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FEATURE

# PROMOTING MORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ADVENTIST ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. English is interwoven with all layers of the socio-economic life. This fact is globally true in travel, business, ministry, education, and many other domains. No one can deny the importance of English today. With the heritage of the Spirit of Prophecy available primarily in English, the Adventist Church has an even better reason to be in the frontline of promoting English language learning and teaching. This paper discusses the role of English in today's Adventist world. It proposes some paths to meet the English teaching and learning needs to equip better the Adventist people for the mission and for their lives in the 21st century. These include offering more TESOL programs, using technology more effectively to make English learning more accessible, and the design of Bible-based instructional materials or materials aligned with the philosophy of Adventist education.

**Keywords**: Adventist, English as a second language, TESOL, English teaching, English learning, mission

# Introduction

It is true that English is now the lingua franca of the global village. From air traffic control to international Christian ministries, from publication to entertainment, from technology to the Spirit of Prophecy, English is now a predominant language (Wa-Mbaleka, 2015). Today, anyone with limited English proficiency can easily feel left out, whether or not this feeling is warranted.

English language learning and teaching (ELT) must now come even closer to the center stage around the world.

The work in the Adventist world may not offer the same competitive financial benefits that other employment opportunities offer. Maybe English in the Adventist world does not give any guarantee for a successful life from the financial standpoint. No matter the way anyone considers English, however, no one doubts the important role English plays today in the world in general. Adventists are part of the world in general although they are called not to be of this world (John 17:14-19). As long as they are still in this world, they too can embrace the different opportunities that English brings to the world.

Through the writings of Ellen White and given that the Adventist Church's headquarters is in the United States, Adventists are bound to constantly utilize English. Church leaders are expected to communicate in English for issues from different parts of the world to be more effectively conveyed and addressed. Additionally, in some countries around the world, Christians are not allowed to share the Gospel. One of the rarest tools to use to penetrate such countries is to go as an English instructor. Unfortunately, this path has not probably been explored to the fullest (Pennycook, 2009). This is partially due to the fact that we have quite few institutions offering Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs. Additionally, fewer are Bible programs that integrate TESOL courses as part of the training of Adventist missionaries.

The potential of English in mission is under-discussed, despite all its potential. This paper discusses the importance of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It then moves into practical approaches that can be used for the enhancement of ELT in Adventist organizations. It addresses the problem of accessibility as well.

# Importance of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

It looks like major religious groups in this world have each one language with which they identify. The Catholic Church identifies with Latin. The moment anyone mentions Latin, most people's minds go to Rome. Hindus are known to use the Hindu language. The moment one is connected to Islam, the person is associated with Arabic. When considering the Protestant denominations in general, it is evident that English played an important role in the migration of the persecuted Christians of Europe (Stobaugh, 2012). The Adventist Church has strong roots in this history (White, 2011). No wonder why the Adventist Church leadership heavily depends on English.

#### **English: The Language of the Church**

In considering the prophetic origins and the prophetic publication contribution, there is no doubt that the Adventist Church's official language is English. All the original manuscripts of the Spirit of Prophecy were written and initially published in English. Although some translations have been made in a large number of languages (especially for the books Great Controversy, Desire of Ages, and Steps to Christ), most of Ellen White's writings have not yet been translated in other languages. They are still accessible solely in English. Accessing the complete messages of the Spirit of Prophecy, therefore, requires people to know English.

The lack of translation of the Spirit of Prophecy in the thousands of languages of the world is certainly a disadvantage for God's children (Thomas, 2017) as they prepare for the Second Coming. Additionally, given the richness that the Spirit of Prophecy provides to the study of the Bible, God's children are obviously missing out on special blessings that would have positively affected their spiritual lives. In fact, a great wealth of knowledge from the Spirit of Prophecy in other languages can have a much greater impact on the spreading of the Gospel in the Adventist Church than it currently does.

The Adventist Church is a global church with its representation in more than 120 countries worldwide. The world church administration heavily relies on English for all major events, meetings, and conferences. It is possible for some important issues to be left unaddressed, unheard of, or misinterpreted due to lack of proficient English communication skills of some church leaders from different parts of the world where English is not spoken. In fact, some areas of the world may remain unreached today due to the limited English proficiency demonstrated in the given countries.

## English as a Tool for Reaching the Hard-to-Reach

Some Baptist churches have come to realize that English is a "visa" to hardto-reach countries. When they send their pastors to the seminary for theological training, they require them to complete some English-teaching courses in addition to their regular seminary courses. When such seminary graduates are sent to a non-Christian country, they are sent primarily as English teachers; hence, the concept of "teaching English as a missionary language" (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003, p. 337). They volunteer to teach English free of charge in non-Christian countries. This volunteerism gives an easier access to the spreading of the Gospel in those countries. Once in the country, these ministers of the Gospel use Christian literature to teach English. The light thus starts shining in some of darkest places of this world.

