



# ESL GO! Newsletter

SLS/ESL Program, Department of English, Purdue University

Issue 3

## Happy 2013!

Welcome back everyone! We hope that your spring semester is off to a great start! We wish a happy and productive new year to everyone!

## Past events: Christmas party

In December 2012, professors Margie Berns and Tony Silva hosted a Christmas party in their home. It was an occasion for people in the SLS/ESL program and other programs to get together after a long year of busy work. It was a good way to start winter break and relax.



*ESLers at the Christmas Party!*

## Past events: ESL speaker series

Lixia Cheng presented on the influence of pragmatic features of speaking on Chinese English learners' response latency, and potential relationship between English proficiency, context, and

pragmatic task features. The title of her presentation was *Investigating Task Difficulty in ESL/EFL Speaking Assessment: The Effect of Pragmatic Task Features on Response Latency*.



## Interview with professor Dwight Atkinson



Professor Dwight Atkinson

An interview was conducted with professor Dwight Atkinson, who is currently doing research in India. In this exchange, he mainly describes his project and offers the tip of this month for success in graduate school. The tip has to do with doing research.

Kamal: I would like to thank you on behalf of our audience for taking the time out of your busy schedule to do this interview. You are currently doing research in India. How is your stay in India going?

Dwight: Very well thanks. It's warm and sunny here, if a bit humid. I'm living in the middle of a jungle—the campus where I'm doing my research is surrounded by a small jungle. We have deer, wild pigs, peacocks, snakes, porcupines, scorpions, mosquitoes, and stray dogs to keep us company. The pace of life is also much slower. It's a very different world than West Lafayette!

K: Can you give our audience an overview of your project?

D: I'm interested in the role of Eng-

lish and higher education in the lives of first-generation college students in India. The site where I'm doing my research is an old and prestigious English-medium college, founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by British missionaries. It's known as a place where people speak "good English." The students I'm studying—well, most of them are now *former* students—are from social groups that in the past had zero access to higher education, and zero opportunity to learn English. So I'm interested in what happens after these students, due to India's current and very strong affirmative action policies, get into a college like this one—what they learn and don't learn, and how that impacts their lives after graduation.

K: Can you tell us a little bit about the background of the project and how you became interested in your research in India?

D: Three years after I finished graduate school, an Indian classmate and I got a grant to do a research project in a different part of India. After five weeks of working on the project together, we found that our interests were different, so we went our separate ways. I thought about giving up, but eventually ended up at my present research site, and started doing this project. The research design (if that's even the right term in this case) has been very bottom-up: My participants actually found me rather than I found them!

K: At what stage are you in your research currently and what does the future look like for the project?

D: I've now been working on this project for 14 years, and my plan is to wrap it up. I didn't do so earlier because I didn't feel I had an adequate grasp of the situation I was researching. But now I think I do. I will use my sabbatical to write a book on the

project, but I've got a long way to go!

*"Heed the advice of Samuel Johnson: 'That which is written [and I would add "researched"] without effort, is generally read without pleasure.'"*

K: Can you give our audience who are interested in

research a piece of advice on doing research?

D: Here's not one piece of advice, but four: Stick with it. Take the time to understand what you're studying. But do other projects at the same time, so you'll be able to publish, if that's important for your career. And heed the advice of Samuel Johnson: "That which is written [and I would add "researched"] without effort, is generally read without pleasure."

K: On that important note, I would like to thank you very much for your valuable time. We look forward to seeing you again at Purdue.

## Professor Margie Berns: ¡ Viva México!

For nearly two weeks last October, I was in sunny Mexico as a plenary speaker at the MEXTESOL annual conference and as an English Language Specialist for the US Department of State. My task was to give a series of lectures and presentations on world Englishes and English language teaching, specifically, the communicative teaching of English in Mexico, Mexican ways of using English, and the pedagogical implications of the development of a Mexican English.

My schedule was pretty packed. The first five days I was on the Pacific coast in Puerto Vallarta, a beautiful resort city on the Bay of Banderas. There I made two presentations at the 39th Annual Convention of MEXTESOL and gave a lecture to in-service teachers at the Centro Universidad de la Costa and English teachers from the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit. I had one day of play on the sandy beach and at the hotel pool (where I met an iguana and had a peacock take a nip at my hamburguesa). That day, like all the others, was sunny and warm (80+ degrees). At the conference I met up with Purdue English department graduate Brita Banitz, who was also a plenary speaker at the conference.

She is now the Jefa (Head) of the Department of Languages, School of Arts and Humanities, University of the Americas, in Puebla, Mexico. She said she misses Purdue and the life of being a student, and to say “hello” to anyone who remembers her.



