

Interviewer and Interviewee: MEXTESOL and You

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Introduction

A questionnaire can be viewed as an interview in written form. The two types of discourse are so closely related that an oral interviewer, while conducting an interview, often follows or fills in the answers to a previously written questionnaire. This is sometimes called the 'structured interview'.

As in previous years, 1983 National Convention-goers were given questionnaires, or "evaluation forms," to be answered anonymously and returned to an even more anonymous and impersonal 'interviewer'.

I have selected 15 responses and ventured some speculative interpretation of them. To make the texts somewhat more readable outside of the context of the sequenced, fill-in-the-blanks format (see Appendix), I have taken the stylistic liberty of rephrasing five 'questions'. For example, the questionnaire literally states:

1. - My profession is: English teacher ___ linguist ___
 Administrator ___ - Publisher's representative ___
 Other _____

I would restate it more economically: "What's your profession?"

The slight differences (of minimal importance) can be easily observed by comparing my questions with the original (Appendix).

As far as the responses go, I have strictly respected the originals, word for word, comma for comma.

The text can be read as a 'collage' interview. Neither the whole nor its components are in any way, of course, representative of the consensus of opinion expressed at the Convention nor do the texts chosen profile a typical convention-goer. This kind of statistical analysis is scheduled to appear in the next issue of the MEX-
TESOL Newsletter. I have deliberately selected extreme atypical responses and will later explain why.

The Responses

- I-1¹: What did you think of the services provided by MEXTESOL organizers and assistants?
- CG-1²: Poor. In the circumstances they were excellent. The organizers were clearly most concerned to do a good job - Marcela, Pupis, Cecilia, etc....
- I-1.1: Do you have any other comments, suggestions, complaints or criticisms concerning this year's Convention and any recommendations to improve next year's?
- CG-1.1: It's nonsense to knock the sponsors. If MEXTESOL is short of money that is because its members can't generate enough funds for the organization. Let's try and do this if we can, but cooperation is needed.
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- I-2: What did you think of the services provided by MEXTESOL organizers and assistants?

¹"I-1" is "Interview #1"; "I-1.1" refers to a second response from the same person. Thus, I-4.3, for example, would refer to a fourth answer on the fourth of the questionnaires examined.

²"CG-1" is "Convention-goer #1"; CG-1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc. would refer to subsequent responses by the same interviewee.

- CG-2: Poor. Many people didn't get the bag of the convention. The information and pamphlets were not enough.
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- I-3: Did you attend the MEXTESOL Annual Meeting?
- CG-3: No. It is my first one.
- I-3.1: What were your impressions of the Annual Meeting?
- CG-3.1: As a whole it was all right, but we were too many people.
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- I-4: Did you vote in the MEXTESOL elections?
- CG-4: No.
- I-4.1: Why not?
- CG-4.1: You told us not to do it; I am not membership.
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- I-5: What about the cost of the Convention?
- CG-5: Too high because the lunch was not included.
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- I-6: What did you think of the academic program?
- CG-6: Nothing was worthwhile. Poor quality. Low Academic Level Get better or this will be the last convention many teachers will attend!
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- I-7: What about the cost of the Convention?
- CG-7: Too low. I would like to know what do you do with the money - You didn't give us lunch or something to eat - You didn't pay anything to the persons who talk so what do you do with the money. GIVE INFORMATION OF

EVERY THING!!! You say "MEXTESOL no es una agrupación lucrativa" but I don't think so, Sincerely,
Me.

The remaining comments (except CG-15) were all in response to the final question:

In the space below and on the back of this sheet please add any other comments, suggestions, complaints or criticisms concerning this year's Convention and any recommendations to improve next year's.

CG-8: Information on the conference should be available well in advance (a Mexico City member told me she only knew the dates 10 days ago).

CG-9: Por favor mandar la papelería por ADO. El correo tarda un mes en entregar los sobres grandes. En provincia perdemos las oportunidades de pagar a tiempo, por este retraso.

CG-10: I can't believe 300 people had registered before Friday and that 1,000 were accepted that same day. The people who pre-registered should have been given priority to attend the workshops. Late acceptance complicated everything. Above all I congratulate the organizing committee for their strenuous amount of work and I tip my hat to the great effort put into it. It is very easy to criticize as we say in Mexico "Los Toros desde la Barrera". Good luck to all the organizers and again congratulations.

