idea that we can see things from another person’s point of view. Young argues that the idea of symmetry obscures difference, is ontologically impossible.

---

52 There are many examples of translations, done in inequitable situations where the lesser ‘power’ loses out. When Edward Fitzgerald, for example, was translating the *Rubaiyat*, he wrote to a friend in 1857 that “[i]t is an amusement for me to take what Liberties I like with these Persians who (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them” (Fitzgerald in Lefevere, 1992, 4). See also Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) where she argues that translations of works in Hindi, done in the mid to late 1800s by the British, were used as source materials by government officials who then created an image of Hindus as lazy, insincere, cowardly, dirty, and untrustworthy and eminently in need of guidance from a “civilized” culture.
and has politically undesirable consequences. It tends to obscure difference because, even with people who are very similar to us, we bring different histories, experiences, so on to our encounters. If we only seek symmetry, we risk closing off the discussion and fruitful exchange that acknowledgment of difference can bring. Young believes that it is ontologically impossible to stand in another’s shoes because “our positions are partly constituted by the perspectives each of us has on the others” (Young, 1997, 47). She uses the example of a mother and daughter to demonstrate that although they seem to share a lot of similarities, their relationship is based on the asymmetry of the positioning between the two of them. The daughter’s position is created, in part, through the mediation of her mother. It is hard to imagine that the daughter could suspend her perspective (constituted, in part, by her relationship with her mother) to assume her mother’s perspective (constituted, in part, by her relationship with her daughter). Young concludes, “the infinity of the dialectical process of selves in relation to others both makes it impossible to suspend our own positioning and leaves an excess of experience when I try to put myself in the other person’s place” (Young, 1997, 47). Finally, trying to completely understand another is a politically suspect move because “when members of privileged groups imaginatively try to represent to themselves the perspective of members of oppressed groups, too often those representations carry projections and fantasies through which the privileged reinforce a complementary image of themselves” (Young, 1997, 48). Rather than embracing a symmetrical ideal of understanding another, Young advocates the idea of asymmetrical reciprocity. In asymmetrical reciprocity, both parties recognize two points. First, that each party has its own history and that that history can always be retold. Second, that all social positions are multiply constructed in relation to many other positions. Young tells us that “there is always a remainder.
much that I do not understand about the other person’s experience and perspective” (Young, 1997, 53). The people or translators who wish to approach others or foreign texts have to do so knowing that full understanding is not possible, but the process of reaching understanding is revealing. Translation, as Maier says, has to be seen as the “humbling, disconcerting experience it often is” (Maier. 1995. 29).

*Role of Translator*

Given the complexity of the relationship between the foreign and translated text, the role of the translator in this model is much more complex and complicated than that in the traditional model. In the traditional model, the translator was expected to be able to read the (one true) message of the original, and meticulously translate the book so that it seems like an English text. The translator is uncreative compared to the author of the original. The recognition of the political nature of language, the rejection of a mimetic isomorphic relationship between the two texts, and the recognition of the existence of difference in the original significantly change the role of the translator in this model. The translator has to approach the text with respect, knowing s/he will not be able to “cover” it completely. S/he has to consider how her/his social location will affect her/his approach to the text, s/he needs to report about the process, discussing choices, differences, canons of accuracy,⁴ and s/he needs to try and maintain a balance between the two

⁴ Although many translation theorists have made this call, it is important to acknowledge the practical constraints. In addition to the low pay, translation tends to be dismissed by academia. (Venuti, 1995. 2-3).
cultures. The job that the translator does is difficult, humbling and creative.

Unlike some of the traditional translation theorists, these theorists stress the necessity of a thorough knowledge of the language. Gayatri Spivak, in addressing the inequalities in translation, specifically between the “third” and “first” world, suggests: “to decide whether you are prepared enough to start translating, it might help if you have graduated into speaking, by choice or preference, of intimate matters in the language of the original” (Spivak. 1992, 185). This recommendation is a reaction to a colonial type of translation that erased difference and presented foreign texts as if they already contained Western values. Maier agrees with Spivak’s requirement of intimacy with the language to be translated. She also acknowledges that most often translation takes place not only in difference, but inequality. If translation is made visible as an activity that takes place within a situation of linguistic and cultural difference and (often) inequality, there is a better chance that there will be understanding within asymmetrical power relations because people might be willing to “listen” longer. Although Maier agrees with Spivak’s requirements of the translator, she also suggests seeing translation in terms of inquiry. Inquiry, for Maier, is related to subjectivity and identity. Subjectivity is achieved if identity is problematized. What she means by problematizing identity is recognizing that our identity as translators and readers is constructed by all of the particular groups we belong to. Our identity shapes how we read the text. She questions the traditional goal of self-effacement by the translator in order to give authorial illusion to the translated text because she believes that “transparency [of the translator] results in a concealment of the cultural and social conditions of the translation” (Venuti. 1995, 61) and, she would add, the translator. The goal of rendering the
work done by the translator visible is not done with a view to criticizing them for not getting it “right,” but as a way of acknowledging them and considering the various changes that have been made to the text. If we, as readers, ignore the presence of both translator and author, she argues, we risk not acknowledging changes to the text and denying “the poet a distinctiveness that resists absorption by another culture” (Maier, 1989, 630).

I would like to consider Maier’s relationship to Ana Castillo, a Chicana writer, and the translation of some of her poetry as an example of what the translator’s job is. Maier rejects the idea of “fusing” or “becoming one” with the author because she recognizes that that gesture leads to a rejection of difference and emphasis on sameness. She sees what she and Castillo did as entering a coalition. During her struggles to understand Castillo’s poetry, an act that Castillo welcomed, Maier realized that her attempt was also a violation because she had to make changes to the poem. Despite her desire to create a situation where the poet is given a voice, Maier recognizes that translation also silences voices. She notes that “the translator’s gesture of generosity, her enthusiastic embrace, tends to mask—despite the continual representation [of] translation as a struggle, the conquest, or even murder—that gesture’s inherently rapacious nature” (Maier, 1989, 630). Using words like conquest or murder to describe translation seems excessive; however, what is risked in translation, according to Maier, is achieving a balance.

---

4 See also the work done by Niranjana (1992) who examines two translations of a vacuna (poem) written in Kannada. She compares the two translations with one done by herself. She shows that the first two translations were done in such a way so as to read the vacuna as already embodying Christian values. In fact, she argues, the vacunas were chosen because they were seen as already Christian and modern, and thus “worthy of the West’s attention” (Niranjana, 1992, 180). This point is useful to remind us that the urge to simply make works accessible is not always value free.
between the two cultures without obliterating either.

When reading over a published translation that she has done of Castillo’s poems, Maier worries that she has obliterated part of Castillo’s culture by using the uppercase I in her translation. In Spanish, pronouns are usually left out of most speech and writing. “I want to eat” becomes “Quiero (want) comer (to eat).” She is surprised by the decision she had made because she knows that whenever Castillo writes in English, she uses a lower case i to indicate collective voice. The Spanish poem, she feels conveys a “strong experience of identity with a non-specified subject” (Maier. 1989, 640). How can she convey this in English? She writes five different versions of the poem using a combination of all upper case ls. and lower case ls. Here are excerpts of versions one, two and five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>El Sueño</th>
<th>The Dream</th>
<th>The Dream</th>
<th>The Dream</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucía mi traje zapoteco</td>
<td>I was radiant wearing my Zapotecan dress</td>
<td>i was radiant wearing my Zapotecan dress</td>
<td>Radiant, wearing my Zapotecan dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un huipil</td>
<td>a red</td>
<td>a red</td>
<td>a red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rojo</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rojo</td>
<td>huipil</td>
<td>huipil</td>
<td>huipil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>....</td>
<td>....</td>
<td>....</td>
<td>....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Maier. 1989, 632-35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maier explores these options, pondering which version best represents the Spanish and which version would be best received in English. She worries about using a lower case i because she feels it is trivial and may lead to the translation being ignored. She asks herself, “is the
translation complete if no one stops, risks lateness long enough to listen, to build further on the coalition it represents?” (Maier, 1989, 631). Maier then considers the “translation” (or transcription) of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (*I, Rigoberta Menchú*) as an example of this struggle over the standardization of the language of a translation.