In the mid-1900s, one of the tools that successfully introduced the Adventist message in Asia is said to have been the English language centers that were opened in different Asian cities. Early missionaries described how highly welcome these centers were in Asia and how they played an important role in entering new territories never entered before. Many Adventist churches today can easily trace their roots to the early work of those English centers. Yet, back then, English was not as much in demand as it is today.

Today, ELT is becoming more and more in demand in countries where it used to be unpopular. This is true not only among school age and university students, but even among professionals. Publications in different fields, scholarly research studies, and other such materials are written in English. So, in order to keep up with the updates and advancements in their fields, professionals find it necessary to learn English (Chen, 2014; Hillman, 2015). This is in addition to the pursuit of different countries to maintain a respected status in the global world (Hillman, 2015; Regalado & Calica, 2013). Therefore, there is a strong reason to open newer and better English centers today, as part of the strategy put forward for other centers of influence. Indeed, church leaders should "let forces be set at work to clear new ground, to establish new centers of influence wherever an opening can be found. [They need to] rally workers who possess true missionary zeal, and let them go forth to diffuse light and knowledge" of Jesus Christ (White, 1925, p. 183). English may just be one of the best tools the Church can use to establish new centers of influence.

Vigilance plays a vital role in reaching the unreached. That is, although Adventists should be as careful as possible, they should also keep their eyes open for opportunities to do mission. They have to be proactive. Hence, there is a need to make disciples through English teaching and learning. In addition, when new centers are established for English teaching, optimal teaching and learning should also be ensured (Singh, 2009). These centers are to be highly informative and welcoming as well as focused on the goal of redeeming souls for God's Kingdom.

The list of benefits presented above about the spread and use of English is not exhaustive. Yet, from these benefits alone, it is clear that much more investment in ELT needs to be put in place in the Adventist world. Speeding up the work that the Adventist Church wants to accomplish through its mission depends considerably on a more intentional vision for ELT in and by Adventist institutions and organizations.

## Some Practical Paths for Better ELT in the Adventist World

Together with its educational institutions and other church organizations, the Adventist Church has some great potential in improving ELT for the betterment of its services and ministry. In addition to depending first and foremost on the

leading of the Holy Spirit, all depends on a new perspective and new vision of providing more and better opportunities and resources in ELT planning. Opportunities may be plentiful but resources are limited. Where resources may be plentiful, perhaps the vision is missing. A number of major opportunities or avenues are presented here to begin the discussion about enhancing ELT in the Adventist world.

#### **Offering Full Degrees in TESOL**

At the time this article was written, the Adventist Church had a highly limited number of higher education institutions that were offering full graduate or doctoral programs in TESOL. This fact explains why the Church has a highly limited number of TESOL experts, most of whom probably graduated from non-Adventist institutions. The few TESOL courses and doctoral programs that are available today in Adventist schools are degrees offered in education with specialization or cognate in TESOL. This is, for instance, the case of Advanced International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, Asia-Pacific International University in Thailand, Antillean Adventist University in Puerto Rico, and Southwestern Adventist University in the United States of America. Those with an actual master's degree in English (or English education) train students in teaching English to native speakers of English, which is not necessarily fit for the needs of students who learn English as an additional language. This is the case, for instance, of Andrews University and La Sierra University in the United States of America, and Bugema University in Uganda.

The fact that a number of Adventist universities are offering some English and some TESOL courses means that the Church has some TESOL experts. Unfortunately, these experts are scattered all around the world. The Church may need to find a way to bring them together to create and launch full degree programs in TESOL to prepare TESOL experts who can disseminate the knowledge needed to effectively teach English in Church schools all around the world.

As was already mentioned above, the Adventist Church is not the only denomination that employs English as a means of evangelism. The Church's production of more TESOL experts may make a significant difference. It can put the Adventist Church a step ahead of other denominations that send English teachers who are not sufficiently trained to teach the language (Smith, 2015). For instance, the use of Christian literature, more specifically the Bible, in teaching language is not as easy as people think it is. It needs TESOL experts to deliver the right language learning principles (Burgos, 2017). It also takes TESOL experts to train missionaries to do the same.

