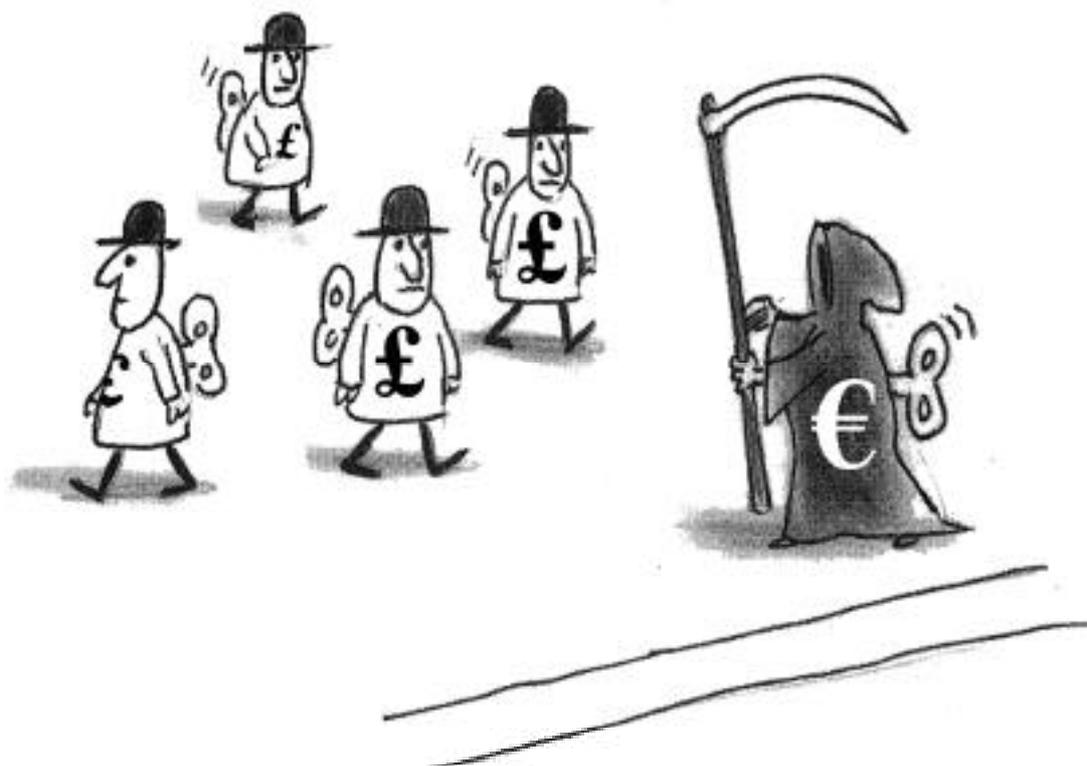


# FELT Newsletter

*The Forum for English Language Teachers in Ireland*

## ***In this Issue...***

- **TIE Update** by *Gronia deVerdon Cooney*
- **Hong Kong Diary (Part 2)** by *Melody Noll*
- **Euro Impact: ☒ Day is D-Day** by *Ciarán McCarthy*
- **A Few Notes on Vocabulary Teaching** by *Paul Pauwels*
- **Dictionaries of Collocations** a review by *Mark Krzanowski*



*An Associate of*



***Also in this issue...***

- **Silly Things to Say to Your Students...**
- **A Photocopiable Activity!**
- **FELT Plans for 2001**
- **News from ACELS**
- **FELT Editorial**

# Mel Does Hong Kong (2)

by Melody Noll

*This is the second and final installment of an incredible account of Melody's hellish few weeks teaching in Hong Kong. Originally meant only as a 'lazy letter to family and friends', this frank and witty account of life teaching in a completely alien environment is absolutely enthralling and will certainly make you think twice about taking such a bold step, or will make you smile wryly if you've already been there. If you read the last installment, you'll know not to skip over this piece!*

## The Neighbourhood

My daily walk from the hotel to the school is a short but interesting one. The stores are long and narrow with no doors as we know them - just things that get rolled down and padlocked at night. Shopkeepers often have day-to-day leases (the economic crisis is that bad), and I've seen a few businesses shut down during my short stay. Curious locals include:

- a little-old-lady veggie vendor who picks at and bundles various Chinese greens before biking them to market
- a butcher who piles piglets ripped from the womb into huge sidewalk baskets
- a chicken vendor who crams a million fowl into tiny little cages (they can't even stand), whose last earthly sight is his cleaver-wielding wife
- a motley crew of money-grubbing hawkers
- a geriatric beggar who parks herself right smack in the middle of the sidewalk - supine with hands outstretched. BTW: Street people don't seem to smell here, even though they look like they're completely covered in soot. I saw one urchin neatly trimming his moustache beneath some scaffolding one morning.

My favo(u)rite character is a charming old man whose stall I patronise at least once a day. He knows that on my way to work I buy a Diet Coke, and on my way back, a much-appreciated can of San Miguel. In a

city this big, it's very comforting to actually know someone (even if it's an elderly hawker who's bound to be picked up by the police sometime soon). Every time this fellow sees me, he throws up his arms and greets me with a very loud and resounding "Oy!" (I do hope this is a Cantonese term of endearment, as opposed to an opportunity for this gentleman to practice his Yiddish.)

## More on Food

They serve fish with eyes, ducks with heads, and chickens with feet. I'm pacing myself with trying at least one new bizarre dish a week. (Eel was my latest adventure... Couldn't quite get a feel for it, though, due to the other overpowering tastes on the plate.) And while ordering take-out at my favourite neighbourhood greasy-spoon, the proprietor asked the Cantonese speaker I was with, "Do you understand a word she's saying?!"

"Yes," she replied.

"Well, what's she saying, then?" he asked. Jane diplomatically opted out of the truth here, because I had just said something about my Aunt Liddy refusing to set foot in such an establishment. He then pointed to some weird thing hanging among the other carcasses, gestured my way, and informed Jane that I "would like it". As we were leaving, she identified the mystery meat as some Chinese variety of pork skins.

## Bathrooms

I now know why my bathroom (as well as other bathrooms here) smells so funny (and why the water is always some sickening shade of yellow-brown). At first my roommate and I secretly thought that the other had been badly brought up. Now we know that the water used to flush toilets in Hong Kong is sea water. (And sea water has a lot of unmentionables floating in it.)

## The School

I teach about 25 hours a week. This may not seem like a lot, but if you consider that we also have to design the curriculum, write original materials, and carve out a program, what they're asking is... Well, the world, I guess. Though they pay us a "guaranteed 40 hours a week", it often takes many more to get the job done. ("Overtime", of

course, is out of the question.) I'm now trying to work out a way to do the minimum while planning a lesson that will keep hordes of little kids occupied for ill-conceived two-hour stretches. (Creative problem solving at its finest.)

