

## Questioning traditional assumptions of language teaching

Vivian Cook

Newcastle University  
vivian.cook@newcastle.ac.uk

### Résumé

*Cet article défend l'idée qu'il est temps de réexaminer quelques-unes des hypothèses du discours moderne qui n'ont pas été interrogées et n'ont pas été discutées depuis la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, bien qu'elles aient été présentes dans la plupart des méthodes d'enseignement. L'une d'elle est l'hypothèse que l'enseignement de la langue devrait favoriser la langue orale plutôt que la langue écrite, hypothèse justifiée par la prééminence historique de la parole, l'existence de langues non écrites, l'acquisition par les enfants de leur langue maternelle, etc., hypothèses qui sont toutes non pertinentes pour l'apprentissage de L2 en classe par des élèves qui savent lire et écrire. La deuxième hypothèse est que les élèves devraient tendre à être comme des locuteurs natifs, hypothèse à peine justifiée par quelque argument que ce soit. Cette hypothèse ignore la nature distinctive des apprenants de L2 en termes d'usages du langage, de code-switching et de communication avec des locuteurs non natifs. La troisième hypothèse est que l'enseignement en classe devrait se faire en L2 plutôt qu'en L1, hypothèse basée sur l'idée de séparer les deux langues dans l'esprit et d'utiliser en classe les fonctions de L2 de la vie réelle. Ceci se base sur l'idée d'un bilinguisme coordonné, idée contestée par la plupart des recherches récentes en acquisition des langues secondes, qui voient les deux systèmes linguistiques fonctionnant dans l'esprit comme un tout. La conclusion générale est que les enseignants de langue ne devraient prendre ces hypothèses comme définitives, mais devraient regarder s'ils peuvent faire un usage plus efficace de la langue écrite, se donner d'autres buts pour les apprenants que de parler comme des locuteurs natifs, construits sur la base des connaissances de L1 par les apprenants plutôt que de nier leur existence.*

**Mots clés :** langage, enseignement, méthodes, usages de L2, L1.

In the past hundred and twenty years language teaching in Europe has gone through a number of revolutions, starting with the Direct Method, passing through audiovisualism and audiolingualism and now exploring the implications of communicative language teaching through the European Framework. It appears on the surface that everything has changed ; the classroom of today bears little resemblance to the classroom of the late nineteenth century ; what we ex-

pect students to do with the language and what they do in the classroom has radically altered.

The argument of this paper is that most language teaching nonetheless still clings to the same underlying assumptions despite the claimed differences in methodology. The nineteenth century foundations of language teaching were established by a group of Europeans including Henry Sweet and Otto Jespersen. However much the teaching methods that have built on these foundations may seem to differ, they share the same underlying assumptions. This paper argues for a reappraisal of some of these assumptions. They may still be valid, perhaps valid for all time. But constructing new buildings on old foundations is potentially dangerous if the foundations are not inspected from time to time. The paper takes three assumptions: the emphasis on spoken language, the use of the native speaker as a target for language teaching and the use of the first language in the classroom. It describes their rationale and examines how useful a basis they can provide for language teaching in the twenty-first century. Some of the material is treated in more extended form in Cook (1999, 2003, 2008).

### **1. Assumption 1. The basis for teaching is the spoken, not the written language**

One of the clearest assumptions of language teaching throughout the twentieth century was that the spoken language rather than the written language was the basis for language teaching. Article 1 of the International Phonetics Association in the 1880s was « Foreign language study should begin with the spoken language of everyday life » (cited in Stern 1983). Syllabuses laid down by governments have talked of « The principle of the primacy of spoken language » (Cuban Ministry of Education 1999). Mainstream language teaching methods insist on it: audiolingualism depended on the principle of « Speech before writing » (Lado 1964); communicative language teaching used « class-room activities designed to get learners to speak and listen to each other » (Scrivenor 1994); the task-based learning approach « assumes that tasks are directed at oral skills, particularly speaking » (Ellis 2003, p. 6). Even the so-called alternative methods popular in the 1970s did not see written language as an alternative: the Silent Method makes the students hear and say sentences (Gattegno 1976); the core of Suggestopedia is listening to dialogues (Lozanov 1978); the basis of Community Language Learning is students talking to each other (Curran, 1976); Total Physical Response (TPR) now relies on story-telling (Seely & Romijn 1995).