CG-11: Adults should not be expected or asked to sit on the floor.

CG-12: I think most of the problems stemmed from the late registration. I suggest that you double or almost double the late registration fee to discourage this. That way people

will think twice about registering late and so will make their plans accordingly.

- CG-13: You must give an inform about what you really do with the money you get from this convention. ARE YOU SURE "MEXTESOL" IS NOT AN "AGRUPACION LUCRATIVA" ??? It is doubtful. If TIME Magazine sponsored this convention, why did we have to pay a registration fee?

Note: This person had previously written that the services provided by MEXTESOL organizers and assistants were "Very good. It was completely NO ORGANIZED. Lots of factors should have been beyond your control but you didn't do ANYTHING." (See comments below).

- CG-14: No on-site registration? Is this a professional organization or a private club? I realize that it is difficult to predict how many people will register on-site. But I could hardly believe that registration was closed. Not enough programs?!

One lasting impression I have is the zeal with which people grabbed up free handouts. Many came for the freebies, not to exchange ideas. But I'll come back next year, despite this year's disappointments.

- CG-15: Me pregunto si en el próximo Congreso no sería bueno incluir una sesión plenaria sobre la educación y los buenos modales que deben regir al maestro por su condición de guía y modelo.... ¿Por qué sacrificar el nombre de nuestro país con tal de admitir, perdónenme la expresión, a una manada de gentes que no tuvieron la previsión necesaria para inscribirse con mayor antelación?

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Por su propio bien, por el bien de los estudiantes de inglés en México y por el bien de nuestro México, reflexionen, hagan de Mextesol una organización de calidad y de altura, no un organismo que llegue a convertirse en otra mini sociedad demagógica, política, y lucrativa. Mextesol es un árbol tierno, no dejen que su tronco se tuerza.

Observations

Had this collage of questionnaire responses ended here without further analysis, the reader would probably have accepted a series of false premises and erroneous conclusions. I intend to refute those premises, criticize the standard method of response interpretation, and show why certain apparently self-evident conclusions do not really follow from the data.

1983 is the third consecutive year I have carefully read through every Convention questionnaire. Confident of the reliability of my university training in the methodology of the social sciences, I designed the 1982 version, convinced it would provide as objective and as frank an appraisal of the Convention as possible. My questionnaire was not much different from 1981's, and this year's D. F. form is not much different from mine. Moreover, all three are basically representative of countless others applied by researchers in disciplines that range from psychiatry to urban sociology, marketing, economics and political science. Their designers tend to express an almost blind and usually smug faith not only in the scientific objectivity and the precision of their instrument (especially if they have made it through two or more semesters of university-level statistics) but also in the democratic virtue of an unbiased sampling of public opinion.

Evaluation forms are familiar to most teachers who democratically and scientifically ask their students to fill out the same

type of thing at the end of each course. Political parties, radio and TV stations, banks and airlines give the impression that virtually all rational decisions on how best to run the world are based on information gleaned from interviews, polls, surveys and the like. The next time you have lunch in Denny's or Burger Boy, look for the miniature evaluation form on the back of your check. Yes, they probably do really read them. At Burger Boy and on the airplane they purportedly provide continual feedback in order to detect emerging quirks before they cause trouble, and to move ever-closer to Platonic perfection in quality control of products and services. Science marches on, thanks in part to associations like MEXTESOL that bravely face harsh criticism and assume full responsibility for their shortcomings.

I too believed the data could be interpreted correctly; it would permit new insights, reveal patterns, enhance planning, and thereby permit us to avoid error and improve future events. In short, I would learn from accurate and just observational and analytical techniques.

I began to suspect something was amiss however, when, after two batches, (Guadalajara and Acapulco) I discovered that I was learning nothing I did not already know. I expressed my concern in last year's "Convention Wrap-up" (published in the January 1983 Newsletter):

The evaluation forms are supposed to be revealing. I have my doubts. People tend to fill them out rather carelessly and God knows if those few who do, constitute a representative sample of convention-goers. Still, notwithstanding the dubious statistical reliability of the questionnaires, there are certain patterns that show up clearly and consistently enough to merit our attention.