**T**he administrators in California have avariciously decided to pack K-12 kids into two- to three-hour classes (insane), and ask us teach four two-hour lessons back to back (illegal). Though we have a half-hour lunch break (BFD), these are usually eaten up by parents inquiring about their kids' progress. "Is he naughty?" "Does she speak up in class?" "How's his level?" "Give her more homework!" etc.

So I guess I'm slowly coming round to the idea that business and education don't mix. As a "marketing ploy", the school has installed two-way glass separating the hallway and the classrooms. I often see parents' curious faces schmooshed against the glass. Though I'm used to being observed while I teach, the kids find it terribly distracting and horribly unnerving. Once a father barged into my room and began to correct his child's language (rather incorrectly, I might add). I just gave him one of those looks and he disappeared into the corridor.

The stress of all this effects us differently... My roommate talks in her sleep ("Now children, boots are very important!"), Paul mutters obscenities into his computer screen, and I spend my whole day off in Never-Never-Land.

### Colleagues

Well, I was right about one of my co-teachers being squeaky clean. I was totally wrong about the other... Oh W-E-L-L... (Guess we all were.) Turns out the poor guy broke under the stress of the job and showed his true and sadly faded colours. Obviously there must have been other things dreadfully wrong in his life, because the guy shut himself up in his room and drank himself silly. He refused to see anyone, rarely answered the phone, and ventured out of his room solely to seek out booze.

In the end, the hotel had to break in and

remove the deadbolt. They found him huddled in the dark: naked, incoherent, sucking on ciggies, and nursing bottles of brandy. (Guess that explains the naked, catatonic guy in my bathtub dream...) It took most of us to get him together to send him home. Poor Wonder-Bread Jane was the one to pack his things. She was completely mortified to discover that he had... Well, guy stuff. And I am (dis)pleased to announce that I am now a proud witness of someone going through textbook *delirium tremens*.

### Ah, the lessons we learn...

Carl's replacement is a real piece of work. (Give me the quiet drunk ANY day!) A terribly negative, socially unskilled creature, he's the kind of guy that uses your coffee mug, passively-aggressively reconfigures the school's computers, and endlessly reminds everyone that he's "55 with a Master's Degree in Linguistic Communication". A moody S.O.B., he may ignore you when you speak, but then will turn around and happily tell you where you can buy bootleg computer software for a mere HK \$25. (Divide by 7-point-something). If you walk down the street with him, he'll disappear into the crowd or slip off down some side street without so much as a "Boo".

**T**he kicker is he tells us all that he has to go out and exercise regularly so that he doesn't become "unpleasant". (Let it be noted that he's already putting in three or four hours of swimming and jogging a day.)

### The Kids

Thank God for the children. They're pretty good, by and large. Some are sweet, and some are little devils (though nothing approaching disgruntled postal workers). They always give you something to laugh about!

1. During a review lesson on "Parts of the Body", I pointed to my hips and asked my 3rd and 4th graders, "what are these?" The kids looked a bit mystified, and then little Edward Leung shot up his hand and said, "Fat."

"Yes, but fat WHAT?!" I asked.

Edward conferred with one of his classmates for a moment and replied, "Fat heaps."

2. While doing a lesson on pets, my colleague held up a picture of a hamster and asked, "What's this?" A cute little kindergarten stood up (as children are trained to do in class) and announced, "Good to eat".

3. My favourite class is three third-grade girls who go to Hong Kong's top Girls' School. They love to tell me gruesome stories of dingoes running off with babies, sharks taking bites out of pregnant swimmers, and gross, furry spiders that land on lurching mothers. (Gotta love 'em.) I of course can't help it: I swap horror stories right there along with 'em. The looks of terror that register on those cute little faces is most gratifying.

4. On a more disturbing note, one little girl sat in my class for four weeks without ever saying a word. When I asked her a simple question, she would look away and mutter, "I don't know." So, I decided to leave her to her own learning rate (that is, I stopped calling on her and waited for her to volunteer in her own time). One day, I stood behind her and lightly touched the top of her head while praising her rendering of the alien I'd described in a dictation exercise. Angel uttered the first English I'd ever heard her say: "Don't touch!" she snarled.

I was horrified. Had I violated some sort of cultural code? (I thought you were supposed to touch little kids.) So I never touched her again. Now she speaks up in class and is one of the rowdiest participants in raucous language games. And strangely enough, she always hangs back after class now. She offers to erase the board, and helps me pull visuals from the wall and peel the putty off the back.

### Huh?

I tell all my teachers in training that language is easily learned when taught in context - that means, imbedding new words and new grammar structures into some

dumb story or daft text. After reading the most exciting *Helen the Kitten*, *Lily's Quiet Day*, and *Bobby Doesn't Feel Well* (Hey! I have a stupid curriculum to follow!), one little fellow asked if I would write a story about "Miss Noll".

### The Parents

When I first started here, several parents called to complain to the administration. "You told us that our kids were going to be taught by a native speaker! How dare you assign my child a(n) Indian/Korean/Filipino/!" Jocelyn, the director here, assured the up in arms that I was "an African-American-mixed-with-something". That seemed to calm them down. (Go figure.)

And oddly, enough, my Chinese-American colleague was recently told that she was not going to be sent to one of the public schools under contract because she's Asian. (Go figure that one, too.) One of her kids was even transferred to my class, because the mom didn't want her child to be taught by someone Chinese. (How blind these people are to the fact that Jane is your basic American college-student-type: Baggy pants, long un-styled hair, high-tech running shoes and sports shirts... Her language is laced with the oh-so-cool "I'm all...", "It's like...", "That's nasty!" and "How lame!").

So anyway, the school has decided to send Paul-the-child-hating-55-year-old-Master's-Degree-in-Linguistics-Communication-age-ist because he "looks" more American: *i.e.* tall, bearded, balding, peeling from the pool, and sporting John Lennon glasses. (Go figure.)

BTW: I experienced a wonderful wave of *schadenfreude* at Paul's new assignment, because he had just finished a rather peculiar tirade claiming rather condescendingly how much better women are with small children.

But back to the parents: The children's folks often grab the teachers after class and grill us about their offspring's progress. How different it is here! Instead of the familiar "How's little Johnny doing?", it's the

more pointed “*His English is bad/weak/terrible isn't it?*”

**O**ne mother angrily un-enrolled her son when she learned that I had sent him into the hall for a very short but well deserved “Time Out”. A mother who witnessed the whole thing took me aside, kindly told me not to worry about “people like that”, and then proceeded to tell me that I was welcome to hit her daughter any time I saw fit.