### ***1.1. Arguments for the primacy of speech***

The arguments that are given to justify the primacy of the spoken language come from many diverse areas.

#### *1.1.1. Common sense*

Children speak their first language long before they write it ; it is almost inconceivable to think of any child learning to write first. Of course deaf children do learn sign language but, while that uses visual signs rather than oral sounds, it hardly equates to written language.

#### *1.1.2. Linguistics*

Throughout the history of linguistics, the written language has been taken as the basis of language ranging from Aristotle « Sounds produced by the voice are symbols of affections of the soul, and writing is a symbol of vocal sounds » to Jean-Jacques Rousseau « Les langues sont faites pour être parlées, l'écriture ne sert que de supplément à la parole ... L'écriture n'est que la représentation de la parole, il est bizarre qu'on donne plus du soin à déterminer l'image que l'objet » (Rousseau 1781) to Leonard Bloomfield « Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks » (Bloomfield 1933, 21) to John Lyons « ... the spoken language is primary and ... writing is essentially a means of representing speech in another medium » (Lyons 1968, 38). Very few linguists would dissent.

### ***1.2. Reasons***

The reasons that they give for this claim are diverse.

#### *1.2.1. Historical precedence of speech*

In a chronological sense, a language undoubtedly begins in spoken form : people wrote English or Chinese before they used written letters or characters ; it was many thousands of years after the first man or woman spoke that they wrote. Again from a commonsense point of view, it is inconceivable to think of a society that had writing before it had speech. While no-one knows the historical origin of speech, most writing had points of origin, in Phoenicia for alphabetic writing systems, in China for character-based systems. Chronological priority in human societies from speech to writing is hard to deny.

#### *1.2.2. Languages without written form*

Even today there are languages with no agreed written form. The cause may be isolation, as in the languages that the Summer Institute of Linguistics has devised writing systems for. Or it may be lack of status, as in the cases of Ulster Scots, now an official minority language in the EU, or Swiss German, in both of which cases another

language being used for writing by officialdom and education. Incontrovertibly some languages are only spoken. It is hard to imagine a written language without a spoken form, although of course some languages survive only in writing form with little clue to their spoken form, such as Etruscan. Dead languages like Latin or computer languages like PROLOG hardly count as exceptions in that they are not used for the normal functions of human language.

#### *1.2.3. Individuals who cannot use written language*

Only a small minority of human beings fail to learn to speak. Yet, despite all their endeavours, many human beings fail to learn to read and write, whatever the causes may be. The world-wide illiteracy rate given in the *UNESCO Statistic Yearbook* (2000) is 20.6%, that is to say 876 million people cannot read and write. In some sense spoken language is built-in to the human genes, even if there is endless controversy over exactly what and how ; written language isn't.

#### *1.2.4. Children's automatic learning of speech*

Children learn to speak more or less despite their parents ; variation in situation and language exposure makes little difference. However much parents feel that their guidance, correction and interaction is vital to their offsprings' acquisition of language, the sheer diversity of parents, languages and situations around the globe and the uniformity of successful acquisition regardless of situation shows that nothing is necessary for first language acquisition apart from exposure to samples of language. The written language has to be laboriously learnt from a teacher : L1 writing is taught but L1 speaking is not. The only exception is occasional anecdotes about precocious children : the historian Thomas Macaulay is supposed to have learnt to read upside down by sitting across the table as his father read the Bible to him. Talking is as normal for human beings as walking ; writing is an acquired skill, like cycling or ice dancing.

### **1.3. Teaching**

The teaching profession has also put forward some justifications for favouring the spoken language.

#### *1.3.1. Some students need only spoken language*

There may be jobs like simultaneous interpreting or dealing with tourists that involve speech. It is then vital to emphasise speech.

#### *1.3.2. Some students demand the spoken form*

It is claimed that many students expect to learn the spoken language and will demand courses based upon it.

### 1.3.3. *Interference in speaking from the written forms*

Starting with written forms would raise all sorts of problems of mispronunciation – *great* would be pronounced the same as *greet*; silent letters would be pronounced in *hour* and *guest*. Going from the spoken form to the written would cut down on all of these.