I was on the right track, aware that the questionnaires did not work; however I still believed they would work if people filled

them out not "rather carelessly" but with the reverential attitude appropriate to science ("statistical reliability") and democratic process (a truly "representative sample," like a referendum of all English teachers in Mexico). The evaluation forms would realize their potential provided they were used properly.

I am now convinced that the evaluation forms, whatever their content, however they are applied, are structurally anti-democratic, pseudo-scientific, irresponsible, misleading and totally unenlightening. On the contrary, as I hope to demonstrate, they conceal more information than they reveal, drastically constrain democratic participation and choice; censor, discredit, co-opt, manipulate and inhibit public opinion and criticism while reinforcing the status quo and legitimizing an uneven distribution of power. Rather than permit an objective evaluation, the interview structure organizes information so that the interviewee ends up being evaluated instead of doing the evaluating. The interviewer does not learn. S/he teaches, or drills, the arbitrary rules of a rigged game. The questionnaire or structured interview is a powerful propoganda and indoctrinating device, a persuasive instrument to control ideology and behavior, not quality and efficiency.

As we have seen (in my case at least) the scientifically and democratically trained interviewer is just as mystified as the interviewee: the interviewer can be unconscious of the control s/he exercises over the interviewee. The interviewer may even be opposed to the system of constraints s/he sets in motion. The error is in concentrating so scrupulously on content that form, or structure, (or more precisely, the consequences of the interaction between content and form) is not perceived. The interviewer is like a prison guard who has such fun organizing activities for the prisoners that everyone loses sight of the building's structure and its function. A jail, it should go without saying, is designed to control prisoners' actions and deprive them of their liberty.

When reading the questionnaires I kept getting the impression (by automatically evaluating the interviewee) that the answers were

silly, stupid or incoherent. Why did I not get the same impression when I talked directly about the same topics to convention-goers? The answer is that the structure-imposed rules of conversation among colleagues are much less rigid, manipulative and mystified than those of the questionnaire. In the questionnaire there is no doubt as to who is the authority, who defines the limits of the universe of discourse, who has the right to demand information and decide what its value is; who begins and ends the process, decides how long it will last, poses the questions, limits the options, prohibits or permits answers, appropriates all information for exclusive and private use. The interviewer, by exercising this power over the interviewee induces atrophy of conceptual and expressive potential to such an extent that anything but the 'right' answer sounds trivial, idiotic, or simply does not make sense. Even a conversation among 'equals' is not free from distortion and domination. The 'real world' also limits freedom. But it is not a prison.

It also seemed odd to me at first that we easily recognize the structural constraints on dialogue in certain kinds of interviews while failing to see it in the questionnaire. It seemed so obvious in the clergyman who interviewed the parishioner; in the policeman who interviewed the suspect; executive/worker, teacher/student, father/son, used-car salesman/customer. The answer appears to lie in the mythology of social science and its allegedly objective and democratic methodology. Once again the metaphor of the prison may help clarify the point. Jails used to be run by tough wardens who saw to it that criminals were punished for their crimes. That image clashed with liberal, enlightened thought. Now they are often run by an interdisciplinary team of criminologists, sociologists and psychologists who 'rehabilitate' deviants. That sounds so reasonable to us that we forget that, even though the jail is called a rehabilitation center, it continues to efficiently achieve its original objective: to imprison; to deprive individuals of their freedom; to control their behavior. When domination and control are crowned with the mystical aura of progress and

modern science, content tends to overshadow form. Our ideological faith blinds us to structure and function. When a priest interviews a sinner in a confessional booth or when a cop interrogates a suspect, it is easy for us to understand who has the power and who makes the decisions. When a psychologist conducts the same interview with a patient undergoing therapy, we begin to lose sight of who decides, dominates and controls. We are awed and mystified by the notion of a high tech, streamlined computer processing the data from our questionnaires, just as the medieval peasant must have been awed and mystified by confessing in the architectronic splendor of the high tech cathedral of the 14th century.

I was beginning to see that the questionnaire was a trap for the interviewee - a no-win game, and having somewhat demystified the operation, a deeper reassessment of the responses became possible. I had previously thought, for example, that the convention-goers who did not fill out the forms failed to understand the value of scientific research and failed to appreciate their inalienable right to participate in democratic process. I now would argue that the best sign of healthy resistance to the questionnaire's threat to liberty and its pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo is the 90% abstention rate. Silence is not the ideal form of protest, but it is better than voluntary submission.