#### WEEK 7

##### Sundry Observations:

- The scaffolding on construction sites consists of bamboo stalks held together with sandwich bag ties.
- Street sweepers wear surgical masks and push mangy-looking, short-handled, balding little broomsticks. Never seen anything like it.
- Movie theatres have assigned seating. When you buy your ticket, the box office attendant shows you a computer display of the theatre. You point to the seat you want, and the computer prints out your ticket.
- Policemen wear puke-green uniforms in summer and blue uniforms in winter. They have a special force that comes out at night to arrest “*illegal hawkers*” (whatever those are). And when someone steals your handbag, 8 cops show up to take the report.
- When a typhoon reaches “*Level 8*”, you don't have to go to work or school. We were at Level 3 on Monday. My 7<sup>th</sup> graders found it rather amusing when I stopped teaching for a moment to take in the fact that the wind was howling through the classroom and the trees were horizontal.
- The daily diet here consists of rice and noodles, and no one seems to get fat! (Those carbs are usually the first to get dumped from an American weight-loss plan.) My roommate is a thin, rice-consuming, noodle slurping food bag.
- Shopping, jaywalking, and horse racing are the national passions. Berkeley dis-

sident that I am, I find that the jaywalking thing comes quite naturally; but I can't quite figure the crowds flocking to the Hong Kong Jockey Club, madly waving tickets and tuned into walkman-ed reports. I have, however, grown to understand the shopping rage (not that I buy anything). Living space is so cramped that you have the urge to get out just as soon as you get in. And, as I've recently discovered, there's not much to do. Shopping and going to restaurants seem to be the only bit of diversion around.

- Chinese culture revolves around food. (Think of all those wedding banquets!) If there's something to celebrate, then there's something to eat - clear and simple. Even the standard form of greeting is, “*Have you eaten yet?*” (The Western equivalent is something like, “*So, uh, how's it going?*”)

##### Prejudice and Discrimination

Hong Kong is a pretty homogenous society: One gets the feeling that 99.9% of the population is Chinese, with a whole slew of Mandarin-speaking “*illegal aliens*” from the mainland dying to join them. There's a handful of Asian Indians for a spot of colour (Imagine that Urdu/Hindi lilt flavouring Cantonese!), but I find the most intriguing group to be young Filipino women.

This tiny, downtrodden segment of society is made up mostly of teachers and nurses unable to find work in their homeland just two and a half hours away. It seems they'd rather be employed as live-in nannies here, and are, as most (especially foreign) minorities, thought little of and grossly underpaid.

##### Dancing with Death

I somehow managed to throw my back out while lying in bed watching a cheesy Chinese game show. The pain was excruciating! As I lay there, barely able to breathe and waiting for the sun to rise, I began to think, “*Hey? Is it time to check out, or something?*” Then I began to ask myself if I had

anything left to do on the planet, if there were any loose ends that needed tying up, and if any of those people dressed in black would find that condom in my dresser drawer. But the sun rose as usual as in that creepy Ray Bradbury short story and I was thankfully still alive. Even breathing. Guess that means I'll be sticking around for a while longer.

### **Big Brother is watching.**

Oh yeah, I forgot: Hong Kong is 49 years away from being absorbed by the Mainland Borg. So be careful what you do in a mirrored elevator or dark corridor. An unseen observer may just be watching as you pick your nose, tug your undies out of your ass, or examine the size of your butt. (Big Brother was certainly a help, however, when my alcoholic colleague was around. Security was always able to tell us whether or not he had left the hotel and which direction he went. So I guess there's a good side to totalitarianism, though heretofore unreported.)

### **On the Language**

Have you ever wondered what *bok choy* means? *bok* = white and *choy* = vegetable. I've made various stabs at the language by boldly ordering various forms of choy: tung choy ("straw vegetable" because the stalks are hollow) and choy sam. (I have no idea who Sam is.) Jane made me order dinner the other day in one of those greasy-spoon-carcass-hanging-establishments. (Help! Cantonese!) I meekly and self-consciously asked for choy sam with fan (rice) and yau gai fan (soy-sauce chicken with rice... and I think I must have upset the cashier. Jane ran screaming into the street.

### **"Noll" seems to be translated into "Lo".**

I guess what happens is Cantonese speakers drop the final "l" sound: This leaves "No". (Chinese does weird things with consonants at the end of words.) Then people do the typical "let's-confuse-l-and-n" thing. That makes for a very interesting "Lo". My 7<sup>th</sup> grade class from hell has coined the very creative (and occasionally à propos) "Miss No".

Customs officials are rotated to different

departments every two years so that they don't become familiar enough with any one area of administration. This way, these powerful civil servants will be less likely to engage in corruption and extortion (or so the government thinks). But it's all who ya know...

The school here has its very own customs official (an old friend of the owner's) who fixes our toilet, replaces toner cartridges, baby-sits alcoholics, and handles "foreign affairs". He's offered to pay for the replacement of my colleague's once beautiful UCSB diploma - his office punched a nasty hole through it to make it conform to their "filing system". (Guess this explains my peculiar dream about my colleague and the Chinese Department of Education.) Walter also offered to hook me up should I find some nice, local gentleman to spend the rest of a Chinese life with. (Jackie Chan's taken. Too bad.)

So I guess that means I'm a foreigner. (Who knew?!) A mother pulled me aside one day after class to stress how important it was for her child to be exposed to "people like me".

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# Dictionaries of Collocations

*A review  
by Mark Krzanowski, London, England.*

1. DICTIONARY OF SELECTED COLLOCATIONS. J. Hill and M. Lewis (eds); LTP. ISBN: 1 899396 55 1

2. THE BPI DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH WORD COMBINATIONS. M. Benson *et al*; John Benjamins Publishing Company. ISBN: 90 272 21677

3. COLLINS COBUILD COLLOCATIONS ON CD-ROM. HarperCollins Publishers. ISBN: 0003711706

**C**ollocation is defined as a unique word partnership; it refers to the restrictions on how words can be used together (e.g. which nouns and verbs go together). Such word partnerships are arbitrary and any language has a distinct set of its own stock of collocations. Some of them may be universal (i.e. they exist in any language), but some may well be present only in a particular language, in which case a learner has to memorise this particular word combination in order to use it effectively.

Nowadays it appears that collocations are gradually beginning to occupy a more prominent place in English Language Teaching, but it is only in the 1990s that collocation has started receiving proper attention in the ELT classroom. The purpose of this article is to review three types of recently published dictionaries of collocations and see to what extent they can help students of English develop learner independence and consolidate their language skills.