Looked at objectively, these arguments are far from convincing. One reason is their irrelevance. Arguments about the chronology of human history or the existence of languages with no written form have nothing to do with second language acquisition or with language teaching. The fact that speech precedes writing in human society says nothing about the second language classroom. Language teaching should no more take pre-literate societies into account than physics teaching should cover medieval alchemy.

Arguments about the development of language in the individual are superficially more convincing. The commonsense argument depends on the sequence in first language acquisition, not on *second* language acquisition. There is no necessary reason why a second language should be acquired in the same order in the classroom as a first language is acquired in the home. Obviously the child cannot make use of written language while acquiring the first language; but this is no reason why it cannot be used for teaching a second language. People who cannot read are certainly precluded from teaching methods that involve written language but that does not mean speaking has to be emphasised for everyone else. Children do indeed learn spoken language spontaneously and have to be taught written language; this tells us nothing about priority in language teaching where everything is taught, both spoken and written language.

The reasons from teaching are true but are extremely partial. There may indeed be students who need and request spoken language; but every teacher has equally met students who need and demand written language. Greater mispronunciation from writing before speaking needs substantial research to show its existence compared say to the snags about writing language after you have learnt to speak it. But it also depends on the writing system involved; Chinese characters would not lead to these confusions nor would transparent alphabetic writing systems like Italian or Finnish where each letter corresponds to a sound – it would be odd to base the priority of speech on the vagaries of a single spelling system, namely English.

Over all no cogent reasons have been advanced for speech before writing in foreign language teaching. Even if the above claims are factually correct, they are based on false analogies between natural first language acquisition or the development of human language

with foreign language teaching in the classroom. The L1 analogy is indeed often mentioned in teaching : communicative activities « allow natural Learning » (Littlewood 1981, 17) ; Total Physical Response « simulates at a speeded up pace the stages an infant experiences in acquiring its first language » (Asher 1986, 17). This principle of the primacy of speech in second language teaching is an unsubstantiated assumption. This does not mean that it is incorrect – much of the language teaching of the twentieth century that was based on it was successful, perhaps despite rather than because of the principle. We do need however to re-examine the necessity for this principle and see, if it works, why it works.

## **2. Assumption 2. The aim of language teaching is to make students like native speakers**

The assumption underlying language teaching from time immemorial is that its goal is to make students as similar to native speakers as possible. The language that they are taught is based on native speaker models and native speaker roles ; « The native speaker's 'competence' or 'proficiency' or 'knowledge of the language' is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching » (Stern 1983, 341). Their success is measured by the extent to which they get close to the native speaker ; « Relative to native speaker's linguistic competence, learners' interlanguage is deficient by definition » (Kasper & Kellerman 1997, 5). Until recently it was taken for granted that the only reality in language was the native speaker, so that the only people that students would talk to would be native speakers : « After all, the ultimate goal – perhaps unattainable for some – is, nonetheless, to 'sound like a native speaker' in all aspects of the language » (González-Nueno 1997, 261).

### **2.1. Background**

One problem is the definition of 'native speaker'. The classic version is by Leonard Bloomfield : « The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language* ; he is a *native speaker* of this language » (Bloomfield 1933, 43). A mainstream definition is « A person who has spoken a certain language since early childhood » (McArthur 1992). On these definitions there is no point in teaching students to be like native speakers as this is logically impossible short of putting them in a time reversal machine back to their childhood. Hence all second language learners are going to be failures, to a greater or smaller extent. As is always going to be the case if you measure one thing by the norm for another – apples are complete failures as pears.

A second question, particularly for English, is who is a native speaker ? On the one hand, if it is defined as an inhabitant of the

country from which the language originated, this involves a choice between dialects ranging say from Glasgow to Newcastle to Norwich. Language teaching has usually adopted the position that it is the class-based RP accent and 'standard' English that should be taught, used probably by a small minority in the UK, but vastly over-represented in the media. Only a small subset of people in the UK qualify as native speakers. On the other hand there is a question of alternative regional standards. Does an Australian count as a native speaker? An Indian? A Singaporean? For some time there has been a movement to liberate local versions of English and make them independent of UK or US standards. Making the native speaker the target of language teaching still raises a host of other issues about who counts as a native speaker.