Burgos-Debray, the woman who interviews Menchú and fashions the interview into a seamless narrative, makes many changes to the text. She “also makes it clear that Menchú’s Spanish has been corrected so as to keep it from seeming ‘folklórico’” (Maier, 1989, 636). Maier wondered if by using the uppercase *I*, she is doing the same as Burgos was in trying to keep Menchú from sounding *folklórico* and avoid alienating English readers. She wonders if her reluctance to use the lower case *i* is because it might be read as trivial. Although initially happy with version five, she decides that it is unsatisfactory because it eliminates the action, the verb from the poem. She decides that the collaboration that she sees translation as demanding

a willingness to consider the *use* of the small “*i*” as a practice which is not trivial and *ingenua*. In other words, it involves the recognition of a “lower case” poetics as a serious strategy that consciously employs “triviality” even though it is a form that the translator herself would not otherwise use- as either writer or translator (Maier, 1989, 643).

Maier suggests that taking risks over not appearing “correct” might be necessary if she is committed to holding two worlds in one translation and to accepting that a poet’s words are capable of changing her translation (Maier, 1989, 643).

In addition to struggling with the decision of whether or not to use standard English, Maier considers how her particular social location might influence her translation or reading of the text. Maier and Anuradha Dingwaney, a colleague, return to examine *I Rigoberta Menchú* with their
class in an attempt to encourage their students to see that both readers and translators come to a text from a particular location. They choose *I, Rigoberta Menchú* because it is a doubly mediated text: first by Burgos-Debray, the ethnographer, and then by Anne Wright, the translator. Dingwaney and Maier start by considering, with their classes, the role Burgos-Debray played and draw on literature on ethnographers to argue that “the ethnographer’s acknowledged and unacknowledged assumptions-social, cultural, political-about the speaker and her culture are implicated in the rendering of the life history” (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 305). Dingwaney and Maier write about the uneasiness they feel by the quick (over) identification Burgos-Debray makes with Menchú. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, an upper class Venezuelan woman, meets with Menchú in Burgos-Debray’s Paris apartment and tape records and transcribes her interviews with Menchú. When Burgos-Debray is re-reading the transcript, she decides to eliminate the interview structure and write the manuscript as a seamless narrative. In so doing, she seems to eliminate Menchú from the position of author. She refers to Menchú in the third person in the chapter headings: the epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter are attributed to Menchú, which makes it seems that it is not Menchú who is speaking in the bulk of the book; and the author’s name in the Spanish version is actually Burgos-Debray, not Menchú. In addition, Burgos-Debray writes the introduction, at the end of which she dedicates a poem to Menchú!

Burgos-Debray seems to erase Menchú as the author of the book. Dingwaney and Maier ask themselves the following questions: Is Burgos-Debray assuming the identity of Menchú? Is it possible for her to assume Menchú’s identity? Is she actually violating Menchú’s identity by erasing her as the author? On the other hand, perhaps the production of a seemingly unmediated
narrative was a collaboration with Menchú\textsuperscript{55} to enable Menchú to reach her political goals of effecting change for her people. Did Menchú, as Dingwaney and Maier ask themselves, "use" Burgos-Debray as part of a larger strategy, perhaps for the same reason she decided to learn Spanish?\textsuperscript{56} The fact that Menchú warns Burgos-Debray and us that she is "still keeping secret what [she] think[s] no-one should know" (Menchú in Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 309-10) supports the idea that this might be part of Menchú's strategy.

Dingwaney and Maier go on to think about the role of the translator, Ann Wright, and first react negatively to her mediation, as they did to Burgos-Debray because they feel that both create a text that might lead "to a reader's unexamined compassion" (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 310). Wright states that she wants to be an invisible mediator and let Menchú's words shine through. In fact, she says that she "has tried...to stay with Rigoberta's original phrasing" (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 310). This is odd given that there is no evidence that she had access to the original transcript. However, when they re-examine the text, they notice certain changes that Wright has made which might support the idea of staying with Menchú's words. In particular, Wright has Menchú using you as if she is talking to another person. This does not occur in the Spanish version. Perhaps this is an attempt to (re)write Burgos-Debray back into the picture as a

\textsuperscript{55} Dingwaney and Maier note that by focusing on Burgos-Debray, they ended up ignoring Menchú's role in this story and risk "reproducing the classic colonizing gesture identified by Edward Said, whereby representatives of a hegemonic (colonizing) culture invest themselves with the authority to speak about, describe represent the colonized/subaltern subject" (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 308).

\textsuperscript{56} As I mentioned in chapter one, learning Spanish for some Guatemalan Native people is seen as dangerous because one risks losing their identity. Menchú's father actually prohibited her from studying Spanish. She chose to study it so that she could speak for her people. (Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 309)
mediator. In addition, Menchù is acknowledged as the author in the English version, and Wright did not translate Burgos-Debray's introduction, acknowledgments or dedication. Wright seems to be making an effort to move Menchù back into the center of the book.

Through this process of examining, re-examining, and questioning the text, and recognizing the mediation involved, translation is seen as "a reading- a construction of social, political, cultural 'realities'-by an individual who inserts herself and her work (and is embedded) in that culture in particular ways, for particular purposes" (Dingwaney & Maier. 1995. 313). Just as the translator is recognized as a person located in a particular culture, so also readers can look at their own location and see how that influences the interpretations they make. This does not imply that anything goes: the text exists and restrains the reader/translator. White articulates what Maier, Benjamin and others seem to imply. He says that the original text can not be forgotten because "it is upon the prior text that our right to speak at all depends. One has no authority to disregard it and substitute for it texts of one's own composition" (White. 1990. 246). The problem with this statement, of course, is that it is unclear what the restraint of the original text is. It seems that we are back again with the idea of a core meaning of a text which determines the correctness of the translation. While a full exploration of this important problem would require another thesis. I believe it is possible to propose a way of thinking about it for now. The theorists I have been drawing on in this chapter all share a respect for the text. They listen to the text and write another text almost in response to the original text from a particular location and with particular ideological ways of seeing the world. They write a text knowing both that they
are neither freely making up our their own compositions without any regard for the text nor that there is a definite "essence" in the text to capture. Many interpretations are possible.
Chapter Three
In this chapter, I will be drawing on the work done in the first and second chapters to create the beginnings of an alternative model or way of thinking about teaching for ESL (and other second language) teachers. In the first chapter, I argued that traditional ESL pedagogy, based in the positivistic arena of applied linguistics is structured so that certain questions can not be asked. Some of those questions that are difficult to ask are: how does my social location affect my teaching? How does the emphasis on fun and light classes affect my students? What difference does it make that my students are learning English, instead of, for example, Farsi? Being able to ask these questions and start thinking about the answers is crucial to helping students learn. In this model of second language acquisition pedagogy, language is seen as a neutral tool; teachers are seen as technicians who only have to master the most scientific and supposedly neutral methods to teach English; and students are often seen as two dimensional, uninterested in any substantive or serious topics.