The 'Dictionary of Selected Collocations' (DOSC) edited by J. Hill and M. Lewis is aimed at intermediate and advanced learners of English. As suggested in the title, the book offers a selection of the most important collocations in English perhaps on the assumption that students of English should be exposed only to the most productive and the most relevant combinations of English

words. A specimen entry of 'independence' taken from the dictionary looks as follows:

## INDEPENDENCE

**V:** achieve, assert, be given, claim, declare, defend, demand, deprive sb of, fight for, gain, get, lose, preserve, proclaim, safeguard, threaten, value, want, win ~.

**A:** complete, full, hard won, immediate, partial, total ~

**P:** ~ of mind/spirit

This is certainly of enormous help to learners of English, as they can easily see which combinations are customary in English and which ones would simply be translations from their own language that would not be acceptable within the English lexical system. The entry contains most of the typical English collocations associated with the word 'independence'; the entry is not exhaustive, as it does not cover other examples, e.g. 'independence of thought', 'learner independence' (which would obviously be too technical!) or 'The Independence Day'.

DOSC opens with an extensive and very useful 'Introduction' which explains the rationale behind the dictionary and offers guidance to students how to use the book. It is also accompanied by two booklets: one addressed to students (an A-5 insert providing students with 16 specimen activities to practise different types of collocations in different contexts and for different purposes) and one aimed at teachers ('What is collocation and why is it important to learners?'; this A-5 insert has been prepared specially for teachers so that they would put the dictionary to better use in their classes).

'The BPI Dictionary of English Word Combinations' by M. Benson *et al* offers a very large selection of English collocations (18,000 entries and 90,000 collocations). The actual entries are presented in a very user-friendly manner and a learner has no difficulty accessing the word selected. A specimen entry on 'independence' reads as follows:

**Independence** n. 1. to achieve, gain, win ~ from 2. to assert, declare one's ~ from 3. to grant ~ 4. to lose ~ 5. 5. financial, political ~

**T**his is a very useful and practical way of presenting the combinations of this word in English and that brief yet effective principle of organisation underlies any other entry in the dictionary. As already seen in DOSC, the BPI Dictionary is not an exhaustive reference book either. Nevertheless, its coverage of English collocations is much wider than that one in DOSC. According to the publishers, the revised 1997 edition of the dictionary identifies and incorporates collocations that have entered the English language in recent years. This applies in particular to the word combinations linked to computing, and the book indeed covers the new collocations such as 'to browse the web', 'to create a home page' and 'to go online'.

What is important to note, however, is that the BPI dictionary seems to cater primarily for very advanced learners of English. The authors do not definite the linguistic ability of the target audience, but the introduction to the book which is written in a technical style would imply that it would normally be advanced learners who may be able to derive maximum benefit from the dictionary. There is no workbook or separate training leaflet for learners accompanying the publication. Apart from these minor reservations, the dictionary is a very useful selection of relevant collocation data for students of English.

The 'Collins Cobuild Collocations on CD-ROM' dictionary published by HarperCollins offers yet another approach to English collocations. The actual publication is attractively presented on a CD-ROM accompanied by an invaluable 'User's Guide' written in an accessible style.

While DOSC and the BPI Dictionary are classic paper dictionaries limited by the constraints of space, the Collins dictionary makes almost unlimited use of space owing to the potential of the CD-ROM mode. The publication offers about 140,000 collocate pairs which are supported by approximately 2.6 million authentic examples (!) taken from the Bank of English (i.e. a large collection of samples of written and spoken English held on computer for the study of language in use; the collection has been developed at the

University of Birmingham).

While a learner of English may certainly be overwhelmed by this extensive reference work, the clear advantage of the publication is that all collocations can be substantiated by examples in meaningful and memorable contexts. This is particularly useful for the students who may not be able to understand certain details of usage (e.g. the difference between 'independence' and 'freedom' and their respective collocations would certainly be seen more clearly in the HarperCollins publication). It seems that this dictionary can be used effectively by intermediate and advanced learners (provided they have access to a computer and are IT-literate).

**T**he three dictionaries reviewed above are excellent ELT publications in their own right, each of them providing a valuable insight into English collocations. It would be advisable for ELT units in schools and colleges to ensure that they either purchase class sets of the dictionaries (a network licence can be obtained for the HarperCollins publication) and/or make sure that a certain number of the books is kept in their language centres and/or learning resources centres. As fostering learner independence and dictionary training play such an important part in the ELT classroom, it seems logical to conclude that the above publications are ideal for ELT learners and teachers. However, it is crucial to ensure that students of English are first provided with adequate teacher-led training in the classroom before they start 'experimenting' with collocations autonomously.

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# A Few Notes on Vocabulary Teaching

By Paul Pauwels,  
Antwerp, Belgium

1. "Until recently, vocabulary has been relatively neglected as an area of language study."
2. "Oh, no. Not another book on vocabulary. What makes this one any different?"

Ten years make a lot of difference: Ronald Carter's excellent book *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Perspectives*, the subject of the first quote, was indeed one of the first major surveys of the field in 1987. In 1997, Schmitt and McCarthy's *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy* was the latest of a pile of all possible kinds of vocabulary books, hence their disclaimer in the introduction.

Since 1987 vocabulary has become a popular topic in applied linguistics following the Cobuild project, resulting in work like Sinclair (1991) on collocation or Fernando (1996) on idioms; there have been several monographs on vocabulary teaching, like Gairns and Redman (1986), Taylor (1990), and McCarthy (1990). I should not forget to mention some of the new teaching materials such as the CUP's *English Vocabulary in Use* series, the Cobuild *Key Word* series, the Heinemann *Wordbuilder* and books like Hadfield's *Vocabulary Games* (Longman) or Taylor's *Vocabulary in Action* (Prentice Hall). Finally, there has also been research into vocabulary acquisition but here Meara (1989, 1996, 1997) who can be considered as one of the major players on that field is not very happy with the state of the art: to his mind research into the acquisition of foreign or second language vocabulary is still very piecemeal and inconclusive.

It would seem, then, that the lack of knowledge about how we actually acquire second language vocabulary has not stopped people from writing about how vocabulary should be taught. A closer look at some of

the above work shows that advice about teaching is usually based on common-sense beliefs, linguistic knowledge (but usually not psycholinguistic findings) and knowledge of general acquisition principles. One of the earliest types of applied linguistic research into vocabulary focused on frequency; it yielded frequency lists, which were then often used as the basis for determining vocabulary 'levels'. Since the early days, the view on frequency has become much more nuanced: the corpora such frequency lists are based on were often biased

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*It is now commonly acknowledged that it is chunks of up to 4 words which occur more, or less, frequently, rather than individual lexical items.*

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towards written language; frequencies differ widely according to text type and register; beyond the first two thousand words frequency differences are no longer a good guide to the centrality of a word; there are other factors which influence the importance of words for learning/teaching etc.

