



**Russ Campbell**  
**September 5, 1927–March 30, 2003**

## A Lifetime of Dedication to Language Education: An Interview with Russ Campbell

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*Dr. Russell Campbell was Professor Emeritus of the Department of Applied Linguistics and Director Emeritus of the Language Resource Center at UCLA. A key figure in the field of language education, Dr. Campbell was always committed to and fascinated by the study of language. Throughout his career, he worked on pioneering language education and research projects both domestically and internationally. His interests ranged from the design and development of English language training programs for professionals overseas, to the preservation of heritage languages in the United States. An active member of the profession, Dr. Campbell held several positions of leadership. He served as President of TESOL in 1971-1972 and sponsored and directed the first TESOL Summer Institute in 1979—a program that is still running today. Besides his extraordinary career accomplishments and contributions to the field of applied linguistics, Dr. Campbell served the UCLA community with unwavering enthusiasm. Easy-going and unpretentious, he helped and supported thousands of students—for whom he always had time—and inspired just as many.*

### THE INTERVIEW

**Lorena:** *Russ, I know you speak Spanish very well and you speak other languages too, how did you first become interested in languages and the field of language education?*

**Russ:** I became interested in languages other than English when I was in high school. I got an after-school and summer job in a meat-packing house in Kansas City where all the workers were Latinos. In this *ambiente*, this environment, I began to acquire some Spanish—the profanity first. It was amazing: These people brought me into their lives. Suddenly, I was going to their *fiestas* and homes, and they were coming to my place. Willy-nilly, I became interested in and found it truly enjoyable using another language and gaining entry into another society. So that's how it all got started. I was sufficiently interested by the experience in the meat-packing house and in the *barrio* to take Spanish in high school, but I didn't enjoy it. It almost turned me off.

**Lorena:** *Why?*

**Russ:** Because it had nothing to do with what I was learning in the meat-packing house and the teacher was not that competent. For one, she didn't know the profanity!

**Lorena:** *What method did she use?*

**Russ:** The name of the textbook was *El Camino Real*. The very first lesson was “¿Qué es el burro? El burro es un animal. ¿Es grande el burro? No, señor/señorita. Es muy grande.”<sup>1</sup> And then you had to memorize *fui, fuiste, fue, fuimos, fuisteis, fueron*,<sup>2</sup> which had nothing to do with the language I was getting a big kick out of. I remember there was one Mexican-American girl in the class. The teacher would jump all over her for not using accent marks. But this young kid, as you might guess, spoke Spanish and *la señora* didn’t speak much Spanish at all! Anyway, I got through high school and I tried Spanish again in college.

**Lorena:** *What was your major in college?*

**Russ:** Bridge and ping pong. (Laughter). I went to Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, Kansas for a couple of semesters, then went off to the Navy. When I came back to Kansas I did major in Spanish and got connected with the Spanish-speaking community there. I remember that for the first time I brought representatives of the community, of the *barrio*, to the university and we had a big party. A lot of my life has been going back and forth across that line of Latino and non-Latino. I got a B.S. in Education with a major in Spanish. After that, I taught high school Spanish in the wheat country of the state of Kansas where I was the only Spanish-speaking person in town, therefore, an expert. I recognized pretty quickly that my Spanish was not where it could be—should be—so I started seeking opportunities to live and work in Spanish-speaking countries to improve my Spanish. Lo and behold, I got a job in the *Instituto Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano*, an English-teaching school in San José, Costa Rica. Before that ended, they offered me a job in Córdoba, Argentina.

**Lorena:** *When did you decide to go back to graduate school?*

**Russ:** In Costa Rica, I sat across the desk from a professor of linguistics on leave from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. By the end of our two years working together, he had convinced me that the study of linguistics was truly relevant to foreign language teaching, particularly, English language teaching. So he suggested that I do graduate work at the University of Michigan, which was one of the major centers for TESOL in this country. At that time, I had a choice of going hot and heavy back to Michigan at the end of Costa Rica or going to Argentina: Michigan didn’t stand a chance! But, while in Argentina, I did apply, and that’s how I ended up in graduate school.