In the second chapter, I first introduced traditional translation theory which is similar in philosophical approach to mainstream ESL pedagogy in many ways. With traditional translation theory as a backdrop, I then explored four main ideas of the translation theory I will now use to build an alternative model for ESL teaching. The first was the focus on process of translation as opposed to the product. Focusing on the process can lead to new ideas about differences between cultures and the nature of language. Second, language is not seen as a transparent tool, but as a non-neutral way of seeing the world. Words are seen as having many primary meanings and as being somewhat overdetermined. Third, the nature of the relationship between the original and the translation is altered. The mimetic, isomorphic idea of translation is rejected. Rather than
judging the translation on how similar it is to the original, the translation is explored to examine the choices translators made and to recognize the mediated nature of the text. The translation is not seen as simply a copy, but another text which continues the life of the original. The sacrosanct status of the original is questioned, and it is recognized that many readings are possible. Sometimes, the translation can expand some of the ideas in the original. In addition, any text, but particularly one from a different culture than that of the translator, is seen as never completely knowable. The translator will never be able to “cover” the whole text. There is always a remainder. Given this, the fourth idea explored concerns the role of the translator. The translator approaches the original with a certain respect that recognizes that there is always a remainder. In this model of translation, the translator recognizes that his/her social location will effect the reading and translating of the text. Hence, social location is recognized as something that needs to be considered when translating. Again, this is not done with the assumption that the translator will be able to produce a perfect translation, but that the translator can attempt to acknowledge the inequalities that exist.

Translation and Teaching

In this last chapter, I will start to explore the implications of translation theory for ESL teaching and for the creation of a better model. As an introduction to the body of this chapter, I will outline five reasons why translation theory might help inform ESL teaching. The first reason is practical. While working, it is easy to get so caught up in the daily grind of preparing for classes, dealing with emergencies, etc., that teachers feel they do not have time for what can
seem like more abstract concerns. Along with being caught up with pragmatic day-to-day issues, most ESL teachers work in a model which does not encourage reflection. Most of the places I’ve worked have been cost-recovery, corporate model programs where the focus is on keeping “clients” happy and keeping things fun and light. Seeing teaching as translation could give teachers a bit more space to contemplate and criticize. It gives teachers a chance to draw back from the daily work, reflect, and think about connections, and how these ideas would affect their teaching.

The second reason is the parallels between ESL teachers and translators: I will mention several similarities here. They both are in a paradoxical place of having a lot of power and not having much power at all. In the classroom or when translating a text, they have a lot of power. However, in the real world, they are both often seen as technicians and not “artists”; they generally have a fairly low status, seen in both the low pay they receive and their second class status versus original authors or “real” teachers, teachers of literature. Also, they both deal with expressing ideas in a new language: the ESL teacher’s job is to help students develop the language to express their thoughts; the translator has to find words for the original author to express his/her ideas. Finally, both ESL teachers and translators deal with and have to understand “the other.” Translators take a text from another culture and are responsible for creating a translation. ESL teachers work with a student from another culture to help them

---

Technical translators tend to receive higher pay. Literary translation, by itself, would be almost impossible to make a living at. As I mentioned in the first chapter, ESL teachers in Canada who work with a board of education or with a University or College tend to be paid more; however, most ESL teachers are paid far less than public school teachers.
achieve their goals in this culture.

Third, using translation theory to explore second language teaching is appropriate because students learning a second language are going through a process of translation. As I will argue, learning a language is more than just the process of being able to substitute one word for another; it also involves creating a new identity. Language students are learning to express their ideas and thoughts in English, to create an identity in English, or to translate their identity into English. Hoffinan deals with the issue of translating her identity from Polish into English when her family immigrates to Canada. She writes about the frustration of being forced to use English, a language which initially has no living connections for her. In Polish, she's intelligent, witty, alive. In English, she's dull, a bit odd and pedantic. She expresses her anger at her friends because “they can't see through the guise, can't recognize the light-footed dancer I really am. They only see this elephantine creature who too often sounds as if she's making pronouncements” (Hoffinan, 1989, 119).

Fourth, when I hear a student speaking in English, I often understand that they are translating from their own language. When I hear a Korean student say, “Please play your flute continuously.” I understand they're translating from Korean. When an Arab student writes a poetic description when we're practicing a TWE essay I understand (or think I do) that he's translating the rhetorical pattern from Arabic. I hear their English and I try and help them translate it into a style of English I believe would help them make themselves understood. My students and I share, in effect, the role of the translator. I hear them translate and guess at what
they mean. They rely on me, to some degree, for information of the effect of the particular word or sentence or intonation in English.

Finally, theories on translation and on teaching depend, to a large degree, on how language is seen. If words are seen as having a core meaning which is fixed, and if language is seen primarily as representational, then translation, as well as teaching, is an essentially neutral task of decoding the meaning of one language and re-coding it into another. This view of language is both pervasive and persuasive in translation and teaching. Alternatively, if we believe that “the meaning of a word is its use within a language game, where meanings can change with almost every use to which a word is put” (Corson. 1997. 176), and we believe language is not representational but (somewhat) indeterminate and imbued with power, then translation and learning a language are not neutral. Translating a text and learning a language become transformational activities. Activities where inequalities and difference play a role.

Shared Role of Translator

Before considering in more detail the focus on the process, the view of language, the way of seeing the student and the role of the teacher, I would like to develop one idea which I think will effect everything else. As I mentioned briefly above, the role and responsibilities of the translator are shared by both the student and the teacher. There are two reasons for this. The first is the fact that most ESL teachers in North America have students who speak many languages and are from many different countries. It is impossible for them to know about all of
the different cultures of their students in detail. Maier describes the translator as having a foot in each culture/language she is translating to and from. ESL teachers in North America can not have our feet in both our culture and language and the cultures and languages of all our students; we must rely on our students to do their share of the translating role. ESL students have, obviously, detailed knowledge of their own cultures and languages, and they usually have quite a bit of knowledge about English and cultures where English is spoken. Given the immense economic and cultural power that English and English speaking countries have, non-English speakers have had to acquaint themselves with the dominant power.

Given this argument, however, one might ask about the role of the Korean teacher teaching English to Korean students, or the Canadian teacher who has lived in Korea for years and speaks the language fluently. Do they still share the role of translator with their students? They have intimate knowledge of both English and Korean. Certainly, they have an advantage over the non-bilingual teacher: however, differences in language and culture are not the only differences teachers and students experience. Spivak recognizes that when she acknowledges that for a translator, speaking the language is not enough. In addition to speaking the language, the translator's space is also class organized (Spivak, 1992, 186). There are also (possible) differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. In addition to all of the differences which we experience, student and teacher are also separated by the inequalities of the role of teacher and student. Ellsworth (1989) has written about the danger of assuming that students will be comfortable talking about such issues in the (non-neutral) classroom. The implication of these differences is a recognition that I, as a teacher, can never have complete
knowledge of my student. There is, as Young (1997) argues, always a remainder. Because of
the asymmetrical relations of power between two people and the fact that our positions are made
up through interaction with others, we can never see things from our students eyes. Even with
students who are similar to us, we must recognize that we can never completely understand a
student and that, therefore, they must share the translating role with us. This recognition of the
inability to "fuse" with another does not mean there is a failure;48 it means that teachers need to
be prepared to share their role with the students and realize the limitations of their own
knowledge. Assuming we can know our students so well is dangerous because it is more likely
we will not be able to recognize when difference does occur.