Re-examining the options for those persons who did participate in the interview by filling out the forms, it was clear that they could only give 'right' answers. That is, all the options available fortified and legitimized the power structure. You either cooperate or you cooperated. Take your choice. The content of the interview in the confessional can vary widely: "I hate hearing the boring sermons (plenaries?) in this church" or "I think you clergymen (members of the executive committee?) just want our money" are just as cooperative and acceptable options as, "Prayer has saved me" (the Convention has made me a better teacher). By participating in the rite, whatever the content may be, the institution and its ideology (church or professional association; Bible or by-laws)

are legitimized, confirmed, strengthened.

What would happen if a person began to realize consciously or sense intuitively that s/he was trapped, that the chess board had been designed so that all possible moves meant checkmate? One might struggle to bend, change or break the rules. The attempt to escape from a trap may appear ridiculous, stupid and illogical to the 'objective' observer. Breaking the rules? How would we describe the baseball player who insisted on running to third base instead of to first base when s/he hit the ball? As silly, stupid or irrational, would we not?

Bearing rule-breaking possibilities in mind adds a new dimension to the eccentric, fluke or aberrant responses in the questionnaire. It is worth noting that the possibly passive and incipient forms of resistance or protest are easily defused by the system. The passive protest - not answering the form (abstaining) - is theoretically neutral. In practice, however, we have seen how it is discredited as irresponsible or explained away as a technical problem. The assumption usually is that if the person had anything relevant to say, s/he would have been eager to fill out the questionnaire. Not filling it out is tantamount to an admission of incompetence as an evaluator. The abstentions can be ignored, since incompetence to exercise one's rights is the equivalent of not having any, as in the case of children or non-members.

The 'aberrant' response, the other possible rule-defying form of resistance, is nullified. Here MEXTESOL has a special advantage. By imposing English on the Spanish-speaking majority as the official questionnaire language, several birds are killed with one stone: first, the language and culture of the majority is judged to be of secondary importance; second, in a situation of two languages in contact/conflict, the majority is obliged to submit to the code selected by the interviewer; third, the majority

is subjected to an evaluation of its linguistic (and professional) competence.³ Fourth, forcing the majority to express itself in a foreign language can only further erode its conceptual and communicative potential. Finally, any 'wrong' (dangerous) answer by the majority can be attributed to linguistic deficiencies and nullified. Possible protest answers, as we shall see, are dismissed as nonsense: "Obviously he totally misunderstood. Don't count that one."

Interpreting the Authentic Texts: A Second Look
at the Responses

Text 1 (see p.64)

This person seems to be asserting that while the MEXTESOL organizational services were objectively "poor," considering "the circumstances," they were excellent. What circumstances? We can only speculate, but there is enough evidence to make an educated guess. CG-1 is quick to praise the authorities. S/he refers to them by their first names and nicknames ("Pupis"). This name-dropping serves to proclaim his/her solidarity and familiarity with them. S/he identifies with the in-crowd and, by extension, with their representative, the anonymous interviewer. Ironically, it is the interviewer who remains thoroughly anonymous while the supposedly anonymous interviewee is obliged to identify him/herself in the first five questions. Thus, more than 20% of the total number of questions seem to have little relation to an evaluation of the Convention. They do, however, clearly help evaluate the evaluator.⁴ In this case, for example, we learn that CG-1 is an administrator

³If the interviewee answers in perfect English he has no special merit; it is only 'natural'. On the other hand, every 'mistake' lessens his/her status and exposes him/her to possible ridicule.

⁴Observe also that the first question (which generally leads one to believe it is the top priority) is the order to identify oneself, typi-

not a teacher. As interviewee, s/he is a subordinate, but s/he (an "administrator") is comfortable among the interviewers (on a first-name basis) because s/he recognizes them, thanks to the structural code, as fellow-bosses. This is interesting because s/he gives Marcela, Pupis and Cecilia equal status as convention organizers, while outside of the questionnaire situation Pupis, whose work functions are secretarial, would clearly be an administrator's subordinate.

Question 16 provides further clues. CG-1 did not attend the MEXTESOL Annual Meeting because, "I was busy." S/he does not need to "explain," why not, as all the other teachers did who answered this question negatively. S/he simply had more important things to do than to engage in public debate with subordinates.