**Lorena:** *Why did you decide to get a PhD?*

**Russ:** Because I got an MA, I guess. (Laughter). It was a one-year masters in TESL at the University of Michigan. You didn't have to do a thesis. You just finished eight or nine courses and you got your degree. Before the year was over, somebody said, "How would you like to go to Bangkok and work in Thailand?" It was the Southeast Asia Regional English Project funded by an American government agency and we were to go out and develop instructional materials and train teachers to use these materials for their middle school English program in the whole country. Before I left, there was some discussion about coming back and doing a doctoral program. I remember agreeing with somebody—probably myself—that if I could complete one of the qualifying exams and get one of the languages out of the way while in Thailand, then I would come back for the PhD. But really I had no other place to go. It's very difficult to find a job from Thailand, so I was admitted to the PhD program. There's always that other thing, Lorena. You look at other people with PhDs and you say "My God, if they can have a PhD, surely I can." That was part of the equation. Anyways, I collected mountains of authentic data from unscripted television programs and roundtable discussions, and used those data as the basis for my dissertation on Thai grammar, specifically, the pronoun system of modern Thai.

**Lorena:** *So how's your Thai?*

**Russ:** It's not as good as my Spanish and, therefore, pretty bad. I can *defenderme*<sup>3</sup> when it is necessary and I know a lot of Thai linguistics because that's what I spent two and a half years doing, analyzing data at the sentence-level, not the discourse-level, sort of a Michigan approach to language analysis.

**Lorena:** *How did you end up at UCLA?*

**Russ:** I've told the story many times because it's another one of those fantastic coincidences. While in Córdoba, Argentina, the then chair of the TESL program at UCLA, Dr. Clifford Prator, was on a State Department sponsored tour of Latin America giving lectures and talks at these Binational Centers. Clifford Prator came to the Center I was directing and we had time to talk and drink lots of wine. I had told him I was going back to Michigan to do graduate work, and he said something along the lines of, "Well, if you get your PhD, look me up when we have a position at UCLA." About six years later, when I had finished my degree, I called him up and finagled an invitation—and they hired me! Compared to Purdue, Indiana, or Tuscaloosa, Alabama, or some other places, Los Angeles was a very attractive place coming from Ann Arbor in February, iced and snowed. Besides that, UCLA had a leadership role in this field.

**Lorena:** *Speaking of leadership at UCLA, you led the Applied Linguistics department for many years. What part did you play in the formation of the department?*

**Russ:** In 1964, TESL was a subdivision of the English department directed by a Vice-Chairman, Dr. Prator, and it continued that way up until the mid-seventies. In the late sixties, for a lot of very good reasons, we presented strong arguments for an MA degree in TESL. Until that time, we only offered a certificate, a one-year program. In a certificate program you tell people what to do and they do it, you hope. In an MA program, you ask, “Why are we doing that, should we be doing it that way, are there other ways of doing it, etc.” We had a lot of very bright, returning Peace Corp volunteers who were prepared to do serious academic work and research, rather than training. It took a couple of years, but we got the MA program. The same sort of phenomenon occurred as young people finished their MAs. They were even more interested in bigger and better questions in areas that we hadn’t done before. Driven a lot by students, their interests, and their capabilities, we argued for a PhD program. Frankly, in the middle of the 70s, we were still doing most of our teaching and learning based on experience rather than research. We hadn’t become empiricists at that point, but the demand was there, thus justifying a higher level of study at the PhD level. Around 1977, we argued for and gained our independence from the English department.

**Lorena:** *Was applied linguistics as a field already out there and known?*

**Russ:** Barely, just barely. We did argue that there was the *Linguistique Appliquée*; there was a European Association of Applied Linguists; there were journals, people, and organizations that used the term applied linguistics. We argued that applied linguistics had all the trappings of an independent discipline. That’s very hard to justify when we are absolutely dependent on anthropology, psychology, sociology, and education for almost anything we do.