Exploring some of the implications of seeing our students as co-translators and as ultimately
opaque is important because I believe this recognition will help make us better teachers and also
help our students learn. One of the main implications is the realization that we can not assume
we know what students are like or what they want. Making sweeping assumptions about our
students (such as, they just want to have fun, they wouldn't be interested in that subject, etc..)
leads to seeing them in a very uni-dimensional, diminished way. Of course, this does not imply
that we can not make generalizations about groups of students. We can, and do, become familiar
with groups of students from various cultures. The generalizations we make help us teach. For
example, I know that many Arabic students have a hard time with handwriting because they have

48 Maier says that "one must work to redefine expectations for translation by coming up with approaches
that will show it as the humbling, disconcerting experience translation can be" (Maier. 1995:29).
to train themselves to write "backwards" in English. Also, given the huge difference between
spoken and written Arabic and differences in rhetoric, they will need a lot of help learning about
the "standard" English way of organizing a paragraph. Japanese students (and most other Asian
students) will have problems distinguishing and pronouncing the letters / and r properly.
Obviously, these types of generalizations are extremely useful to us as teachers. However, when
we start extending the statements to more substantive and moral pronouncements like "Asian
students can't think critically" or "that's too serious for our students, they just want to have fun."
or "our students don't understand why women would want to remain single," we go too far. We
assume too much knowledge. We risk conflating our students' English ability with their whole
self.

Recognizing our inability to know exactly who our students are does not imply paralysis on
our part. It does not imply that we can not make certain choices about what to study or what
approach to take. What it does imply is that our choices have implications; they are not neutral.
We have based them on our ideas of our students. We need to recognize that they will not
necessarily agree and that we might or might not hear about their reactions to our assumptions
and choice of material. We have to remember that the questions we ask will determine, to some
extent, what kind of answers we will receive. In addition, students sometimes do not feel
comfortable expressing their complaints. What we can do is try and remain open to comments
students do make.
Another implication of seeing the student as co-translator is, I believe, a deep respect for students and for the decisions they make. This respect comes through in Maier’s argument that taking a risk by using non-standard English (such as using i) may be justified if she is willing “to accept the poet a [sic] a women [sic] whose word is capable of orienting its own (and my) translation” (Maier, 1989, 643). If, as teachers, we recognize the role of students as co-translators, it means we might not understand or agree with the decisions they make with the language. In the case of Ji-Hae, the woman who apologized before her presentation, I was able to understand her decision because she felt comfortable enough to tell me why she had said what she said. This is not always the case.

This idea of respecting students’ decisions does not imply that whatever the students decide to do in the classroom is fine. As Maier, and other translators point out, if a translation is overly strange or “foreign-sounding,” people might not listen. If a student makes a decision to use a strange phrase or a rhetorical device not used in English, the teacher’s job is to ensure the student

---

59 I think Schenke makes this point in a slightly different way when she stresses that teachers have to recognize that “students come to classrooms already knowing, and yet this is rarely the place from which ESL pedagogy begins” (Schenke, 1993, 54).

60 Even theorists like Venuti, who advocated foreignizing translations in order to draw attention to the difference in them, also sees the value of using fluent translations sometimes. Venuti (1995) writes about how Paul Blackburn translated Julio Cortázar’s work through a combination of maintaining some difference (by using many Spanish words in the text) and writing a fluent translation. He says that “Blackburn’s translations smuggled Cortázar’s fiction into Anglo-American culture under the fluent discourse that continues to dominate English-language translation” (Venuti, 1995, 267). The acceptance of Latin American fiction in English opened up a larger space for experimentation (for authors such as, Donald Bartheleme, Angela Carter, etc.,) (Venuti, 1995, 266).
knows the likely interpretation of her decision. Ji-Hae needs to know that native English speakers might be quicker to dismiss her if she starts her presentation with an apology. Another student might need to know, for example, that writing a sentence like "I wish I could be a teacher like you" will come across as childlike in English. Students need to have access to "standard language," but they also need critical knowledge of that "standard" language. Delpit explains that students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life...and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent (Delpit, 1988, 296).

If a student is aware of the impact a word or way of speaking will likely have, and they still choose to use it, the teacher has to respect that decision. There are limits to this respect which I will discuss later.

Process

I will now consider the emphasis that translation theory places on the process of translation. This focus is helpful, as I mentioned above, for the simple reason that most teachers tend to get caught up in the product rather than the process, so anything that gives us time to sit back and think about the process is valuable. However, the theorists I examined move beyond a simple call to consider process for the sake of process. They call for the translator to write about the actual experience of translating because it will make translation visible, expose inequalities and

---

Of course, as Delpit points out, "pretending that gatekeeping points don’t exist is to ensure that many students will not pass through them" (Delpit, 1988, 292).
differences between cultures/languages, demonstrate the creative role of the translator, and be a valuable space in which to explore cultural differences and spaces between languages. Maier (1989, 1995), Levine (1992), and Chamberlain (1992), for example, stress the need not to shy away from sexist texts, but to engage with them, challenge them and write about the experience of translating them. Venuti urges the symptomatic reading of translations to find the inconsistencies, the gaps, the evidence of mediation. Teaching a second language could also be a place to expose inequalities and differences.

How should ESL teachers expose or explore these inequalities and differences? Researching and writing articles in scholarly journals about how teaching can reinforce or challenge inequality is one important way. Another important way is to be more open in the classroom. Like most translators, teachers tend to be silent about their choices and decisions in the classroom. probably largely because the decisions are perceived to be apolitical, neutral decisions made by professionals who know how people learn a language. If we reject the idea of neutrality, teachers and students have to realize that there is no form of teaching that is apolitical. This is similar to the view in translation theory which recognizes that every translation is a kind of transformation. As Schenke points out.

like all curriculum decisions, providing a direction involves a moral and political standpoint as to what knowledges are to be valued in terms of learning and teaching. It is not as though there is a ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ (or neutral) way of doing curriculum or teaching (Schenke, 1996, 5).

As well as recognizing the non-neutral or political nature of teaching, this model encourages teachers to verbalize their choices and rationales to their students. Just as the act of translating
should become visible, so too should the act of teaching. This is particularly salient if the teacher remembers she is sharing her role as translator with the student. Sharing reasons and rationales with students is sometimes frightening because it involves more thinking, planning and leaving oneself vulnerable. It might mean admitting that we do not know the absolutely best way of learning a language. It might mean accepting and acknowledging that we are not working with a particular set of principles from a scientific method, but that we are influenced not only by our professional training and reading, but also by our personal experiences as teachers and learners, and by our instinct. Being able to explain our choices helps us as teachers think through what we are doing in a thorough manner. It also gives our students more knowledge about us and our ideas about education and second language learning. Being open does not guarantee that we, as teachers, will always be able to identify a particular decision; certain decisions we make are not conscious. Being explicit will also not guarantee that the students will agree with the teacher or that they won’t ever feel manipulated; however, to the degree that the teacher tries to share the reasons for her choices, the possibility of a non-coercive space is created.

One other idea that ESL might borrow from translation theory is the notion that translators, working from a space “in-between” might have interesting things to learn about differences, inequalities, and spaces between cultures and languages. If ESL teachers are seen as (co) translators who work with their students, at least to some degree, in the space in-between cultures and languages, they might have something to teach other people working in applied linguistics.

---

62 See Pennycook (1989). He deconstructs the notion that “methods” really exist.
Language

Mainstream ESL, as I argued in my first chapter, sees language as neutral and sees language learning as beneficial. However, in the translation theory explored in the last chapter, language is not seen as transparent and neutral, but as political, involving inequalities, and connected to identity. Words are not easily exchangeable and do not have a core unitary meaning surrounded by add-on connotational meanings. They have many primary meanings and are not neutral. Words are over-determined and are "always the site of a range of semantic possibilities" (A. Benjamin, 1989, 35). In addition to rejecting the notion of language as a kind of label, these theorists stress that "standard" language is not neutral. Both Venuti and Spivak, for example, argued that the overriding style of current English language translation to translate the piece into fluent, standard English hides differences from the reader. However, the concern for marking difference and inequality is also balanced by a concern for acceptability. Maier addresses this point when she talks about the danger of writing a poem that no one will read.