Little explicit rationale has been provided for choosing the native speaker target for language teaching: the assumption is so deep-rooted that it is beyond questioning. It relates to notions of the standard language, defined as the possession of native speakers, i.e. to people's loyalty to a language and their pride in it. Since the eighteenth century, in Europe language has been seen as a property of a nation (Anderson 2006); defending one's language may be the same as defending one's physical territory. Admitting that non-native speakers have the right to speak the language in their own ways would be unpatriotic.

Overall, basing language teaching on the native speaker sets an unachievable target; « adults usually fail to become native speakers » (Felix 1987, 140); well of course they do. Reams of paper are covered with arguments about L2 learning leading to failure; the job of SLA research has sometimes been seen indeed as accounting for this failure. Many L2 users indeed perceive themselves as failures for not being like native speakers. I remember a conference reception in Belgium where the participants were switching constantly between four languages at which someone apologised to me for the poor quality of their English. It was I who should have been apologising for sticking to my native language. By measuring people against something they can never be, language teaching is dooming people to think of themselves as failures rather successes.

## *2.2. Distinctive properties of L2 users*

Let us then try to think of some of the distinctive features possessed by people who speak more than one language, whom we will call 'L2 users'.

### 2.2.1. *The L2 user has other uses for language than the monolingual*

If we restrict the target to what monolingual native speakers can do, we are neglecting those uses of language that L2 users can carry out which monolinguals *cannot*. The L2 user is not just a pale imitation of a native speaker but has an independent existence. Some of these are :

#### 2.2.1.1. Code-switching

Here is a Greek student talking to another Greek student in English : « Simera piga sto *shopping centre* gia na psaksw ena *birthday present* gia thn Maria » (Today I went to the *shopping centre* because I wanted to buy a *birthday present* for Maria). She is switching effortlessly from one language to another when convenient. It is not that she doesn't know Greek words for shopping centre and birthday present ; rather it is a particular type of talk between people who know each others' languages. And something that no monolingual native speaker can do, by definition as they do not have another language to switch into. The only exception may be the limited extent to which some monolingual native speakers can switch dialect.

The other obvious use of language that is unavailable to monolinguals is translation. Some, though not all, L2 users can turn one language into another, whether immigrant children interpreting for their mothers in doctor's surgeries or simultaneous interpreters in the European Parliament.

A third is possibly the ability to communicate with other non-native speakers. A frequent complaint at international meetings using English is that the L2 users can understand each other very well but cannot understand the English native speakers present. The native speaker appears to lack flexibility of adaptation to non-native speakers, except through such crude devices as speaking louder and more slowly.

#### 2.2.1.2. The L2 user has a different knowledge of language

It is perfectly obvious to everyone that most L2 users speak their second language differently from native speakers, whether or not this constitutes 'failure'. After a few seconds of listening to someone we have a good idea of whether they are native speakers or not. Accent, grammar, vocabulary all show a different command of the language from the native speaker. Why not? We immediately know if a speaker of English comes from Dallas or Hyderabad, but the characteristics of their speech identify where they come from rather than constituting failure. So why shouldn't an L2 user sound as if they come from Berlin or Tokyo ?



Recent research has shown how language influence goes in two directions; the knowledge of a first language also is changed by the other language you know (Cook 2003). Your pronunciation is subtly different, for example in the timing of plosive consonants (Zampini & Green 2001); your processing of syntax is changed, for example weighting the cues to the subject of the sentence differently from monolinguals (Cook et al. 2003). The L2 user does not then have the same knowledge of their first language as a monolingual speaker.

In addition the L2 user has a different awareness of language itself – often indeed one of the reasons put forward for the study of second languages. Children with two languages are better at making grammaticality judgments about sentences than monolinguals (Bialystok 2001). School children who know another language use sentences that are more structurally complex (Kecskes & Papp 2000). Whether this heightened awareness of language is the cause or effect of the success of bilingual writers such as André Brink, John Milton or Vladimir Nabokov is a moot point.