His/her status also allows CG-1 to defend his/her other class allies by proclaiming ex cathedra that criticism of "the sponsors" is "nonsense."

"If MEXTESOL is short of money that is because its members can't generate enough funds for the organization." MEXTESOL's problems are blamed on the members who fail to do what they are supposed to: make money for the organizers. Might this ill-will

cal of the most rigidly authoritarian interviews (officer/common soldier, for example). "Before we do anything else, let's find out your exact status in this community. Are your papers in order?" In Mexico, of course, most English teachers were educated to practice some other profession, or none at all. The statement might have been phrased, "My job is..." or "I am employed as...". By making the subject of the first sentence "profession," which can only be translated into Spanish as "profesión" (work that requires a college degree), the majority of interviewees are immediately trapped into identifying themselves as outlaws, pariahs whose very right to belong to a "professional" association could be challenged.

or incompetence on the part of the member-workers to generate enough capital for the organizers-bosses constitute the "circumstances" that caused the "excellent" organization to yield "poor" results?

Text 2 (see p.65)

CG-2's complaint about not getting the rather shoddy, cloth convention bag may seem petty at first glance. It is not at all clear what this junior high school teacher means by, "The information and pamphlets were not enough." The interviewer will probably dismiss the comments as of minor importance. In the broad context of convention organization, how important is a souvenir bag? What "information and pamphlets" could the teacher be talking about? But this interpretation ignores the underlying message: the teacher went away from the Convention feeling confused and empty-handed.

Text 3 (see p.65)

CG-3's answer will be dismissed as incoherent and contradictory. It will not count. This 'evaluator' will be evaluated as stupid, careless or linguistically incompetent (and therefore unfit to teach English?). If the teacher did not attend the meeting, how can s/he say, "As a whole it was all right but we were too many people"? His/her legitimate protest, that the Convention could not meet the needs of the large number of people registered, will not count.

Text 4 (see p.65)

On the surface, an absurd response. Surely no one told CG-4, a junior high teacher, not to vote. Once again the 'incoherent' answer that rings of paranoia, will not count. However, it is really much more interesting than it appears on the surface. The teacher does not say, "I was told not to vote," but rather "You told us..." His/her 'incoherent' attempts to escape the questionnaire's traps have succeeded in violating two important taboos: 1) s/he is not permitted

to address the interviewer; the interview is impersonal. Supposedly there is no "you." Yet this act of rebellion goes to the heart of the matter by insisting that some human being assume the responsibility. All the questions are designed to evoke answers beginning with 'I', 'he', or 'she'; never 'you'. Second, notice that 17 of the 19 questions contain pronouns ('I', and 'my') if the text is to be completed in first person; 'you' in questions like #10 and #11, cases that also require an 'I' answer). This 'paranoid, incoherent' teacher, however, manages to defy the rule by referring to "us". S/he claims, then, that there is a group that is given orders, that shares a subordinate status, that is denied its rights. These three implicit affirmations, invisible to the interviewer, are, far from incoherent or paranoid, correct and of extreme importance.

Text 5 (see p.65)

The complaint seems trivial. No one ever suggested lunch was to be included. It is in fact unlikely that even CG-5 had really expected MEXTESOL to pay for his/her meals. What the interviewer will miss here by evaluating the evaluator's 'unfair' demand is that most teachers cannot afford to eat in luxurious hotel restaurants. Real problems for English teachers, like sub-poverty level wages (CG-5 teaches primary and junior high) have no place in the questionnaire. Might this 'trivial' comment not be a reasonable attempt to introduce a priority topic somehow? Since there is no space for the priority topic, forcing it in is awkward and makes the comment sound incoherent, while the answers of CG-1, who fully identifies with the elite power structure, always fit smoothly and therefore sound rational, authoritative and commonsensical.