If we recognize that standard language is not neutral and we believe that part of the job of an ESL teacher is to try and uncover differences and inequalities, then we must talk about these differences in our ESL class. It is important for us, as teachers, not only to help our students achieve some control over standard language, but also to give students information on the powers
that shape the language and help them develop their own critical abilities. For a concrete example of giving students information about language think of the example, cited in the first chapter, of the TOEFL book which teaches students to use *he* when they do not know the gender of the person speaking or acting. By not addressing the controversy around this issue, we are both presenting language as if it never changes, and supporting a sexist viewpoint in our language. In fact, this particular piece of “standard” English has become non-standard and almost archaic. Students should know that this issue has been talked about for quite some time and that choosing among *he, s/he, he or she, they* or simply using *she* can make quite an impact on the reader. In addition to talking about how English deals with this issue, the discussion could be extended to how the students’ languages deal with this problem, or even if it is seen as a problem. The discussion could be further extended to talk about efforts to make other parts of the language less sexist, e.g., replacing words like *chairman* with *chairperson* or *chair*, etc.

Equally important, when students come across overtly or covertly racist words or phrases like *gook, black magic* and *to be gypped*, it is crucial to point out where these words come from and what racist slurs they carry, again both to combat the racism in the language (and culture) and to explore the power that language has.

Similarly, standard rhetorical patterns and conventions surrounding language in, for example, a presentation, need to be addressed in a critical way. If they are presented in a non-critical way.

---

61 In the OISE/UT handbook on guidelines for theses and orals, it states that students must use non-sexist language.
there is a danger that they will be presented as if that particular way is the way to do things, not just the English/middle class/white, etc. way of doing things. If the teacher acknowledges that this particular way of doing a presentation is the way it is done in middle class, white English culture, for example, it could leave more room for students to compare it to their ways of doing a presentation. It could lead to some exploration of some of the differences between languages and cultures and how students will negotiate these differences. Think again of Ji-Hae's apology before her presentation. Being told that she had done the wrong thing and that she should never apologize before a presentation is not good enough. Yes, that's the standard way to do presentations in English. However, it is important to critique that notion of standard. It is important to have some acknowledgment of how people view presentations and apologies differently. The exploration of cultural norms around presenting, apologizing and considering the view of self which prevails in each culture could lead to a better understanding for both student and teacher. There could be some exploration on how she could express her (Korean) sense of self while not alienating her audience. She could have, for example, introduced herself in both English and Korean and apologized in Korean. Alternatively, she might have introduced herself and her presentation with an apology and an explanation of the apology. She also could have decided to drop the apology completely or to use it without explanation. Her knowledge of ways that standard language is produced give her more autonomy to make decisions about how to present herself.

When I worked with Elizabeth, the woman who dropped out of her low intermediate ESL class. I attempted to strike a balance between working on a standard style of writing while
acknowledging its limitations. Although Elizabeth had an extensive (and esoteric) vocabulary, her written English was at quite a low level. Reading her prose was more like reading poetry; there seemed to be many interesting ideas, but it was very difficult to make much sense of it. When she was preparing to take an English test to be admitted to Sheridan college, we worked on a basic five paragraph essay. As we worked on this organizational pattern, I stressed that this was one of the basic patterns which was used as a jumping off point, not as an end. We talked about the differences between good writing in English and in Chinese. Rather than hearing she was a poor writer, she learned about a basic English pattern of organization. She felt free to criticize and expressed her surprise that English writing, at least at this level, was so unsubtle. She learned how to write a basic pattern. Maier reminds us of the importance of considering a balance when she tells us that "to refuse to entertain the complexities of translation, either by subsuming the poet in the translator's voice (arrogance or excess aggression) or by giving her too strong a voice of her own (excess compassion) is to render her [the original author] speechless and invisible in the new language" (Maier, 1989, 631). Elizabeth was had a voice and was able to express her own ideas.

Language and Identity

Another idea that I explored in the previous chapter is the idea that language is connected with identity and that the act of translating does not only produce a text with a different identity, but also can alter the identity of the original. The main idea explored in the second chapter concerning identity is that a translation transforms a text. Recall the example about Freud where
Bettleheim argues that in English, Freud’s ideas seem medicalized and scientificized, whereas Bettleheim reads a more humanistic, spiritualist Freud in German. Similarly, when Graves translated Suetonius’s *The Twelve Caesars*, the text that emerges is quite different from the original. The intention of the piece has completely changed. In traditional translation theory, this has been seen only negatively, as the original text losing a vital component. The notion that the translation can develop the original is liberating for the translator and means that the original text is still vital because it is being read, discussed and interpreted. The best example of this is probably Joyce’s translation of *Finnegan’s Wake*, where the original text itself becomes a work in progress and the translation takes the identity of the original and develops and changes it.

Before I go on to talking about the identity of students, I need to clarify the analogy I am making between the identity of a text and the identity of a person. The two are not always the same kind of thing. In terms of the identity of a text, one could talk about the identity of the author that comes through that text, like the medicalized Freud, or one could talk about the overall meaning of the text. In terms of the identity of a person, one could also talk about different kinds of identities: we identify ourselves by our profession, our nationality, our “personality,” etc. There are three points of similarity that I want to focus on here for the sake of my argument. First, language is connected with identity. When texts are translated, they are transformed. When people learn new languages, they learn new ways of being and thinking. Second, the

---

*Niranjana (1992) and Maier (1989 & 1995) do warn us that we need to be careful when translating that we don’t obliterate the differences in the original text.*
identity of both the text and person already contains difference in the original. Their "subject positions" are not fixed and unitary. Third, they can both be "read" in different ways. There is not only one translation possible.

Language, Identity and Students

In ESL teaching, this implies that learning a language can be connected to creating an identity and that an "English" identity can reflect the students' original identity, can alter their original identity, or at least provide different ways of thinking about it. As they learn English, it seems clear that our students are in a process of constructing (with our help) their identity in English. The Guatemalan Mayans rejected the change in identity that learning English seemed to entail. Another clear example of this comes from Hoffman. Learning English for Hoffman was a process of developing a different identity. She describes some of the process of learning

My mother says I'm becoming "English". This hurts me, because I know she means I'm becoming colder....I'm learning to be less demonstrative. I learn this from a teacher who, after contemplating the gesticulations with which I help myself describe the digestive system of a frog, tells me to "sit on my hands and then try talking....I learn my new reserve from people who take a step back when we talk, because I'm standing too close. (Hoffman, 1989, 146)

Learning a second (or third, or fourth) language can be very frustrating. In the new language, you make mistakes, express your ideas in a simplified way, etc. You feel as if you have to give up your identity as a successful, competent adult and revert back to childhood. Not only do you

---

65 This is particularly the case for immigrants and refugees who give up not only their language ability, but also their family, friends, and often their professional training.
have to revert back to childhood. You also have to revert back to a childhood of another culture. You're expected to start obeying customs which are not your own. This feeling of frustration can be exacerbated by infantalizing activities and the low expectations ESL students often have to cope with. Recall the example of Byung Kuk who, although frustrated by the silly topics he had to discuss, resigned himself to accepting them because, after all, he was like a child in English.

If learning a language is connected to translating identity, then what we're asking students to do in the classroom has a real impact. By asking them to do simple, uncritical, infantalizing tasks, we risk not recognizing the importance of what they are doing. Carolina, a Mexican student, felt frustrated in class by the exercises she was asked to do. She mentioned one exercise where students were supposed to talk about the qualities they wanted in a husband or wife. As a woman who was exploring the possibilities of being bisexual or a lesbian at the time, she felt marginalized in class.