As long as each higher education institutions work individually without collaborating with other Adventist institutions, a golden opportunity for synergy continues to be lost. With so great an opportunity that English is offering to the world today and so much need for ELT experts, the Church can no longer afford to allow Adventist institutions to offer TESOL degrees as some type of addendum to their regular programs. More coordinated effort must be put in place where TESOL experts can bring together their expertise and develop additional full TESOL programs.

## **Offering Online TESOL Training**

Although Adventist educational leaders may be some of the slowest ones in embracing online education, more and more progress is being made today. Most of the North-American Adventist universities now offer online courses. This trend is spreading in Asia, Central and Latin America, and even some discussions are ongoing about online education in some African institutions. Online education works quite well for adult learners who are mature enough to be responsible. Additionally, it works well for theoretical courses that rely more on words rather than formulae and calculations. TESOL courses theoretically fit well for online education.

A number of Adventist missionaries in foreign lands have understood the importance of ELT in their ministry. It is common to receive some of their requests for online TESOL courses that can provide them just some solid foundation needed to use ELT to reach non-Christians. Offering online TESOL certificates could just be one of the best ways to make TESOL training accessible to Adventist educators worldwide, given that Adventist TESOL experts are both limited in number and scattered around the world.

For quality online TESOL programs to be offered, experts in online education must be involved. Additionally, TESOL experts who design these online programs must receive appropriate training in online course design and delivery (Wa-Mbaleka, 2013). Although the Church probably has a highly limited number of experts in online education, it does have some today. With the ongoing work of Herbert Fletcher University of the Inter-American Division today, for instance, more and more experts in online education will soon be available in Church institutions. This university is currently offering a master's degree in online instructional design.

With internet accessibility available all over the world today, online education may be one of the best options to deliver education (Kazemi & Narafshan, 2014; Knutzen & Kennedy, 2012) to the hundreds of thousands of potential Adventist learners. From the mountains of Asia to the heart of Africa, millions of people can now access the internet 24 hours on portable devices. While these devices are still

underutilized in delivering the three angels' message to the world, the internet is far from being fully used for Adventist educational purposes. Although it must be done with special care, online education through which TESOL programs must be delivered needs to move to the center stage in the discussion of the future direction of Adventist education.

#### **TESOL** as a Missionary Passport to Kachru's Expanding Circle

One of the best classifications of English regions of the world is the one about the three circles (Kachru, 1985, 1990; Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2009), where native speakers of English are classified in what Kachru calls Inner Circle. This circle is made of countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, where most people have English as their mother tongue. ELT in these countries is a lot more effective because of the instructional resources and TESOL experts that are available there. In fact, because the Inner Circle provides an excellent setting for English language learners to practice English, it is easier for them to learn English more effectively. Additionally, Christian literature is already mainly spread in many of the countries in the Inner Circle.

Next is what Kachru refers to as Outer Circle. It is between the Inner Circle and the Expanding Circle. It is made of countries that were former colonies of English-speaking countries. They continue to hold English as their official language, even long after their access to independence. People in this circle use English as an additional language. Some of them may, in fact, use English as their mother tongue. Because of their linguistic diversity, however, they face some English issues that they must regularly deal with. For instance, this is the case of the Philippines, Nigeria, Belize, India, Jamaica, Kenya, and Singapore. These countries are a great place to train missionary English teachers because, unlike most countries in the Inner Circle, these countries provide more potential for training English language teaching missionaries at a more affordable cost.

In the last circle, Kachru classifies countries where English is hardly spoken as Expanding Circle. Countries in this circle include several countries such as Myanmar, Burundi, Mexico, China, Brazil, Rusia, and Iraq. For countries in the Expanding Circle, it is not common for someone to hear English easily being spoken on the street, at church or school, unless it is some kind of international program, institution, or church. These areas need extensive effort in ELT. Not only are the instructional resources unavailable, TESOL experts are almost inexistent in these places. It is common to have English language teachers in Adventist academies in these countries who can hardly hold a conversation in English. ELT in the Expanding Circle is commonly focused on rote memorization and repetition of vocabulary lists and grammar rules. Even after several years of English language learning in these settings, students can hardly understand what a native speaker is talking about.

Interestingly enough, many of the countries with the least Christianity presence is found in this circle. Countries with major concentration of Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus are in the Expanding Circle. Christianity is not welcome in some of these countries. ELT can be one of the best ways to penetrate such countries (Johnston, 2017; Pennycook, 2009; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Pennycook & Makoni, 2005; Varghese & Johnston, 2007). This is an opportunity worth considering with seriousness in the planning of the Adventist mission.