Moreover, the fact that a lot of the 'words' occurring in such frequency lists were highly polysemous may have invalidated the 'frequency = centrality' idea from the beginning. Starting with the Cobuild project, applied linguistic investigation shifted its attention to topics like collocation and chunking, actually challenging the assumption that vocabulary is about words. It is now commonly acknowledged that it is chunks of up to 4 words which occur more, or less, frequently, rather than individual lexical items. A closer look at recent teaching materials like *English Vocabulary in Use* shows that such ideas have been taken on board. In the books in the series, expressions and phrases are treated as vocabulary to be learnt, to the extent that one sometimes wonders whether what is being learnt can still be called 'vocabulary'.

Another source for ideas about vocabulary teaching have been more general psychological findings about acquisition. The fact that 'deep processing'

increases retention in memory has led some researchers to argue that learning from lists is not effective. On the other hand, there are those who show lists can be useful in early stages of language learning. Gairns and Redman (1986:90) use the claim that "it is generally believed that of the information we forget, 80% is lost within 24 hours of initial learning" to introduce suggestions about 'recycling' after 15 mins, 24 hrs, 1 week etc. They also comment on 'vocabulary load', i.e. the limited number of new words that one can reasonably expect a learner to cope with in one class (below 10, if memory serves me right) - which leads me to suggest that explicit vocabulary teaching in class can never satisfy our students' vocabulary needs.

The failure of vocabulary teaching programmes has led some people to reappraise the premises of such programmes, viz. that there is a fixed vocabulary to teach and a right way to teach it. Concerning the vocabulary, it has been remarked that learners will only really learn those words they feel a need to learn. Concerning strategies, it has been emphasised that one should take into account that learning preferences differ inter-individually, so that what works for one learner does not necessarily work for the other.

It should be clear from the above, that vocabulary research has a long way to go still; and that we have so far only been scratching at the surface. Short of waiting for a boom in psycholinguistic L2 acquisition research - which is unlikely given the complexity of both the topic and the experimental techniques of acquisition research - what can teachers do? Should we just use the present materials and hope for the best? Or, should we abandon the idea that there is something like vocabulary teaching altogether?

For there is yet another problem: as noted by Meara (1996:38) the techniques which have often been used to measure the results of vocabulary teaching/learning (being able to recall a word, being able to fit a word to a translation, being able to fill it in) are inadequate,

because there is so much more one should be able to do with words before it can be said one actually 'knows them' (as can be seen from Carter's (1987:18~) specification of what knowing a word means.

For now, I will leave you with these questions. But I intend to take up the issue again at a later date. I would welcome reactions to the above at [p.pauwels@kvh.be](mailto:p.pauwels@kvh.be)

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# News from ACELS



FELT has very kindly invited ACELS to contribute a regular column to the newsletter and so here is hopefully the first of many! By contributing a regular column, we hope to be able to give you updates and information on work and projects taking place at the Council and also to perhaps interest you in becoming involved in some of the initiatives taking place.... So, here is some information on work currently taking place.

**S**omething new is the ELT Qualifications Recognition Project. Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer, an independent consultant, is leading this project. Broadly speaking, the project is intended to promote teachers' continuous professional development through the development and implementation of a teacher's dossier that will be designed to contain all professional information on the individual teacher. In its initial stage, the aim of the project is to ensure the quality and standards of pre-ELT career awards provided in Ireland before looking at other ELT qualifications.

As you may be aware, a questionnaire went out to schools at the beginning of October asking you for your views, opinions and advice about good ELT practice related to pre-ELT courses provided in Ireland and we are currently in the process of receiving your questionnaires back and collating the data. We also held our first meeting on October 20<sup>th</sup> which was very well attended by teachers, academic managers, school owners, teacher trainers *etc.* in which we were able to ask you your views on a number of issues and receive your feedback.

All data, both from questionnaires and the meeting, are now being analysed by Lynette and the results will be sent out to schools and publicised by FELT in the New Year. Don't forget – the deadline for receipt of questionnaires is December 1<sup>st</sup>, so if you haven't sent in yours yet there is still time, and we will be very happy to receive it – a copy of the questionnaire is enclosed with this Newsletter.

Another ACELS project is TIE (Test of Interactive English) which has been developed by ACELS using the Common European Framework as a basis for competency based assessment. TIE had a high uptake during the summer and is on offer to candidates throughout the winter as well. As a result of feedback from the initial launch, we have made some modifications to TIE, the main one being a differentiation between the Junior TIE (for 12 – 18 years old) and TIE (for 18+). These recent changes have been organisational and practical ones – the tasks that make up the test are the same for both groups. TIE had a table at the MEI/RELSA workshop in September and a lot of interest in the test was shown by people attending this.

Also, in September, we had a social session with TIE examiners and others which was enjoyed by all. Gronia deVerdon Cooney, TIE Chief Examiner, gave some feedback on how TIE had gone over the summer period and how her paper on TIE was received at the IATEFL Testing SIG conference in Madrid in September.

Next March we are planning to organise training sessions for new examiners so if you are interested in becoming a TIE examiner, we would be very interested in hearing from you...

**A**CELS also has been continuing to carry out school inspections using the New Model framework implemented this year. The feedback from this is that the change has been positive and generally well-received.

There are many plans in the pipeline for next year not least bearing in mind that 2001 is the International Year of Languages and there will be events taking place across the world, Europe and in Ireland to celebrate this. More information on this in the next of our regular columns.

In the meantime, if you would like to contact us to learn more about anything mentioned in this column (or on other ELT matters come to that!), we can be contacted at:

**ACELS – The Advisory Council for  
English Language Schools.**  
44 Leeson Place, Dublin 2.

Tel.: (01) 676 7374 Fax: (01) 676 3321  
E-mail: [acels@iol.ie](mailto:acels@iol.ie)

# TIE - The Test of Interactive English



by Gronia  
deVerdon  
Cooney

The Test of Interactive English has been 'under construction' since 1996 – close on four years now. Test development is a long and detailed process; for example, Cambridge first offered the FCE in 1939, and revised it in '74, '84 and '91. The '91 revision project actually hit the streets in '96. This just goes to show that the TIE is not even in its infancy – it is still embryonic!