Students will construct their identities in different ways. They might choose (sometimes unconsciously) to foreignize their English, just as translators' foreignize their translations in order to alert the listener to the fact that they are not (in this case) a Canadian. Ali, an Iranian student in a class at OISE, was very uncomfortable addressing the professors by their first names. In the end, he and the professors reached an agreement. The professors were uncomfortable being called “Doctor so-and-so,” but agreed that he could call them Professor so-and-so. When I was learning Japanese, I made a similar decision. I could not bring myself to use the term
suimasen (meaning “I’m sorry/thank you”) when I wanted to expressing thanks. From my observation, the Japanese use the word suimasen in two very different circumstances: when they are excusing themselves or apologizing, and when they are saying thank you. There are additional words that people use when thanking which vary according to formality: arigato, arigato gozaimasu. However, it is very common for people to use both suimasen and arigato at the same time. They are thanking someone and apologizing for the time the other person spent on them. I used more neutral (to me) arigato or arigato gozaimasu all the time. I choose not to use suimasen because I felt uncomfortable apologizing instead of thanking. It didn’t fit my (albeit rudimentary) identity in Japanese.

Alternatively, students may find that adopting “English” ways of speaking gives them a vantage point from which to view their own cultures. For example, Keiko, a female Japanese student, used her experience learning English to reflect critically on both Japanese and Canadian culture. She wrote an article for the school paper about the experience of visiting a seniors home in Toronto. The students were paired up with a resident and spent an afternoon talking. One of the strangest things for her was using the resident’s first name. She explained that in Japanese, a younger person would always use a honourific term when speaking to a person that much older than she. Although she said she would never feel comfortable doing that in Japanese, it led her to think about both the more intimate talk she felt she was able to have with the resident and her own feelings about older people. At the same time, she commented on the respect the Japanese show to the aged that she felt was severely lacking in Canada. Sung Hee, a female Korean student who started using the word womyn in her writing, took some of what she learned in
English to look at Korean language and identity. She told me about how her awareness of sexist language in English gave her a place to reconsider some of the sexist implications of Korean vocabulary. My own experience learning about the much more flexible and context dependent language that exists in Japanese helped me to reflect on the absurdity of the English concept of self which is never changing, always unique, and individual.

Unlike mainstream ESL pedagogy which seems to see ESL students as uninterested in any serious substantive topics, unwilling to demonstrate any sustained interest, and interested mainly in having fun, this model acknowledges that learning a new language could involve a shift in identity. There are two other ideas about students I would like to explore. The first is one I have explored in the first part of the essay: our students will remain somewhat opaque to us. One of the most important ideas explored in the last chapter was a realization, on the part of the translator, that it is never possible to completely "cover" or know the text. As Maier points out, there is always a remainder. Given the recognition of difference and instability in the original text, as well as the difficulty the translator from another culture, time, and place has in understanding, there is a recognition that the text will always yield other interpretations.

In terms of teaching English as a Second Language, the teacher must recognize that she can never know her students completely. that there will always be a remainder, that they can tell their

---

The pronoun "I" can be expressed in three different ways for women and five for men. They vary in degree of formality and politeness. In addition, instead of using a pronoun, you can use your role in the family (Daughter am/is here) or in the workplace (Teacher want/s you to be quiet). Often times, pronouns are simply dropped. See Kondo (1990) for further exploration of this idea.
history a different way, and that we need to leave room in our reading of people to allow them to change it. As I argued with the help of Young (1997), no-one can ever know another completely, or see the world from another’s point of view. When you add the additional differences and inequalities of cultural differences and (sometimes) radically different language abilities, the problem is compounded. Maier (1989), Venuti (1992 & 1995) and others recognize the dangers of assuming you can fuse with another person. In attempting to fuse with another person or become like the author, the translator must look for similarities. The danger is in searching for these similarities. We risk closing off difference. Or we end up appropriating the pain of others or imposing our values on the foreign or other person or text. Both Young (1997) and Boyd (1996) emphasize that the great danger in seeking similarity or universal values is that the person with the dominant viewpoint will end up imposing their values on a situation thinking that they are imposing universal values. Schenke expresses the idea of rejecting fusion while still listening and supporting:

I cannot, and choose not, to stand in your place, perhaps not even beside you. What I can learn is that your struggle is being made. And how it is done. And what it supports. And how what it supports, is similar, complicitous, yet different from my own. I can learn from the pedagogy of your talking back as you can learn from mine (Schenke, 1991. 11).

---

67 Dingwaney and Maier (1995) give an example from a letter from one of their students living in a middle class suburb who seemed to not recognize difference. “I live down the street from what I consider to be the prettiest park....It includes a big rose garden with 300 types of roses. There is a community garden where neighbors plant corn or beans or whatever side by side. Almost like Rigoberta Menchú’s community”(Dingwaney & Maier, 1995, 316). They point out that Menchú’s fight is to encourage us to identify with her agenda, but not imagine that we are her.

68 Recall the work done by Niranjana (1992) who argued that the English translators of a vacuna read the poem as already incorporating Christian ideas of God when, in fact, it did not.
If we accept that we only ever have partial knowledge of our students, we must recognize that all assumptions we make about our students have to be provisionary. Assuming all students "just wanna have fun" and are not interested in any topics of substance is dangerous. Assuming all Asian students can not understand what it is like to want to remain a single woman is dangerous. Assuming our ESL students do not have the ability to think critically is dangerous. Assuming everyone in our class likes English and North American culture is dangerous. Assuming our students need English to free themselves is also dangerous. Obviously, we do go into the classroom with certain assumptions: it is not possible to enter a class (or translate a text) in a neutral way. However, what I am arguing here is that we need to be as open as possible. As ESL teachers we need to be even more vigilant because our students do not always have the language they need to express their ideas. If they do say something, they may come across as rude or blunt because they do not know how to express their ideas in the typical middle-class way of asking. In addition, given the power the teacher has in the classroom and as a speaker of English, she has to realize that her students might not feel comfortable revealing too much to her. As Ellsworth says about her own experience, "acting as if our classroom were a safe place in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening did not make it so" (Ellsworth, 1989, 315).

"I am reminded of a personal example. I became frustrated with a friend of mine (who spoke little English at the time) because almost every time I invited him to do something, he responded, simply, with "No." I told him I felt hurt. He said that he had been very busy, and it dawned on me that the problem was one of language. I explained that in English, if invited to do something, the invitee should always give appreciation for the invitation, an excuse, and show some interest in doing something at a more convenient time. I taught him a few stock phrases which he incorporated. From that time on, our friendship became much more comfortable."
The second idea that I want to explore may seem contradictory because I will argue that although the student must be respected as a co-translator, teachers need to engage with and question students if they are acting in a discriminatory fashion. The theorists I explored in the last chapter emphasized the need to make translation visible and to talk about translation by exploring the process in order to highlight the differences and inequalities between cultures. They argued that texts shouldn’t be rejected because of offensive characteristics, but neither should the feminist/anti-racist translator be silenced. The translator is aware of the differences and inequalities between different cultures and languages and wants to highlight them. Being aware of differences includes more than simply being aware of the differences between whole cultures and languages. It is also an awareness of differences within cultures. Maier writes about the multiple subjectivities and oppressions Latinas have to deal with. They include: “as women, as mestizas or Latin American, as Latinas, and then again as members of the individual ethnic groups within that term” (Maier, 1989, 626). The translator, then, should also be aware of other inequities, i.e., gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. Both Levine and Maier talk about the problem of translating misogynistic texts. Maier talks about how she manages both to give voice to various antagonistic work and to engage with them and question them:

The translator’s quest is not to silence but to give voice, to make available texts that raise difficult questions and open perspectives. It is essential that as translators women get under the skin of both antagonistic and sympathetic works. They must become independent. “resisting” interpreters who do not only let antagonistic works speak…but also speak with them and place them in a larger context by discussing them and the process of translation (Maier in Chamberlain, 1992, 71).