Text 6 (see p.65)

CG-6's comments, scrawls in huge letters on the back of the first page of the questionnaire, appear to be the antithesis of CG-1's 'reasonable observations'. "Nothing was worthwhile" is not only extremist (more "nonsense" for CG-1) but also contradicts what CG-6 him/herself has stated previously about other aspects of the Convention. The remarks seem irrationally aggressive;

so this expression of legitimate outrage and dissatisfaction, relegated to the back page, will not be taken seriously. A threat ("Get better or this will be the last convention many teachers will attend!") is not an appropriate questionnaire response. The questionnaire never asks what the interviewee intends to do, only what s/he thinks about the topics selected as adequate by the interviewer. Yet the 'threat' may be one of the most powerful and logical forms of resistance available under the circumstances. Teachers may protest, not by answering meaningless questionnaires, but by using an effective form of resistance at their disposal: the boycott of MEX-ESOL. Note that CG-6, like CG-4, manages to break the rule and refer not only to the individual interviewee but to a group with similar interests and grievances: "many teachers."

Text 7 (see p.65)

This will surely be dismissed as a hilarious contradiction. CG-7 says the cost of the Convention was "Too low," but then goes on to complain about prices in his comments! A closer look reveals that there is no contradiction. CG-7 is not questioning whether the cost was reasonable or not, but demanding an explanation of what is done with the money, regardless of how much it may have been. S/he sounds incoherent because the interviewer did not grant him/her permission to use space 18 for those purposes. It seems to make good sense to think about the use of funds when asked about the cost of the convention, but it reads incoherently because permission is not given to say more than if the price was high or low. CG-7's main protest (written in double-size letters, underlined and marked with three exclamation points) is, "GIVE INFORMATION OF EVERYTHING!!!" S/he demands the right to be fully informed. The structure of the questionnaire makes CG-7 sound like an idiot for wanting to know what the association does with his/her money. Note that the questionnaire has not selected anything remotely resembling, "What do you think we should do with your money?" as worth asking about. CG-7 also spots another key mechanism of control: privileged information never accessible to subordinates. S/he correctly recognizes that 'inside information', like the questionnaire data and the allocation of funds (teachers' money), is considered the business of the administrators, not elementary school teachers with two

years' experience, like CG-7. Sharing information, like sharing money (or relinquishing control over information or money) is like sharing power.

Text 8 (see p.66)

A complaint by another elementary school teacher about control of and privileged access to information. It seems ridiculous to suggest that MEXTESOL conceals information regarding the dates of its National Convention. What is just as ridiculous, however, is to assume that all Mexican English teachers have equal access to public information, whether it is about MEXTESOL or anything else. Is it coincidence that two elementary school teachers (lowest paying, least prestigious English-teaching job) bring the matter up? Does MEXTESOL information tend to reach only the minority of Mexican English teachers who can afford the association's services? The flow of information would seem worth investigating, but since it threatens the vested interests of the distribution of power built into the questionnaire form, the interviewer cannot raise the question. As we have seen, it only emerged 1) in a rebellious, angry scrawl on the back of the page as the 'contradictory, 'wrong' answer to a different question; and 2) squeezed into section 19.

Since sheets of paper have two sides, questionnaires generally 'permit' interviewees to write additional comments on the back (something like governments permitting all citizens to breathe air). The back of the page is a real option, but since it constitutes a kind of no-man's land on the outskirts of the questionnaire, it never can really attain the legitimacy of the clearly marked 'legal' spaces. Nor is the space left between questions for additional comments quite as 'legitimate' as the true scientific, democratic core of the questionnaire: the blanks to be filled in with a check or a number. As we have observed, in case of doubt the interviewer will disregard "comments"; while checks and numbers, the blanks, are the real facts that will invariably be statistically analyzed. Thus, "evaluation" boils down to twelve words, provided you accept

the yes/no blanks in "I voted in the MEXTESOL elections" and "I attended the MEXTESOL Annual Meeting" as evaluative. If not, the "1983 MEXTESOL NATIONAL CONVENTION EVALUATION FORM" can be reduced to between five and ten words, depending on the number of plenary sessions attended: questions 6, 7, 9, 12, 18 and 8. Question 8 is the one on plenaries.

This analysis of the relative value of the spaces for answers takes on importance now that we have reached the section 19 answers (CG 8-15). As we previously saw, the first question, which demands proper credentials, is probably the most important. It is characteristic of questionnaires that the first item(s) be priorities (see footnote 4). It follows that the last is generally the least important. Some people never finish filling out the forms (unless, of course, they are very brief) and interest and concentration wane in proportion to the length of the questionnaire. Our analysis shows section 19 to be among the most revealing. Why then is it not among the first questions? Why does it appear at the bottom of the page, reducing response space to about 18% of the second page?