From this discussion on Kachru's classification, three major recommendations can be made. First, Adventists living in the Inner Circle need to intentionally plan the production of Bible-based ESL and EFL instructional materials. Such materials can then be used to teach English in the Expanding Circle. Adventists in the Outer Circle should create TESOL training centers that are geared to mission. Funds should be allocated to specifically train missionaries who would use TESOL as a tool for evangelism. In the Expanding Circle, church leaders need to create some sort of ESL centers of influence. English language teaching must now become an important part of the centers influence.

#### United in Diversity

It is no longer a secret that the world has become a global village, where the East and the West meet (Min, 2012). With technological advancement that has boomed over the past couple of decades or so, people are constantly connected around the world. In the early days of the missionary work in Africa, American missionaries took months to finally reach their mission fields. The trip took the same length of time for them to go on furlough. Letters took several months, if not over a year, to get to the recipients. Today, moving between continents takes only a few hours. People can talk to one other from virtually every point of Planet Earth. Text messaging, emailing, tweeting, skyping, and Facebooking are just a few of the tools on a long list of options available for communication.

Many of these technological tools that make the world so interconnected are built primarily in English. They too contribute to the intangible need for increase in ELT opportunities. Additionally, technology has made people meet others from a large variety of cultural backgrounds. While everyone is progressively a member of the global village, nations and tribes of the world still have their own culture that mark their unique identity. Adventists are, therefore, called to live united in diversity (White, 2010).

The role that technology plays in accomplishing this goal of staying united in diversity cannot be undervalued. Technology gets everyone knitted and connected. Through technology, the members of the Church may learn about each other's culture. This knowledge consequently brings about tolerance, sensitivity, and acceptance, consequently promoting unity in diversity. Isa 56:6-8 says,

Also, the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered".

Perhaps, God is using technology to gather His people from all corners of the world.

When people learn another language, they learn another culture (Brown, 2014; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). TESOL experts are trained in integrating cultural diversity into ELT. They are, therefore, fairly well equipped in training Adventist students in unity in diversity. Adventists can no longer be educated as if they exist in a cocoon. They are part of the global village. They must be trained in living peacefully and harmoniously in a world that is beyond their political and cultural borders. This same need is no different from the one found with international missionaries today. International missionaries must learn to adapt to new cultures where they are assigned to serve. This way, they can communicate their message to different people groups through languages that are acceptable in the peoples' cultures and faithful to the biblical principles at the same time. Failure to do this may certainly lead to failure in mission (Doss, 2008). Effective ELT, therefore, must include cultural diversity even though everyone believes that Adventists must share the same Adventist culture (Dybdahl, 1999). It must also include reflective teaching to allow more continuous improvement (Farrell, 2016; Yang, 2014; Yazan, 2015).

#### More Investment in Newer Technology

For the sake of efficiency and effectiveness in ELT, Adventists must reconsider how they utilize instructional technology, as it plays an important role (Kazemi & Narafshan, 2014; Mayora, 2006; Nushi & Eqbali, 2017; Solano, Cabrera, Ulehlova, & Espinoza, 2017). The University of Montemorellos in Mexico, together with a few others in the United States, is perhaps one of the best in developing new technology extensively for Bible study and educational purposes. It is not uncommon to see old technologies still dominating instructions in Adventist schools. It is no exaggeration that Adventist schools do not usually take the lead in the implementation of innovative instructional technology. It is not an overstatement that technology is underutilized in Adventist schools, whether it is because of limited sources, lack of willingness to invest in technology, negative view towards technology, or simply because of lack of expertise in educational technology. No wonder Jesus said that "the children of

this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (Luke 16:8) because they make use of every tool at their disposal to advance their cause.

Adventists should be more aggressive than passive in integrating technology in education. If the world is using technology to spread violence, immorality, hate, and all other forms of evil, the Adventist Church should counter by using technology to promote the redemptive purpose of education and thus spread the hope and the love of Jesus. Whatever the reasons may be for their underutilization of technology, Adventist schools should start reconsidering this issue and move positively towards this direction. They can start by utilizing technology in ELT.

Many social media today are not yet well integrated in ELT. "Web 2.0 technologies are presenting new opportunities for developing diverse online learning environments and enhancing interactivity, participation and feedback between students, their peer groups and teachers" (Harrison & Thomas, 2009, p. 109). The kind of collaboration, sharing, and instant interaction that social media brings to the users provide an important opportunity for ELT.

With the introduction of Apple products and smartphones, many applications have been developed for different purposes, including those designed for second language learning purposes (Small, 2014). Duolingo is one such application (Nushi & Eqbali, 2017). People are spending several hours today in playing games offered through thousands of downloadable applications. While some ELT applications have been designed, these are not yet well integrated in ELT in Adventist education. In fact, few, if any, are the ELT applications that Adventist scholars/experts have developed. If such applications are designed by Adventists, they could not only be a powerful vehicle for the integration of faith and learning, but also to spread the Gospel to places where the Gospel has not yet reached.