Just as translators are aware of differences and inequities, so too ESL teachers are aware of differences and inequalities. We know that some people will judge our students solely by the
way they speak. We deal with this in a number of ways: we ourselves struggle to remember that their English does not equal their person. We talk with them about the perception that other people might have of them. We try and give them tools both to improve their English ability and strategies to communicate. We communicate with other people about the unfairness of being judged by language ability. We realize that our students, particularly those who are refugees and immigrants, have to learn to function in a different world.\textsuperscript{70} Given this acknowledgment and rejection of this form of discrimination, we, as ESL teachers, also need to be aware of other kinds of discrimination. ESL students should not be silenced: the teacher's quest is not to silence but to help students develop their voice. However, developing a voice does not mean teachers simply supply grammatical correction; teachers too can be "independent and 'resisting' interpreters" (Maier in Chamberlain, 1992, 71). Just as students need to know histories of words and racist/sexist meanings of common words, so too do oppressive statements need to be addressed. If the teacher is open and attempting to become aware of those differences herself, she must also be prepared to address comments made by her students.\textsuperscript{71} Schenke insists the Mexican student who, in the same moment of speaking, proudly addresses his ancestry of Indian resistance to Spanish colonization \textit{and} his resentment of black people's 'laziness', necessitates a pedagogical response willing to engage precisely in the site of conflict and contradiction rather than glossing it over (Schenke, 1991, 123)

\textsuperscript{70} As Hoffman says when she realizes that to her classmates, Poland will never be the center of the universe, "it is I who will have to learn to live with a double vision....I have been dislocated from my own center of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my centre" (Hoffman, 1989, 132).

\textsuperscript{71} There is little support for this in Language schools at the moment. Also ESL teachers' training does not address these issues.
Given the ideas developed in the last section, it is obvious that the role of the teacher is far more than merely a neutral language technician. One of the first things I have argued is that the teacher and the student share the translator’s role. Together, they’re in-between cultures. This means that the student has equal responsibility and that the teachers need to recognize that responsibility. It also means that students will make choices that we won’t necessarily understand or agree with. Teachers do have a responsibility, though, to intervene when oppressive statements are made. Another idea I have argued for is that teachers need to be open about their pedagogical decisions. Their decisions are not neutral, but are based on our assumptions about learning a language and about our students. Finally, I would like to argue that teachers need to consider the effect of their social location on their students and their pedagogical decisions.

An important point that translation theorists try to make is that there is no essential core or platonic idea of a text hovering somewhere above or behind the text. The original message is not something independent of the form or language and culture it is written in. The language and the content are together. The words and text contain many readings. This idea can be linked with the idea that there is no core self devoid of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. As Boyd argues, “both our experience of the social world and our interactions within it are already ‘aligned’ for us insofar as we are unavoidably members of groups (in Young’s sense). And by this, we are differentially enabled/constraining or disenabled/constrained in relation to
each other” (Boyd, 1997, 20). If our interactions are already aligned because of our membership in groups, we must consider how our membership might affect our decisions and how our students see us.

Dingwaney and Maier (1995) use the awareness that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* had been mediated, in this case by both an ethnographer and a translator, to get the students to realize that those mediating had read and interpreted the text as people influenced by their belonging to particular groups and categories. Through thinking about and questioning the decisions both Burgos-Debray and Wright made, they hoped that the students would be able to read the text and recognize themselves as a subjects also made up of various conflicting and differing group memberships which influences their reading. Neither Dingwaney and Maier nor the other theorists are suggesting that it is simple to trace the influences of social location, nor that belonging to a particular group will necessitate certain re-actions. Maier and Dingwaney acknowledge that when thinking about Burgos-Debray’s involvement: they continually doubled back on their assumptions and thought about different ways to interpret her involvement.

Similarly, I do not want to propose the adoption of some kind of rigid identity politics for ESL teachers. Being a woman, for example, does not cause me to write in a certain way. Nor do I want to imply that people who belong to the category *woman* or *working class* have some sort of privileged access to the truth and people who don’t belong in this category can not speak.

---

72 For one thing, the concept of a ‘group’ is fuzzy and, in some cases, very large. When the category of “woman” is shared by genetically and in some cases biologically male people who identify as transgendered women, it is a large and uncertain category.
However, being a woman is part of who I am. Being a white middle class able bodied heterosexual English speaking woman will influence how I teach and will influence how my students see me.

When talking about social location, the usual categories include: gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableness. As Boyd says, “these group categories do shape my social experience, and even more so, that of others...any attempt to understand my social relation must include these markers of difference because they are so systemically determinant of both our identities and our life prospects as persons” (Boyd, 1997, 16). In addition to thinking about all of these areas, an important addition for the second language teacher is to consider the language being taught. Although this is not normally one of the categories used when talking about social location, in this case I believe it is important. I, as an ESL teacher, need to recognize the power that I have as a native speaker, not just of the language my students want to learn, but of English, the International language, the language people often feel they need or are forced to learn. Both mainstream second language pedagogy and traditional translation theory operate as if the particular language being discussed is not important. However, the theorists I have been exploring stress that the languages and the inequalities of the languages are important. As Spivak says, “the status of a language in the world is what one must consider when teasing out

73 See Boyd (1997) for a deeper exploration of social location.

74 Another distinction that could be explored is the distinction between native speaker of English and non-native speaker of English and the assumption that a native speaker is preferable. Indeed, the whole notion that people can speak with authority of what or who a “native speaker” actually is seems problematic.
the politics of translation” (Spivak, 1992, 189). As is clear from the examples cited in the first chapter, the language being learned can make quite a difference to the learner. The Guatemalan Mayans left their ESL class choosing instead to focus their energy on learning Quiche rather than English. Although ESL teachers tend to act as if students have chosen to learn English, we need to recognize that the notion of “choice” operating here is not quite the open, free version of choice that we assume. Many students feel they have little choice; they have to study English (for university, jobs, because of immigration, etc.).

As someone in a mainly privileged position, I have to recognize that I benefit from my position, that I might be reluctant to give those privileges up and that my position might be less visible to myself. If I am not aware of my location, I might end up treating my students like they are in the same position I am. An example might help illustrate my point. In the past, I have worked with immigrants taking free ESL classes sponsored by the Federal government. Along with a skills based curriculum, the students had two classes a week on job skills. I was in charge of that part of the course. After doing some research and drawing on my experience and friends’ experience looking for work, I decided to design the course to focus mainly on accessing the hidden job market rather than focusing only on resumes and newspaper ads. Many of my students had come from countries where they had been assigned jobs and hadn’t had the experience of searching for them. I tried to focus on building contacts, making cold calls, developing persistence, etc. The class was moderately successful, but I became frustrated with the attitude of some of my students. A few of my students had complained that they had experienced racism when looking for work, that they were told they needed Canadian experience.
that their credentials were worthless, etc. Some of them felt they had been misled by consulate in their countries and wouldn't have immigrated if they had known how difficult it was to find good work in Canada. My reaction at the time was a mixture of acceptance, frustration and anger. I thought that I had acknowledged the difficulty that they would face, but I wanted to move on and focus on what they could do.

