

Editorial

The most bizarre possibility of all is that our schools will. . . provide an education in the rational use of language. Such an effort would require teachers to take a serious interest in reality.

- Neil Postman¹

Welcome to our fourth and final issue of 1983. We had hoped to fill its pages with a sample of the outstanding papers presented at the October National Convention. Although we hand-delivered invitations to all speakers, urging them to submit their work for publication in the Journal, only three have responded thus far: Dennis Huffman, whose article appears on page 22, Huw Williams, whose plenary address will be featured in our next issue, and Lind Scott.

It is disconcerting that MEXTESOL 1983 left in its wake not the thick bundle of brilliant convention manuscripts we had anticipated, but rather a dimstore collection of ashtrays, cocktail paraphernalia, canvas bags and other trinkets - all courtesy of the gathering's sponsor. This observation is not intended as an indictment of Time, Inc. They did their job. It is the Journal that has failed to keep its pre-convention promise to post-convention readers. This, however, does not mean that we find glittering Time keychains or alcohol and nicotine addiction incentives to be in the best of taste or the most appropriate contribution a multinational corporation can make to a developing country. Nevertheless, to give credit where credit is due, and in the December spirit of contemplating 1983 retrospectively and planning ahead to 1984, we have nothing but respect and admiration for the timeliness (for lack of a better word) of Time's latest

¹In Language in America. 1969. N. Postman, C. Weingartner, T.P. Moran (eds.). New York: Pegasus, p. 19.

cover story on George Orwell.² (In addition to distributing colorful plastic cigarette lighters, the corporation also publishes a widely circulated weekly news magazine.)

Orwell, author of the novel 1984, is perhaps the century's most insightful analyst of English language use and abuse; certainly he is the era's most carelessly ignored thinker as far as ESL-EFL teachers and students are concerned.

We are a month away from non-fiction 1984, and although there are already unmistakable signs of media overkill in 'celebration' of the mythic year, we would be willing to endure even 1984 ashtrays and cigarette lighters³ if they led to sustained research on Orwell's ideas about language and society.

Time has helped cushion the impact of the media snowball by pointing out that "the author's manuscript showed. . . he had also considered setting his story in 1980 or 1982."

Knowing that 1984 is pretty much an arbitrary date spoils some of the New Year's Eve apocalyptic fun for the most banal and/or sensationalistic journalists.

George Orwell, not unlike many British and North American English teachers (and MEXTESOL members), spent several years working in developing countries back when they were called 'underdeveloped', or in the case of India, where Orwell was born, simply 'ours'.

His first job was a five-year tour of duty as a policeman (!) in

²November 28, 1983.

³Time tells us that "1984 calendars" have already been marketed.

Burma. The cultural (and presumably linguistic)⁴ shock changed his life dramatically. He was appalled and creatively inspired by the injustice of decrepit British colonialism, as he would later be appalled and inspired as a militia volunteer in the Spanish Republic's war of resistance against fascism. In that 'foreign language immersion environment' he found his socialist idealism as unacceptable to the Falange as it was to the Soviet-guided Communists. As a result of his Third World experiences, George Orwell spent a good deal of the remainder of his life studying the relationship between language abuse and totalitarian injustice.

1984, which has been translated into over 60 languages since it was first published in 1949, was Orwell's last book. He died in 1950 at age 47.

Despite the attention his work has merited in other disciplines, it is only recently that applied linguists and educators have begun to take serious notice. Coincidentally, these last days of 1983 also mark the appearance in Mexican bookstores of the Spanish version of Language and Control,⁵ a series of reports on research begun in the mid-seventies by applied linguists at the University of East Anglia. In the first chapter, "Orwellian Linguistics," the authors outline their approach to sociolinguistics based on, "las conexiones que existen entre el lenguaje, las ideas y la estructura social. . . la idea (orwelliana) de que la estructura lingüística podría movilizarse para controlar o limitar el pensamiento" (p. 9).

Our hope is that as language-learning research continues to underscore the importance of communicative events, discourse analysis and authentic language use, "Orwellian linguistics" will

⁴The now-independent (1948) nation's official language is Burmese.

⁵Lenguaje y Control by Roger Fowler, Bob Hodges, Gunther Kress and Tony Trew. Translated by Valiente Reyes and published in Mexico by Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983. English original: 1979. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

influence theory and practice to the extent that other 'use-oriented' linguists like Hymes, Labov and Widdowson have.

Aldous Huxley, whose anti-utopian novel Brave New World is often compared to Orwell's 1984, was also deeply concerned with language and education. In the Spring 1962 issue of Daedalus he wrote:

Generals, clergymen, advertisers, and the rulers of totalitarian states -- all have good reasons for disliking the idea of universal education in the rational use of language. To the military, clerical, propagandist and authoritarian mind such training seems (and rightly seems) profoundly subversive.

In spite of the opposing forces, Huxley was optimistic about the feasibility of teaching "rational language use." The project seems to be even more of a priority on the twentieth anniversary of Huxley's death.⁶

Huxley had a normal lifespan (1894-1963), but Orwell died prematurely. Had he lived he would have been a lucid 59 at the time of TESOL International's first Annual Convention. It is exciting to imagine what he might have said as keynote speaker.

But before indulging in such delightful speculation, we suggest commemorating 1984 in what seems to be the only honorable way. Do not settle for the "1984 Calendar" (\$10.95 plus tax) or for Orwellian thought filtered through Time, East Anglia, or the MEX-TESOL Journal. Give George Orwell the respect he deserves: read him.

D.H.

⁶Aldous Huxley died on November 22, 1963, the same day John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.