As most readers will know by now, the TIE was designed to bring together best classroom practice and a publicly available examination. Teachers have been commenting for years that their efforts to introduce communicative activities or task-based learning are thwarted by students' desire to sit formal exams. Exam preparation classes usually have to concentrate on memorising grammar rules, on learning examiners' styles in answering comprehension questions, or on practising writing transactional letters and other specified text types. This is not because all this is what the teachers want to teach; it's because it's what the learners think they ought to be doing.

The TIE does not include any formal test of structural or lexical manipulation, nor does it measure reading or listening comprehension in the traditional manner. However, these skills are not ignored: the preparation for the test involves both intensive and extensive reading and listening, all of which is recorded in the student's log or portfolio. The test designers felt that in these circumstances it was sufficient to employ an indirect but integrated approach.

Preparation for the test can be quite intensive also: candidates need to investigate a point of interest to them, read a book of their choice, and follow a story in the news media. In the test itself they have the opportunity to write about some of their research and to talk about the rest of it with an examiner and another candidate. This is the interactive part of the test, in which candidates and interlocutor engage in a conversation about topics of interest or importance introduced by the candidates themselves.

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*efforts to introduce communicative activities or task-based learning are thwarted by students' desire to sit for formal exams...*

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About a hundred candidates took the TIE last year, and about another hundred and twenty have taken it so far this summer, so we can now begin to evaluate the effects the test and classroom activities are having on each other. In general, students have been extremely well prepared, so it is obvious that teachers are using the format of the test as a hook on which to hang parts of their lessons. Some interesting differences have emerged, however.

In some schools, a whole class reads the same book, while in others students make an individual choice from the school library. These different approaches lead to different in-class activities, all of which promote effective learning and none of which is inherently better than the other, provided the candidates realise that they will not be asked simply to summarise the contents of the book or to provide a 'lit. - crit.' type of answer.

A similar situation is emerging with the Investigation. In some cases the entire class is doing a project on 'Ireland' or 'The difference between Ireland and my country', and they choose a section of this joint project to talk about in the Oral test, whereas in other schools individual candidates or very small

groups investigate different topics. Again, it is not possible to say that one method is better than the other, but it is important to remember that each candidate must have a portfolio or log to bring into both parts of the test.

We do not want a situation in which one candidate who did a group investigation is doing the Oral while the other is doing the Written and they both need to consult the log at the same time. The outcome of this is that while group investigations are fine, individual portfolios are compulsory.

Because we designed the TIE to test the things that teachers want to do in class, we're seeing very few problems in the way students are prepared. The one problem that is arising, however, probably concerns the candidates more than the teacher. In the Written test, candidates are writing their

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*candidates need to investigate a point of interest to them, read a book of their choice, and follow a story in the news media. In the test itself they have the opportunity to write about some of their research and to talk about the rest of it with an examiner and another candidate.*

---

texts without reading the rubric. The result of this is that either: a) they are simply writing a summary of or copying word-for-word from their Book or News Story, or b) they are writing a text that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the task specified. The TIE is not like other examinations: it is not possible to guess what the questions will be! It is absolutely crucial that candidates read the rubric carefully and follow the instructions.

**E**ven so, there will be those who won't read the instructions - we do not want to have to write on a certificate 'The candidate has not fulfilled the requirements of the Test', so it is extremely important that teachers warn students to read all the instructions carefully before they start

writing. They are free to consult their dictionaries if there is anything they do not understand, and the invigilators will be helpful without actually solving their problems.

The future for the TIE is one of intense activity. During the coming winter there will be another examiner training course, and we would like to ask all schools to support their teachers in becoming examiners.

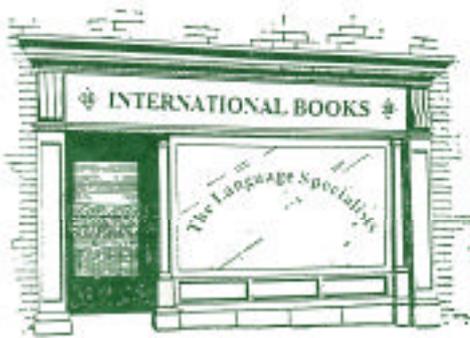
After a twenty-hour training programme (for which there is no charge) new examiners will be invited to work with more experienced examiners in marking Written tests before they are expected to do any Oral testing. The work will be ongoing throughout the year with an extremely busy period in the summer, and we do pay!

There will also be a series of induction sessions to inform teachers about the test and to give them ideas for classroom activities, investigations and suitable books. We would particularly like secondary school teachers who teach EFL in the summer to attend these sessions. We also hope to have a video available early next year to show to both teachers and candidates, so that they will know what to expect when they take the TIE.

The prognosis for the TIE is good. If we continue to get the support of schools, DoSs, teachers as well as agents, group leaders and sponsors, it looks as though it will soon be the examination of choice for students coming to Ireland to learn English.



*TIE is administered by The Advisory Council for English Language Schools Ltd., which operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science.*



# The FELT Newsletter

would like to thank all the sponsors and contributors over the last 2 years. Incredibly, our IATEFL Special Issue - Vol. 2, No. 1: Spring 2000 - had a circulation of 1200 printed copies and a whopping 6000 downloads of the online version!

Thanks to everyone who has helped to make the FELT Newsletter one of the fastest growing ELT publications in the world!



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## Our contributors to date:

Dave Allan - UK	Mark Krzanowski - UK
Tom Bekers - Belgium	Ciarán McCarthy - Ireland
Ellie Boyadzhieva - Bulgaria	Mike McCarthy - UK
Jeremy Castle - Ireland	Kevin McGinley - Ireland
Maurice Claypole - Germany	Alison Medland - UK
Gronia deVerdon Cooney - Ireland	Teresa Murphy - Ireland
Martin Eayrs - UK	Melody Noll - USA
Jane Evans - Ireland	Paul Pauwels - Belgium
Jim Ferguson - Ireland	Mary Shepherd - Ireland
Tania Harada - Ireland	Johnathan Snell - Japan
Sam Holman - Ireland	Scott Thornbury - New Zealand
Jaci Joyce - Ireland	Adrian Underhill - UK



# The FELT Editorial

## Membership for 2001

It has almost come to the end of the year and we must turn our minds to how we will manage FELT in 2001. This last year, we charged IR£25 for joint FELT/IATEFL membership. That was sufficient last December, as the cost of Sterling hadn't begun to soar. When we received the invoice from IATEFL, towards the summer, the cost of Sterling had increased to the point of eating up FELT activity money.