Today, a number of applications of the Spirit of Prophecy are available. Some of them are even free of charge. Since the Adventist Church is focused on spreading the Gospel as effectively and efficiently as possible, more investment into educational applications based on Bible truths could provide an important avenue to that end. While used as a vehicle to deliver English instruction, Adventist apps could be used to deliver the Gospel, packaged in English language learning lessons.

Technology is available today that can deliver content on regular cell phones with extremely minimal cost. The existing telephony network is used to add a component that can deliver short videos (for instance, 5 minutes each) or audios, or texts on mobile phones. Proper collaboration with mobile telephone companies could provide an opportunity to deliver such short contents for both ELT and Gospel messages.

If Adventists want to use what may now be considered a traditional technological strategy, they could develop an online repository of ELT lessons

that integrate video, audio, still graphics, and text to make content available online. Such a repository could be used by English teachers, learners, or even Church employees who would like to teach or learn English by themselves.

Technology has the potential of making teaching easier for instructors, especially for Adventist English teachers. There are varied ways of integrating new methods to technology. The Great Master Teacher, in Bible times, taught objects lessons from nature. Today, clips from National Geographical Channel can be sources of materials to teach the love God has for His creation. Another possibility is the creation of online journal dialogues for communicative practice while integrating content from to the Word of God.

Last, because of so much attention on and weight of multimedia, it looks more and more necessary to develop more ELT multimedia (Mayora, 2006). Short films and interactive multimedia that make English learners play a more interactive role can make English language learning more enjoyable for the younger generation. Yet, the attempts to use the abovementioned technological tools may lead to failure if English language learners and teachers lack the needed knowledge. Many people, especially those who existed long before the digital age, expressed the challenges they encountered in using technology (Piccialli & Chianese, 2016). This concern calls for the provision of trainings on the use of technology for educational purposes. TESOL experts may not necessarily have needed skills in producing such materials. They need to partner with multimedia experts or companies. The church has to be intentional in allocating budget for these purposes because the results are promising.

# **Designing Bible-Based ELT and ESL Materials**

The last but definitely the most important aspect of the paradigm shift needed in ELT in Adventist education, is the design of Bible-based ELT and ESL materials. Bible-based instructional materials are almost non-existent, at least from the Adventist perspective. Again, this is additional evidence that TESOL experts are scattered around the world and are, therefore, not able to bring their expertise together to develop Bible-based materials. There may already be some materials for learning or teaching English to native speakers. Little is known, at least from the global perspective, about Bible-based instructional materials for students learning English as an additional language.

Among the very few available Bible-based ELT and ESL materials is REBIRTH, an online resource that assists teachers of different subjects, including English, in integrating faith and learning. This resource, however, is not designed primarily for ELT. Therefore, it may not completely meet the language needs of ESL and EFL students. This means that Adventist TESOL experts should muster

their creativity and put together a decided and concerted effort in developing Bible-based ELT resources.

Adventists should no longer continue to teach English from materials designed from secular perspectives. Using a new bottle or label with the old wine will not change the old wine into new. Adventist education should not simply be a label placed on secular materials. This calls for some radical measures in designing ELT and TESOL materials from the Adventist perspective. TESOL materials are needed that integrate faith and learning.

#### Conclusion

Christ's ambassadors here on earth must bear in mind that language teaching and learning can be intricate and complicated. God has given them a promise that His strength is sufficient in this process. When God created this world, He used language (Kingston, 2017). Language, therefore, is for the enhancement of His mission and ministry here on earth. Teaching English can help prepare souls for service here on earth as well as for the Heavenly Kingdom.

Today, more than ever before, English offers an important opportunity to spread the Gospel and connect Adventists. Technological advancement has made this opportunity even more exciting. Adventist educators have not yet fully embraced the benefits that English brings. It is time TESOL experts together with Adventist educational leaders begin some important discussion on a new paradigm shift in the ELT in Adventist schools and organizations. More collaboration is needed among TESOL experts, Adventist schools, and between TESOL and technology experts to design ELT materials that meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Additionally, the Adventist Church needs to consider the important potential that English offers in reaching hard-to-reach places, regions, or countries. More TESOL programs must be offered in Adventist higher education institutions to produce many more TESOL experts. More intentional effort must be made to promote ELT in all Adventist schools and organizations. Bible training centers should also integrate ELT courses in their programs.

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