THE TESOL QUIRKS PROJECT

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The results of the end-all TESOL QUestionnaire for Investigating Really Kaleidoscopic Samples (a.k.a., QUIRKS [pronounced quirks]) are in. This paper is designed to provide readers for the results of this project. The purpose of the study was to explore survey research investigation evaluation analysis assessment appraisal estimation techniques (i.e., to study whether there should be questions on questionnaires). To that end, the following research questions were posed:

1. Does TESOL have members?
2. If so, do those members respond to stimuli (e.g., questionnaires)?
3. If they respond to questionnaires, should they (the questionnaires) be mailed in plain brown wrappers for a better response rate?

The alpha level for all statistical tests was set at $\alpha > 1.05$ to insure significance.

METHOD

Subjects

An astounding total of 23,743 questionnaires were returned by the 21,152 members of the TESOL organization, which represents an unheard of return rate of 112 percent.\footnote{The astoundingly high return rate has led to accusations that some of the "university research types" surreptitiously photocopied and filled out hundreds, if not thousands, of extra questionnaires to make sure that the "researchers' point of view" (as if you could actually get any two researchers to agree on any "point of view") would continue to dominate the TESOL organization for the rest of the millennium. However, one bleary-eyed researcher (with copy machine toner on her hands) suggested that the dastardly deed may have been done by "public school teacher types" for equally nefarious reasons. This important, but mysterious, debate may never be resolved.} Such a return rate is clearly a record for language sciences survey research (LSSR) if not for social sciences research (SSR) as a hole.

Of the respondents, 62 percent were female and 50 percent were male. The ages ranged from 12.5 to 107 with a median mental age of 11. However, it should be

noted that 62 percent of the respondents left the age question blank, or filled in an obscenity. A number of ESL/EFL teachers turned out to have had experience in teaching ESL/EFL, though the results were similar to those found in Vitro (Unpublishable ms., cited in Brown, 1982), who found that "many teachers have only had one year of experience over, and over, and over again."

**Materials**

Naturally, the questionnaire used in this study was carefully designed to reflect the biases of the questionnaire designer. And, of course, it is readily available for further public inspection (see Brown, 1989, cited in Naire, 1990). The QUIRKS questionnaire had a question-requestion reliability coefficient of .01, which is clearly significant at the .01 level ($r_{xx} = p = .01$).

The questionnaire included 30 closed-response Lick-it scale (a.k.a. Liquored scale) questions, which turned out to be fairly messy to analyze. There were also three open-ended questions which received not only drier responses, but longer ones, as well. Naturally, the open-ended questions were analyzed using the latest ethnographic research methods (even though some "quantitative" researchers believe "ethnographic research" is an oxymoron [not to be confused with a Cambridge moron]).

The length of time that it took respondents to answer the questionnaire was operationalized by measuring the surface area of the coffee stains and other food markings that showed up on the questionnaires. The longest time that it took any single respondent to fill out the questionnaire was 3.73 square inches.

**Procedures**

The questionnaires were sent out by third class mail in plain brown envelopes in order to keep the sample size small; it was hoped that a small sample size would, in turn, help to keep the analyses simple and straightforward. [nb. While the plain brown wrappings were brown, they were not completely plain; they were accidently marked with the word PRURIENT.] However, rather than dampening the response rate, the brown-wrapper strategy (BS) appears to have had the opposite effect on the TESOL membership. In short, there has never been such a high level of interest in any survey conducted in our field. The respondents literally ripped the brown wrappers open in their eagerness to get at the contents. Some disappointment was
reported because of what they found inside (or more accurately, what they did not find inside).

RESULTS

The results of the Lick-it type scale were so smeared and sticky that the quantitative analyses were abandoned. In effect, this meant that it was neither possible nor necessary to use any descriptive or inferential statistics in this study. Nonetheless, a contingency table was drawn up—just in case a table was needed.

The open-ended questions were considerably more productive, drawing a wide variety of interesting answers. The first open-ended question was WHAT DO YOU PERCEIVE AS THE GREATEST SINGLE PROBLEM IN THE FIELD OF ESL/EFL? Three example responses will illustrate the range of responses:

1. "Phooey!"
2. "Too damned many foolish questionnaires to answer."
3. "What does ESL/EFL mean, anyway?"

Other respondents, responded with different responses, but most of those had to do with the ways that administrators and educators in other fields think of us, i.e., as derelict, irresponsible professionals (or DIPs, for short). As one (1) respondent put it, "Hour salarys are two low, and hour ours are to long, and we don't get enuf respekt for peple with hour traneing and degreez."

The second question was DO YOU FIND THE RESEARCH IN THE TESOL QUARTERLY USEFUL? The responses were mostly positive to this question, but several questionees said that they had not noticed that there was any research reported in the TESOL Quarterly (TQ), and another answeree said that it would be fine for TQ to begin printing research articles at any time. Of those who had noticed the research articles in TQ, an underwhelming minority (less than .0000421 percent, i.e., one person) felt that the research was of such bad quality that the results should be ignored, while a larger number (N = 2) felt that at least some of the research studies were probably actually carried out as described in the journal.

Many teachers indicated that they wanted more practical implications to come out of the research. Researchers seemed to want more serious purely theoretical efforts not bound to producing immediate practical applications. Perhaps the best compromise solution would be for the TQ to publish more articles that are impartially
practical and partially impractical.

The final question was **WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE ANNUAL TESOL CONVENTION?** Those answerees who had attended 0 or less times had the strongest negative opinions, while those who had attended 1 or more times seemed to feel, on the whole, that the annual TESOL Convention happens every year. Twelve of the respondees (out of 23,743) felt that the "breakfast with the stars" events were a great idea. [These 12 were later found to be the "stars" themselves.]

**DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

Once the results were in, the alpha level was raised to the 5.55 level, and the research questions were changed. Direct answers to these new research questions, were as follows: yes, yes, and maybe.

Clearly, the most remarkable result to come out of this research was that the use of a plain brown envelope and/or the stamping of the word **PRURIENT** on the envelope resulted in an extraordinarily high return rate. It is important to note that the word **PRURIENT** may only work with English teachers because they are more likely than other educators to have that word in their vocabularies (though it is currently not listed in the Claire (1990) dictionary of indispensable ESL vocabulary). It is also important to note that this research did not disambiguate whether it was the plain brown wrapper or the word **PRURIENT** that caused the extraordinarily high level of interest.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future researchers might consider sending out half of their questionnaires in truly plain brown envelopes, half in white envelopes marked **PRURIENT**, and half in envelopes that are both brown and marked **PRURIENT**. All of these machinations would help to determine which condition results in the most remarkable return rates. Perhaps, an interaction of Prurience and Brownness is necessary, and I was just lucky enough to hit on this combination in my study. Only carefully designed empirical survey investigation evaluation analysis assessment appraisal estimation research can answer this vital question—a question that is clearly important to the future of the entire language teaching profession.
**Final Conclusion**

Without a doubt, the most important result of this study is the finding, which coincidentally agrees with the conclusions of Brown (1982, p. 12), who put it this way: "ESL/EFL teachers are significantly better people ... because they have learned through absolute necessity to laugh at themselves and poke fun at their own seriousness."

**REFERENCES**

**Real Citations**


**Surreal Citations**


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