Also, a number of people pointed out that they either didn't want to have to join IATEFL, or that they already were full members and didn't want to become basic members through FELT.

Therefore we propose the following two options for 2001:

- FELT only membership for IR£20
- FELT & IATEFL membership for IR£36

Application forms for 2001 and details will accompany the next edition. If you have alternative suggestions, please let us know as soon as possible.

## Membership Participation & TEFL Accreditation

FELT has in large part been run by 1 person with help from a few others. This can not continue indefinitely, and it is not appropriate for a membership association.

In every Editorial I write a few moaning lines about the fact that FELT members aren't submitting anything for the Newsletter. I have been begging, borrowing and stealing articles from anywhere and everywhere I can get them.

At last a few articles and activities have arrived from members in Ireland - some appear in this edition and some will appear in the forthcoming winter edition. Sincerest thanks go to those people. Shame on those who have not done anything yet - FELT is a voluntary membership organisation. If it is to have any value as a "Forum" then it must have an active membership which airs its opinions, discusses the issues of the day

and contributes to the future of English language teaching in Ireland.

FELT has a representative on the board of ACELS who is there to voice *your* concerns at industry level. We need to make opportunities to create a real Forum, rather than the virtual Forum that currently exists, so that all teaching EFL can air their view on pertinent matters.

In particular, this is so in the case of the TEFL Qualifications Recognition Project that is underway. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a confidential questionnaire which all members are asked to fill out and return to ACELS (not FELT).

## Forthcoming Events & Activities!

This past year, FELT has not been able to organise any events for members. This has mainly been because the rising cost of Sterling ate up the additional funds.

We haven't been sitting idly by, though, oh no! We have been using the time to get in contact with various people and organisations in order to help ensure that real sessions will happen in 2001.

- FELT is delighted to announce that there will be an **ELT Authors' Conference** in June 2001 in association with ACELS and a number of large international publishers - this will be something like the ELTAC that took place in UCD in 1998. More details later...

- FELT was invited to nominate a member of a new UCLES Consultative committee for Ireland. This committee has committed itself to providing a number of sessions for those teaching FCE, CAE and Proficiency examination courses. Details of these seminars will appear in the next Newsletter.

## We've done our bit - now what about you?

- Sessions by us for us - *local talent* - this should help create events outside Dublin too. Make a positive step - start talking to your colleagues, generating ideas and let's start talking as a profession - let's realise the Forum for English Language Teachers. Of course, this depends on someone making a start. Doesn't it? *I am talking to you.*

# € - Day:

## 40 Days to D-Day

by Ciarán McCarthy

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002 is E-Day - Euro notes and coins will come in to circulation. So, what's this got to do with ELT? Well, not a lot, really, except that you and a good proportion of your students will undergo this confusing changeover, unless you're teaching in Northern Ireland. Even then, it makes for a good old fashioned task-based approach project.



Following the smooth, successful launch of the Euro in non-cash form on 1st January 1999, preparations are well advanced for the arrival of Euro cash in 2002. The challenge facing the government, the banks, post offices, shops and you and me, and a few thousand EFL students is replacing IR£130 million worth of Irish coins and IR£3 billion worth of Irish notes in a very very very short period of time. Not only this, though, ATMs (drink-links), bank accounts accounts, your tax affairs and your own personal frames of reference will all need to be converted to the new currency.

**A**fter the non-event that was the Y2K bug, there lurks a miniature headache in waiting - God help you if you are using Windows 95, you're onto a loser there, (and you always were). Sure... you can get a patch to let you display the Euro symbol, but that's it. The second revision of Windows '98 can handle the Euro and make it the default currency, as can Windows 2000. Mac users will need to upgrade to System 8.5 or later. Err, Linux - you're on your own for now.

From January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 (E-Day) all Irish pound notes and coins must be replaced by retailers with Euro notes and coins - you can ask for your change in pounds, but it will come back

in Euro and Cents no matter how hard you plead. So where's the beef? Well, there will be confusion - the rip-off merchants will try it on, no doubt, so it's as well to be prepared and begin to understand right now:

- Learn how much the Euro is worth (1 Euro is IR£0.787564 - that is, just under 79p. The rule-of-thumb merchants among you will figure out that 20% is the amount to drop from Euro prices in order to get a rough idea of how much that Kit-Kat used to cost in old pence).
- Get to know what Euro and Cents look like. The notes will be identical all over Europe. The coins will have national symbols on the reverse side, (it's a harp here, who would have thought?), but can be used anywhere in the Euro-Zone, regardless of their country of origin (just like the local variations in the Sterling pound coins).
- Use up that pennies jar - there's no juice in having half-a-tonne of Irish coins, when the pint is priced in Euro. Use up coins, rather than hoard them.
- When the Euro actually arrive into your hands, (looks like a gramatical error, doesn't it? Think about it...) use up any Pounds first, then use the Euro.

I'm not being cryptic, the plural of Euro is "Euro" (no 's' - get it?). And, yes, grammat-ical was misspelled. Still, no point in being prescriptive about language, is there...



*You're not likely to see many of these - the €500 note will be used mostly for inter-bank transfers*

**Period of Dual Circulation  
(i.e. Institutionalised Confusion)**

The EU Council Regulation on the introduction of the single currency allows for a maximum period of dual circulation of national and Euro currency of six months from E-Day, with each Member State allowed to shorten this period.

**I**n this period, both IR£ and Euro will circulate (you'd better wear something with at least two pockets) but change will always be given to you in Euro. The Irish Government has opted to remove "Legal Tender" status from the Irish Pound at midnight on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2002. The confusion will then subside dramatically, as the situation becomes suddenly quite simple. It is D-Day - "D" is for dust, done, disappeared, dead, deceased, dispensed with, discontinued, defunked, debunked, dropped, denationalised, maybe even plain Deutschmarkified.



Then the IR£ is a thing of the past; it simply can not be used; the proceeds of that bank robbery you buried just outside Borris-in-Ossary are worthless; and Séamus in the dirty old Jet petrol station on the Limerick Rd. will finally replace that cash register with the crank-handle on the side and the charming little enamelled figures that pop up when he turns the crank handle - ching-ching. With his new state-of-the-art EPOS System (no ching-ching here, this sleek baby goes bloop as you wave your Kit-Kat in its general direction) he'll continue to charge about 13 cents (that's 10.4 old pence to you and me) per litre more than the nice clean Statoil service station half-a-mile down the road - ah, consistency in a world gone mad!