2.2.1.3. The L2 user always connects the two languages in their mind at some level

Implicit in the previous point was that the two languages are intrinsically linked in the L2 user's mind. The integrative continuum presented in Cook (2003) sees the relationship between the two languages in the same mind as ranging between the two poles of complete integration and complete separation; each individual is situated somewhere on this continuum for each aspect of language. It is doubtful whether any individual is at either of the two absolute poles of integration or separation. So in the minds of most L2 users the languages are in constant touch through a network of relationships. The consensus is that the two separate mental lexicons in the L2 user's mind here are not usually separate but bound together more or less closely (De Groot 2002). The two phonologies are similarly linked, so that the L2 user is in effect using a third language phonology that is neither L1 nor L2 (Major 2002). Even ways of thinking such as categorisation of colours and shapes are influenced by both languages (Cook et al. 2006). Nor is it possible to turn one language off entirely, merely to lower its availability (Beauvillain & Grainger 1987). The language system of the L2 user is a unique form of its own, distinct from monolingual speakers of either L1 or L2.

2.2.1.4. L2 users speak to fellow L2 users

Monolingual native speakers stay in their community of fellows. The image behind the native speaker target in language teaching is that L2 users will want to join this community and to talk to native speakers

of the language. This may well be true of languages that are 'peripheral' in De Swaan's sense (De Swaan 2001); if you learn Finnish as a second language, you presumably intend to live in Finland. It is not true of the other levels of De Swaan's hierarchy. Take English as a central language in England: the fact that a British-born Bengali speaker uses English for contacts with monolingual English people does not mean they do not use it for communicating with speakers with a variety of L1s. Or take Arabic as a supercentral language acquired for a specific religious purpose; the use of language with native speakers is beside the point. Finally we come to the phenomenon of English, the only 'hypercentral' language, alias English as Lingua Franca (ELF) (Seidlhofer 2004). This is spoken globally by people for a variety of functions, nor just the specialised functions of supercentral languages, the vast majority of whom are not native speakers. Indeed some have suggested that native speakers need training in the specific forms of ELF that distinguish it from the language they know. The native speaker target is only relevant to people who want to learn ELF in so far as it is the same as ELF: what they need is a way of acquiring ELF so that they can communicate with each other, not with native speakers.

To sum up, the native speaker assumption is highly questionable and has weak support. At best it can cover a limited range of students of peripheral languages. At worst it denies the students the special status of being skilful L2 users with all their extra attributes and limits them to being more or less successful imitations of native speakers. This new goal is now being adopted by some countries. In Japan the goal is «Japanese with English Abilities», not imitation native speaker (MEXT 2003). In Israel the curriculum «does not take on the goal of producing near-native speakers of English, but rather speakers of Hebrew, Arabic or other languages who can function comfortably in English whenever it is appropriate» (English Curriculum for Israel 2002).

### **3. Assumption 3. Teachers and students should use the target language rather than the L1 in the classroom.**

One of the maxims of the nineteenth century revolution in language teaching was that language teaching should only use the second language in the classroom, encapsulated in the overall title the «Direct Method». This has persisted to the present day.

Audiolingualism, for instance, recommended «rendering English inactive while the new language is being learnt» (Brooks 1964, 142). Task-based learning suggests «Don't ban mother-tongue use but encourage attempts to use the target language» (Willis 1996, 130). Stern

(1992, 281) feels that the « intra-lingual » position in teaching is so strong « many writers do not even consider cross-lingual objectives ». In the UK « teachers should insist on the use of the target language for all aspects of a lesson » (OFSTED 1993, section 37). Local Education Authority advisors in the UK do not see « any pedagogical value in a teacher referring to the learner's own language » (Macaro 1997, 29).

Yet curiously enough teachers have resisted this pressure from authority and from language teaching methodology. Franklin (1990) found that over 80% of modern language teachers used the first language for explaining grammar and for discussing objectives ; over 50% for tests, correcting written work, and teaching background ; under 16% for organising the classroom and activities and for chatting informally. But they have been told so often that it is wrong that they feel guilty.

### **3.1. Reasons**

The reasons for the use of the second language that have been advanced fall into two main groups.

#### *3.1.1. The L1 and L2 should be kept separate*

One reason is to keep the two languages in separate compartments. If a rigid wall is kept between the two languages, students will be able to progress rather than be kept back by their constant reliance on the first language and by interference from the language they already knew. Meanings should be built up in the second language independently of the first ; new words should be explained, demonstrated etc, never translated. In terms of bilingualism, this amounts to a strong belief in what Weinreich (1953) calls coordinate bilingualism – keeping the languages apart in the mind – rather than compound bilingualism – making them into one system.