Text 9 (see p.66)

Here we see that the problems of access to information and their financial consequences also reflect the structural problem of discrimination and neglect of the 'provinces'. The challenge to linguistic domination is also noteworthy. CG-9 breaks the rules by answering in his/her native language.

Text 10 (see p.66)

Like CG-1, CG-10 seems to be commensensical. S/he understands the problems, and even wisely quotes a proverb whose point is to be more tolerant of thy fellow man. In this case, as in CG-1, it turns out to be thy fellow administrator. CG-10 is full of praise for his/her class allies, the organizers, and blames the problems on the mob of 1,000 who had the audacity to exercise their right to show up on Friday for on-site registration. To admonish people for

criticizing "Los toros desde la barrera", in the context of an evaluation form that supposedly defines such criticism as the civic responsibility of the evaluator, might seem contradictory; yet once again the questionnaire structure assures it a perfect fit.

Text 11 (see p.66)

This remark may be dismissed as prudish, pedantic or snobbish. Perhaps it is. On the other hand, being forced to sit on the floor could be interpreted as symbolically bowing down or kissing the feet of those privileged 'colleagues' that (by chance? democratically?) got the chairs. Seating arrangements generally reflect relations of power. The hierarchy begins at the throne (or podium) and works its way down to the floor.

Text 12 (see p.66)

Here we find a plan for punishing people who, lacking time, resources or adequate information privileges, register on-site. They should be coerced to "make their plans accordingly."

Text 13 (see p.67)

This complaint, by a high school teacher, is similar to those of CG-8 and CG-9. CG-13 will undoubtedly be ignored for what at first glance appear to be two stupid and contradictory comments. It is interesting to take a closer look to find out who is really stupid and contradictory and analyze why we falsely assume that it is CG-13. The explanation of, "If TIME Magazine sponsored this convention, why did we have to pay a registration fee?" will probably be that CG-13 does not understand what sponsoring means. Time, of course, really only pays a certain percentage of the expenses. The registration fee helps cover others. The truth is that it is Time that does not understand or deliberately chooses to abuse the term "sponsorship." "Patrocinado por Time", ("Sponsored by Time") certainly does give the ordinary user of Spanish or English the idea of covering all the expenses. If one does not have privileged access to inside information - that big business really does not mean

sponsor when it says sponsor - the matter can be confusing.

CG-13 responds to "The services provided by MEXTESOL organizers and assistants were _____", with "very good"; but then goes on to comment, "It was completely NO ORGANIZED." A dumb contradiction? No. CG-13 has circled the word "organizers" and signaled it with a question mark, thereby distinguishing between organizers and assistants. S/he seems to mean that the assistants were very good in spite of the organizers. Since this possibility is unthinkable for the interviewer, it is CG-13 who seems incoherent. On closer inspection we realize that it is the question that does not make sense. Our faith in the authority of the questionnaire, of TIME and MEXTESOL, obliges us to presume that only the interviewee can be wrong.

Text 14 (see p.67)

CG-14 protests restricting on-site registration, asking, "Is this a professional organization or a private club?" It is not clear to me exactly what s/he means. Nevertheless, the comparison is thought-provoking. At any rate, CG-14's anger and protest seem misdirected. S/he objects to the "zeal" with which people "grabbed up free handouts," adding, "Many came for the freebies, not to exchange ideas." While this may be true to some degree, CG-14 includes no criticism of those who provided the "freebies," nor of the fact that they are not exactly "free." Surely CG-14 noticed that every "freebie" happened to have some corporation's name and logo printed on it.

Text 15 (see p.67)

CG-15 has achieved the convention's most creative and effective form of resistance against the structural constraints of the questionnaire. Instead of filling out the interviewer's form, s/he wrote a three-page critique (in Spanish) which was widely circulated among other convention-goers prior to being dutifully returned to the questionnaire mailbox. In this way, his/her text became the only evaluation form made public and not immediately appropriated as the exclusive property of the nameless interviewer. CG-15

categorically refused to accept the imposed options and organized his/her own topics: 1) "organización en general"; 2) "presentación externa del evento"; 3) "nivel de las pláticas"; and 4) "conclusión". S/he was fortunate to have a typewriter and enough spare time available to complete the project. CG-15's evaluation was the only one at the Convention that was not an interview/questionnaire. It was an action, not a reaction. Not coincidentally, it was also the only evaluation to cause an observable impact.