Quite a few idioms and expressions will bite

the dust at the stroke of midnight on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2002 too, as Euro-speak takes over, (though the older forms may remain as archaisms in Northern Ireland). For example:

- I've got to spend a cent
- To be a cent-pincher
- A cent for your thoughts
- In for a cent, in for a Euro
- To turn up like a bad (s)cent  
(Hey, maybe this one works...)
- Those things are ten a cent  
(In the US they are a dime a dozen)
- Look after the cents and the Euro will look after themselves... *ok, enough.*

**N**onetheless, the Central Bank of Ireland will continue indefinitely to give value in Euro for Irish pounds and coins - just show up on Dame St. in Dublin with your piggy-bank and they'll do the business for you. Incidentally, if you have foreign currency from any of the other Euro-Zone countries left over from your hollers right now, the Central Bank will exchange them for Pounds (or, in time, Euro) without charging any commission.

**So what will actually happen?**

From E-Day ATMs will commence dispensing Euro notes - probably ₤10 and ₤20 notes in the initial stages. This will ensure that sufficient

low-value Euro notes come quickly into mass circulation. It will also reduce the amount of change that retailers must return to customers at the point-of-sale and thus reduce their requirement to be furnished with supplies of the new currency in advance of E-Day (known as 'frontloading').

**B**oth the European Central Bank and the EU Council of Finance Ministers have decided that banks may be frontloaded with Euro notes and coins, in order to ensure that sufficient quantities of the new currency are in circulation in the critical first days of January 2002. To this end, the production of the new currency commenced in September 1999. The Central Bank will also continue to

put Irish currency of all denominations into circulation until the end of 2001, thank God - let's face it, there wouldn't be any IR£5 notes left by then, given just how tatty they look right now.

From E-Day onwards, shops, garages and so on will charge customers in Euro only. While they will accept Irish pound notes and coins until the end of the dual circulation period, change will be tendered in Euro only. Irish currency will not be accepted after the end of the dual circulation period.

### The Challenge for You

For the general body of consumers (*i.e.* you) E-Day will represent the most tangible step in the completion of Economic and Monetary Union. The ultimate success of the changeover will be dependant on everyone in the Euro-Zone playing their part - by learning how much the Euro is worth (1Euro is IR£0.787564) and by using Euro price displays to build a scale of values in the new currency. In addition, the withdrawal of the Irish currency will be greatly assisted through actually using up any hoarded coins and continuing to put coins to use between now and E-Day rather than leaving them aside.

Implementation of the changeover is being supported by a public information campaign developed by the Euro Changeover Board of Ireland in consultation with representatives of the banks, pension companies, retailers and so on. You know - the Paul McGrath thing on TV.... Furthermore, banks and



building societies will continue to provide relevant information to their staff, retailers, customers and to schools over the next year and a half. The Irish Banks' Information Service (IBIS) provides a quarterly educational newsletter, available free to teachers. They can be contacted at Nassau House, Nassau St., Dublin 2.

While E-Day and the replacement of Irish currency with Euro cash will represent the final and most visible step in the changeover to the single currency, it will also be an unprecedented logistical challenge for all concerned. It will involve changing not only the currency used by all economic players, but also that used every day by over three-and-a-half million people in Ireland and another 280 million residents across the Euro-Zone. Perhaps it's time to go out and buy that flashy Euro calculator that you've always dreamt of - they cost all of IR£8 (≈10.16).

The Euro Changeover Board of Ireland is happy to provide detailed information on the changeover to the Euro. You can contact them at:

15 Lower Hatch St., Dublin 2

LoCall: 1890 20 10 50

Fax: 01 - 639 6201

e-mail:

[ecbi@finance.irlgov.ie](mailto:ecbi@finance.irlgov.ie)



### ✕ Denominations:

Notes: ✕5, ✕10, ✕20, ✕50, ✕100, ✕200, ✕500

Coins: ✕2, ✕1, 50c, 20c, 10c, 5c, 2c, 1c

### Useful Euro-Changeover Websites:

<http://www.euro.ie>

The Irish Government website

<http://www.irlgov.ie/ecbi-euro/school.htm>

An interactive site for students

<http://www.irlgov.ie/ecbi-euro/ncpeuro.htm>

A substantial list of Euro-changeover websites

<http://www.ibis.ie>

The Irish Banks' Information Service

### ©2000 Ciarán McCarthy

Ciarán McCarthy is an EFL teacher and Manager at the Salesian English Language Centre in Celbridge, Co.Kildare. A Linguistics graduate of UCD, he completed an M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics at Trinity College in 1996. He is currently reading part-time for an M.Sc. in Education & Training Management in DCU. Needless to say, he is an avid supporter of the Euro.



# Millennium Wisdom

Some genuinely silly things to say to your class

A bus station is where a bus stops.  
A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a work-station...

Is it true that cannibals don't eat clowns because they taste funny?

Clones are people two.

If quitters never win, and winners never quit, what fool came up with, "Quit while you're ahead"?

Do Lipton employees take coffee breaks?

I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older, then it dawned on me. They were cramming for their finals.

I thought about how mothers feed their babies with little tiny spoons and forks, so I wonder what Chinese mothers use. Toothpicks?

How much deeper would oceans be if sponges didn't live there?

If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

Think, "honk" if you're telepathic.

How come you don't ever hear about grunted employees? And who has been dissing them anyhow?

Why don't they just make mouse-flavoured cat food?

Why do they sterilise needles for lethal injections?

Isn't Disney World a people trap operated by a mouse?

Whose cruel idea was it for the word "lisp" to have an "s" in it?

Since light travels faster than sound, isn't that why some people appear bright until you hear them speak?

How come abbreviated is such a long word?

Since Americans throw rice at weddings, do Asians throw hamburgers?

What hair colour do they put on the driver's licenses of bald men?

## Submission Guidelines & How to Contact FELT

**S**ubmissions for the Newsletter are always welcome and badly needed. So, if you're ready, willing and able..

\* By E-mail to: [feltireland@hotmail.com](mailto:feltireland@hotmail.com)

\* By Post to: FELT Ireland,  
c/o 102 Meadow Park, Churchtown,  
Dublin 14, Ireland.

We accept the following, among numerous other things, for our newsletter: theoretical articles, practical reports, jokes, brain-teasers, news, opinions, letters to the Editor, class-plans, cartoons, advertisements, questions, answers, book-reviews, reports on life teaching abroad, amusing stories about your students or trainees and so on... pretty much anything, really.

Please do not send e-mail submissions as Microsoft Word Documents (.doc) as they may carry macro-viruses; the Text-Only (.txt) format or RTF are the

safest. If you are using Word, press F12 and select 'Text-Only' or 'Rich Text Format' as the file type. Nonetheless, use your virus checker...All Macintosh formats are fine!

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