I began to realize, near the end of my time there, that I had not sufficiently considered how my social location as white, native-English speaking, middle-class, educated, young woman influenced my assumptions and the way I responded to the class or how my social location would influence how my students perceived and received my actions. Nothing in my training or reading in traditional ESL theory addressed this kind of issue. If I had considered how my social location might be interpreted by my students, what would I have done differently in the classroom? I think I might have done a number of things. I should have included more discussions led by students on the obstacles immigrants face. Simply assuming my students would be like me was not helpful. I could have brought in one or two guest speakers who were themselves immigrants and who could have talked about the difficulties in working in Canada as immigrants, as well as the choices they made. I might have tried to incorporate a more critical approach to all of the workshops, always leaving time for some discussion about who tends to benefit because of this situation, or how this makes it difficult for immigrants who are often in a catch-22- no Canadian experience, therefore no job, therefore no Canadian experience. I still would have included many of the classes and workshops on certain skills that I had originally planned. In a number of the workshops, we talked about two goals: a short term goal and a long
term goal. We talked about getting a survival job, and we talked about ways of choosing a survival job which might eventually lead to their choice of a long term job. Only focusing on the negative is not helpful. Students need access to the kind of job search skills that most (middle-class) Canadians have if they are to compete. Delpit reminds us that not teaching students skills they need to succeed is unfair to students (Delpit, 1988, 292).

Another example that I mentioned in the first chapter concerned accusations of racism towards Asian students and preferential treatment to the European students. The solution to this problem seemed only to avoid controversial issues, to “be careful” and perhaps to leave ourselves outside of the classroom. When we accept that we can’t leave our group identities behind because they have already formed our identities, we realize how ridiculous the idea of leaving ourselves outside actually is. Boyd argues not only that it is impossible, but that it does harm. He says, “failing to locate myself in the sense of group embeddedness warps the nature of my performative moral engagement with others that is necessary for educational discourse” (Boyd, 1997. 24). Given that the issue raised merited only 15 minutes of discussion in a staff meeting, there was not really any other solution possible. Obviously a simple direction like, “consider how your social location might have caused our Asian students to complain” would also not have been helpful. Teachers would have felt like they were being accused of racism and would have reacted negatively. Since even the idea of seriously thinking about ethnocentrism and cultural differences (in a real, deep way, not in the superficial, tell us what kind of food you eat way) is so foreign to many people, including ESL teachers, simply bringing the idea up in a 15 minute discussion would be useless. Dealing with issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, conflict and
controversy is extremely difficult. All of these issues do occur in a second language classroom. Starting to deal with these issues would mean a commitment of time where teachers could talk about their experiences in the classroom, hear from others about issues of discrimination, and receive encouragement. Seriously addressing these issues would also imply that TESL courses, whether they be certificate or diploma, pre-service or not, need to incorporate these ideas in their curricula.

I think it is clear by these examples that accepting that it is important to consider social location when teaching does not lead to a strict adherence to a particular code of behaviour. What it does imply is that teachers need to be aware of their location and consider how it might affect their class. There are certain activities that require more thinking about social location on the teacher’s part. When I’m trying to explain the difference between the simple past and the present perfect, for example, I will not be thinking about my social location. If I’m teaching a course on how to teach ESL, I must consider my social location because it affects how I teach and my position may not be shared. In addition to the importance of thinking about one’s social position, it is also clear from the above examples that teachers need time to consider how conflict and controversy “fit” into the program and how they can be handled constructively in the classroom.

The final point that translation theory makes is that the job of the translator is a creative, demanding, humbling job. The translation theorists rejected the hierarchical positioning of author as supreme, and translator as humble slave/servant. They recognize that translating
involves knowledge, cultural sensitivity, awareness of social location, difficult decisions, a political stance, and creativity. ESL teachers need to learn from translation theory and embrace their role as teachers. As shown above, they are not simply technicians imparting value free information. They are educators who, just like translators, must be aware of the nature of their work. It is a political activity. It does involve cultural sensitivity, difficult decisions, awareness of inequalities and difference. And it does involve creativity.
Conclusion
In this thesis I have used ideas from the fields of translation theory and moral philosophy to argue for a way of seeing ESL teaching that recognizes that it is not a neutral activity. Language itself is not neutral but is a contested place where meaning is constructed. Second language teachers should not simply help their students learn the standard language, but should also explore the power of language. Teachers share their role as “translator” with their students, and hence, must respect the choices their students make. Teachers also need to recognize that they can not leave their social location outside of the classroom. The role of teacher expands from that of technician to that of educator in a wider sense. I think it is clear from my suggestions in the third chapter that this particular way of thinking about ESL teaching enables the asking of many questions. It allows space for questions about social location, the power of English, how our teaching methods affect our students, etc.

In the third chapter, I explored how translation theory would “translate” into ESL teaching. I looked at some specific examples from my classroom to help me figure out the kinds of changes that might come about from the guidance of this pedagogy. I did come up with some concrete ideas of what to do in the classroom. However, the overall pedagogy does not provide a kind of ABC lesson plan which all teachers can follow and arrive at the answer. It is not a deskilling kind of theory where teachers need only learn a few ideas, follow the textbooks and, presto, a better English class. This way of looking at ESL teaching provides more opportunity for questions than for answers. I believe this is a strength. This is the kind of theory that promotes thinking and discussion. As Maier says when talking about translation, “for if translation is defined not as a product but as the practice for which I have been arguing, its ‘end’ is the
prompting of rather than the resolution of an inquiry" (Maier, 1995, 31).

The next step for teachers to take is to discuss how, given this framework, other aspects of our teaching will be transformed. I have given some examples, but we need to develop them and consider more. Given this framework, for example, does it matter if classes are primarily skill based or should they be content based? One criticism of mainstream ESL is the total lack of concern about content. This tends to result in either an endless stream of "common interest" and almost mindless topics such as movies, families, comparing cultural traditions, etc., or very controversial topics such as abortion, capital punishment, etc., which receive only very cursory treatment. Perhaps a subject-based course (which draws on particular skills when relevant), especially for students at the intermediate and higher levels, would be more appropriate.

Two of the biggest questions that I have brought up in this thesis, but have not explored are finding a role for controversy within a classroom setting and dealing effectively with offensive (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.) comments from students. How do I structure or contain the controversy to encourage growth in ideas and in English? How do I best help students to develop their own thoughts and ideas? How do I avoid imposing my point of view? How do I respond to the man who makes a homophobic comment in class? How do I interact with that student in a more productive way than simply telling him that his comment is offensive and he should not use that language in the classroom? How do I avoid simply glossing it over?
When considering issues like the above, it becomes obvious how important it is to have the support of colleagues as well as institutional support. It is very difficult to make these kinds of changes individually because, sometimes, the institutional structures teachers work within do not support, but even actively discourage, these kinds of changes. When working in a place where teachers are never given time to talk about pedagogical issues, for example, it is difficult to institute any changes. When trying to change the basic ideas that support one’s teaching, it is often very useful to talk with colleagues and find out what they have been doing in their classrooms and how they are thinking about a particular issue. In addition to theoretical discussions, workshops where teachers can role-play dealing with offensive statements would be helpful. Having the support of colleagues and the administration is also useful when considering the kinds of textbooks and materials being purchased.

At the end of his book, *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Venuti (1995) writes a “call to action.” In this section, he calls for translators to change the way they work and the way their work is perceived. He encourages them to resist the transparent style of translating, to write sophisticated prefaces, essays and presentations on the issues around translation, to fight for a translating contract that gives them copyright of the translation, etc. He also calls for a change in the way the general public thinks of and reads translation. At the risk of sounding too idealistic, I think ESL teachers need to do the same kind of thing. We need to make these suggestions in our workplaces, in journals, and at conferences. We need to think about our teaching and what we can do to improve it.
Reference List