The text includes some gratuitous ad hominem insults. The tone is often self-righteous, pedantic and overly moralistic. When CG-15 gets personal it comes across as petty, malicious and vindictive. Nonetheless, as can be seen from the section of the text I have quoted (p. 68), s/he makes two concrete proposals that appear in no other evaluation form: 1) that something be done for the good of Mexican English students (remember them?); and 2) that thinking ("reflexionen") be included among MEXTESOL's priorities. The second proposal may sound especially vague, but it refers to the means of avoiding a clearly described danger: "que (MEXTESOL) llegue a convertirse en otra mini sociedad demagógica, política y lucrativa". It is an appropriate warning about the abuse of power.

This final evaluation's content is controversial, but its form is a step in the right direction in resisting the questionnaire's pseudo-democracy and pseudo-science; its inherent distortion, manipulation and control of information.

I would propose another among many conceivable alternative evaluations that could be put into practice next year: a graffiti board - a large, prominently situated wall space for everyone to express all their criticisms, suggestions, paeons, poetry and confessions. Public and uncensored. Someone would be responsible for transcribing all the texts which could subsequently be published and distributed to all convention-goers. I imagine comments that might include: "I love MEXTESOL"; "Best Convention in years"; "Fulano said the same thing he said last year"; "English teachers at Colegio X are underpaid"; "Legalize abortion"; "Sign this list if you want a refund"; and naturally a wide variety of longer and more complex texts.

1983 MEXTESOL NATIONAL CONVENTION EVALUATION FORM

PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO FILL OUT THIS FORM. YOUR COMMENTS WILL HELP US IMPROVE FUTURE MEXTESOL EVENTS USE THE OTHER SIDE OF THESE SHEETS IF YOU NEED MORE SPACE TO ANSWER.

1.- My profession is: English teacher _____ Linguist _____
 Administrator _____ Publisher's representative _____
 Other _____

2.- This is my _____ (first, second, etc.) MEXTESOL National Convention.

QUESTIONS 3 and 4 are for English teachers only.

3.- I teach: Pre-primary/elementary _____ Secondary _____
 High School _____ University _____ Other _____

4.- I have _____ years total teaching experience and _____ year in Mexico.

5.- I participated in this year's academic program with a paper or workshop: YES _____ NO _____

6.- The facilities (room, equipment, etc.) were:
 Excellent _____ Very Good _____ Poor _____ Un-
 acceptable _____
 COMMENTS:

7.- The services provided by MEXTESOL organizers and assistants were:
 Excellent _____ Very Good _____ Adequate _____
 Poor _____ Unacceptable _____
 COMMENTS:

8.- Please evaluate the Plenary Sessions you attended.

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Poor	Extremely Poor
I. Bertha Gomez Maqueo	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
II. John Swales	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
III. Fernando Castaños	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
IV. Richard Rossner	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
V. Huw Williams	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

9.- In general, I found the Academic Program:

Excellent _____ Very Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____
Unacceptable _____

10.- Please use the space below and the back of this sheet to comment on any especially interesting and useful session(s) you attended:

11.- Please use the space below and the back of this sheet to comment on any especially unsatisfactory session(s) you attended:

12.- I think the distribution of papers according to areas was:

Excellent _____ Very Good _____ Satisfactory _____
Poor _____ Totally misguided _____

COMMENTS:

EVALUATION FORM

- 13.- I attended _____ (number) commercial demonstrations.
Use the space below to comment on those demonstrations
you attended:
- 14.- I visited the commercial exhibits: YES _____ NO _____
Use the space below to comment on the commercial exhibits.
- 15.- I voted in the MEXTESOL elections: YES _____ NO _____
If not, why?
- 16.- I attended the MEXTESOL Annual Meeting: YES _____ NO _____
If not, explain:
- 17.- My impressions of the Annual Meeting were:
- 18.- I thought the cost of the Convention to members was:
Exorbitant _____ Too high _____ Reasonable _____
Very economical _____ Too low _____
COMMENTS:
- 19.- In the space below and on the back of this sheet please add
any other comments, suggestions, complaints or criticisms
concerning this year's Convention and any recommendations
to improve next year's.