The Bay of Banderas, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico



Outside the conference center in Puerto Vallarta

After Puerto Vallarta I went to Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco, which has a population of over 1.5 million. (For those of you who are tequila fans, Jalisco is the center of tequila production!). There I met every day with either teachers or coordinators or students for informal meetings or to make a presentation. In the city itself I gave talks at the Bi-National Center: Instituto Cultural Mexicano–Norteamericano de Jalisco, the Universidad de Guadalajara, and also talks at public schools

for the Secretaría de Educación, State of Jalisco. The school talks were to teachers new to teaching English, but not to teaching. To deal with an earlier start for English in the public schools that was recently implemented in Mexico, in-service teachers can attend workshops and courses to develop their English competence as well as their teaching repertoire. I also

gave talks and met with university English teachers outside the city at the Universidad Panamericana (Bonaterra) in Aguascalientes (hot waters!) and at the Universidad de Colima, each city about two hours’ drive from Guadalajara.

*“It is a great experience to be with so many energetic, dedicated second language professionals..“*

In between talks I was able to visit historic and cultural sites – cathedrals, museums, markets – and sample Mexican cuisine, including tacos, enchiladas, and guacamole, which tasted nothing like any I’ve ever eaten in the States! I even met an all-female Mariachi band (these ensembles are traditionally male). Everywhere I was treated with the utmost in hospitality and kindness and learned a great deal about a country I had not visited before.

All in all, it was a terrific trip and I’d go again if given the opportunity. It is a great experience to be with so many energetic, dedicated second



These students, from less affluent backgrounds, are in the English Access Scholarship Program sponsored by the US Department of State, and are getting free English courses at the Bi-National Center (tax dollars at work).

language professionals. I learned so much from them about their students, their situations, and their approaches to the challenges they face in a country with considerable disparities between rich and poor, discrepancies between rural and urban environments, and differences in regional cultures and languages.

## Contact

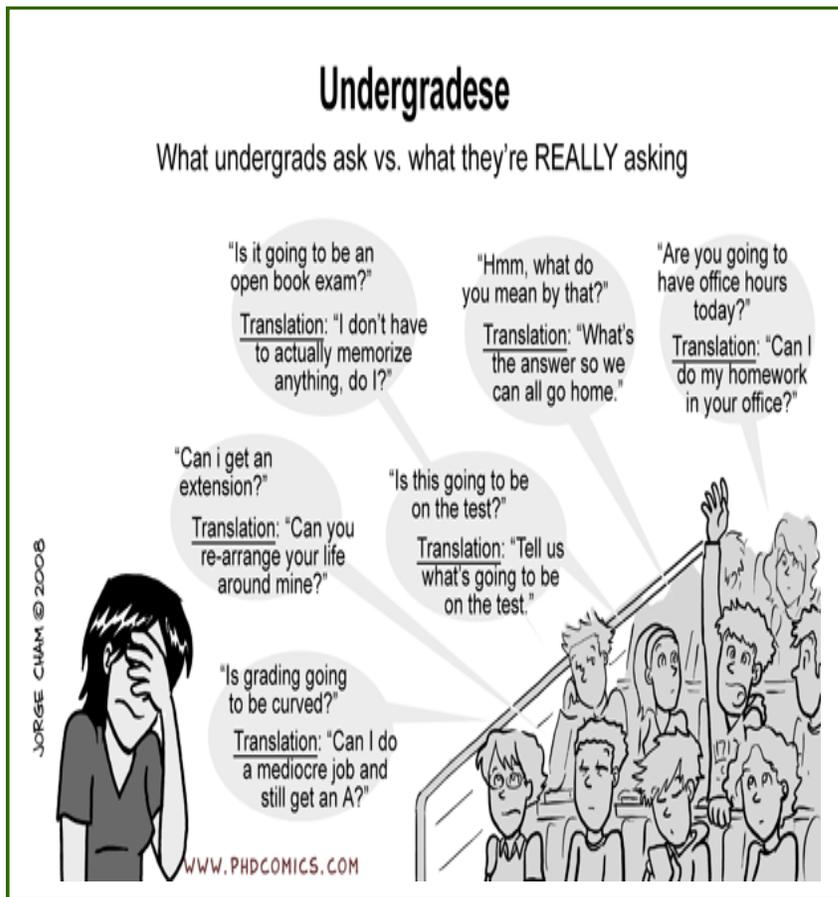
If you have any questions or comments, or would like to contribute to the newsletter, please contact the editor Kamal Belmihou at: [kbelmiho@purdue.edu](mailto:kbelmiho@purdue.edu)

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### Our Website:

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~eslgo/index.html>

# ESL GO!



## Upcoming events

### ESL Speaker Series

Venue: RAWL 1071

Time: 5:30-6:30 PM

Date: February 8, 2013

### 2013 Graduate Student Symposium on Second Language Studies & English as a Second Language

For more information on the call for papers and other details, please visit:

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~eslgo/symposium.html>

### World Englishes in the Multilingual World

Arizona State University

Tempe, AZ, USA

November 16-18, 2013

For more information on the call for papers and other details, please visit: <http://iawe.asu.edu/>

### 2013 ECWCA

Clarion University

April 12-13, 2013

For more information on the call for papers and other details, please visit:

<http://ecwca.org/annual-conference/ecwca-2013-call-for-papers/>

### 2013 Second Language Research Forum

Brigham Young University.

For more information, please visit:

<http://ce.byu.edu/cw/slrf/>