However even Weinreich saw that this did not apply to all bilinguals : some are compound, some coordinate. At best banning the L1 helps the coordinate type students, disadvantages the compound type. But, as we saw earlier, much current research assumes the two languages are inextricably bound up with each other : the coordinate L2 user is only one pole on the integrative continuum. When we speak a second language, the first language is not turned off, just turned down. There is no principled reason why the vast majority of L2 users should be confined to the second language in the classroom. The first language is after all always there in their minds, invisibly being used during the class.

### *3.1.2. Using the L2 for real-life functions*

Teaching a second language in a class is divorced from the use of the second language outside the classroom. Using the second language for all the everyday purposes of the class can bridge this gap by showing students the language in action rather than as an artificial device ; wishing the students good morning, asking them to open the window, telling them which page of the coursebook to go to and all the myriads of everyday language interactions of the classroom, if carried out in the second language, will help the students to genuinely use the language.

But it became obvious that the classroom functions of language are either a limited set of those used in the world outside the classroom, such as greetings, or are distinct ways of behaving that occur nowhere but in class, such as the IRF exchange – Initiation, Response Feedback (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). Normal classroom interchanges provide a limited number of possible formats.

### *3.2. Using the L1 in the classroom*

Let us try to see how teaching might exploit the L1 necessarily present in the classroom. Overall using the L1 judiciously in teaching can be more efficient than trying to avoid it at all costs, can help learning, can be more natural and can relate to situations outside the classroom.

#### *3.2.1. Conveying meaning of words or sentences*

Many teaching techniques have been used for conveying the meaning of new words to students in the second language – images on film strips, mime, example sentences, dialogues, explanation, etc. All of these ignore the presence of the first language in the student's minds. If however many students are finding equivalent translations in their minds, all this effort is wasted and the teacher might as well give the translation in the first place. Of course exact translation is a myth and ignores the subtle overtones that go with a word in any particular language ; this may lead to some long-term harm in the student's understanding. Nevertheless, when appropriate, translation may be a good way of priming the pump for other kinds of activities. None of the methods advocated since the 1960s such as communicative language teaching and task-based learning have provided any solution for pump-priming of the necessary meanings that can be used in the activities they recommend for the classroom. Dodson's Bilingual Method indeed has translation at its core (Dodson, 1967) ; the students are given translations of the total meaning of sentences rather than individual words as a way-in to the language.

### 3.2.2. *Giving instructions for teaching activities etc.*

Setting up say a communicative task for the students to do in the classroom involves explaining what they have to do. Carried out in the second language this may be time-consuming with careful checking that they have understood the task. Is it better to spend 6 minutes setting up the activity in the second language and 4 minutes carrying it out in the second language or 1 minute setting it up in the first language and 9 minutes practicing the second? The only real pretext for using the second language in the setting up stage is that it gives the students a genuine communicative comprehension task in the second language – a secondary teaching goal – but this is at the expense of the primary teaching goal embodied in the activity itself. Similarly using the second language for instructions or questions in an examination gives students the secondary task of understanding the instructions (or forces the examiners to set simpler questions).

### 3.2.3. *Letting students use L1 incidentally within classroom activities*

One of the characteristics of the modern language teaching classroom in many countries has been the use of group and pair work rather than treating the whole class as a single group. Originally the danger in this was seen as the uncorrected mistakes that the students would make free of the teacher's supervision. Later the problem was seen as students using their first language once the teacher was out of earshot; « If they are talking in small groups it can be quite difficult to get some classes – particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones – to keep to the target language » (Ur 1996, 121). If code-switching is a normal bilingual activity, this is a natural use of language; what is unnatural is confining the students to one language when they know two. Obviously there are going to be limits of tolerance for this. But, provided the outcome of the task is in the second language, there is no reason why some aspects of it may not draw on the first language. Indeed the examinations of the Institute of Linguists in Languages for International Communication (discontinued in 2004) used to require all the tasks depended on the students using both languages, not just one (Institute of Linguists 2008). The true measure of the success of an L2 user is to be able to use both languages together, not to be a monolingual in either language.

We have seen that the bases of all three assumptions are rather shaky. Language teachers should not be taking them for granted as incontrovertible wisdom but trying out whether language teaching could make more effective use of written language, could adopt other goals for students than sounding like native speakers and could try

building on the first language in the students' minds rather than denying that it exists.

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