**Lorena:** *You served as President of TESOL in 1971-1972. How did you move inside the organization to become President at some point?*

**Russ:** You represent a university with a great name like UCLA. Also, I had published a book with Harold Allen, readings in English as a Second Language. It’s 40 years old now. Harold Allen was a very distinguished old fellow in our field and I became associated with him. People recognized me at TESOL conferences as “the guy who published with Harold Allen.” One time, somebody approached me and said, “We would like to nominate you for second vice-president of TESOL.” Wow, that’s interesting. What does a second-vice president do? Well, they organize the whole conference. I accepted. From my little office we organized the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, from scratch. If you become a second vice-president, you are sufficiently prominent that somebody recommends you to be first vice-president, and then automatically if you are a first vice-president you become President.

**Lorena:** *What was TESOL like as an organization back then?*

**Russ:** It was a nice, cozy, friendly, little organization. Several hundreds rather than thousands.

**Lorena:** *What were the main issues confronting the organization at the time?*

**Russ:** The role of grammar. Marianne Celce-Murcia and others were fighting that battle. Stephen Krashen and his input hypothesis of second language acquisition were quite, quite prominent. The role of minorities in TESOL and internationalization. We didn't have affiliates around the world at the time. In the board meetings we would talk about prerequisites for becoming an official affiliate of TESOL.

**Lorena:** *What do you see as the issues facing TESOL today?*

**Russ:** TESOL is quite aware that you must have a rational basis for what you do, and that this calls for research, or very carefully controlled experience, which I think is also research. A few years ago, a small group of us established a foundation, the TESOL International Research Foundation (TIRF). The foundation's purpose is to raise funds, maybe 12 million dollars, and from the interests earned on that 12 million—which would give us about a million a year—support empirical or quantitative/qualitative research that would help answer some very, very important questions. For example, why is it that Japanese students study English for five years and end up with an inability to use it for any real-world purpose? Why is it that Latino students in our public schools are literally washed out of the whole system because we have not quite been successful in teaching them English or providing opportunities for them to acquire it as we should be? There are huge numbers of kids who are underserved academically in our society and English is the key. Why is that and how do we find out?

**Lorena:** *You organized and sponsored the first TESOL Summer Institute. What were the goals of this program and what do you see as its accomplishments?*

**Russ:** The goals were good and noble and nice! It was patterned in part by the Linguistic Society of America that has had summer institutes for much longer than TESOL. But it was as Chair of the department that I realized that given the faculty we had and the time we had to teach, we could never have a Krashen—he was just one. There were other second language acquisition people, language policy people, psycholinguists, and so on around the country that were doing fantastic things. Our students didn't have the opportunity to take courses with them. What if we could set up a situation in which I could bring 10 or 12 superstars to UCLA for the summer to offer courses that our students couldn't get otherwise? The intent was to provide our students with these extraordinary opportunities—and it worked. Kathi

Bailey was the gofer that ran here and there, and I got to direct it. We pulled it off, but we went in the hole about three thousand dollars, which was a huge amount of money in those days. Both the university and the TESOL organization lost because they were subsidizing the program. The same thing happened a couple more times, and the institute went on for six, seven years following our pattern. But it became apparent that they had to offer courses that would earn money, so they started offering Introduction to Linguistics. They could get two hundred students, paying customers, studying that. The program became diluted in terms of the level of academic offerings.

**Lorena:** *To attract a wider audience...*

**Russ:** Oh, much wider. They had to. They had to make money because no university or TESOL could afford to subsidize it. Now they offer little summer training programs, two or three regional programs. It doesn't look like our original program at all.

**Lorena:** *Let's now turn to The Language Resource Center, previously known as the Language Resource Program. It is such an important part of UCLA and is involved in so many projects in collaboration with other university departments and programs. When and how did you come up with the idea of starting the Language Resource Center?*

**Russ:** In part, it grew out of necessity. I already mentioned that much of what I did, my interest, was international. UCLA was the first American university to open up China and I was invited to go on with the first group. Soon we had a project with Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. They wanted to set up an Institute, an English Language Center, to prepare Chinese scholars to come directly to the US to work in science and technology. Then we went to Beijing, where they wanted an institute for business and economics. The Academy of Science wanted one in science and technology. It was a big undertaking that could involve several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Our little department just couldn't handle the contracts but the International Studies and Overseas Program (ISOP) could. So we entered into an agreement with ISOP: they would handle the administrative part—the contracts, the budgets, the dissemination of monies and so on—and the Language Resource Center would handle the academic activities directed by those of us in Applied Linguistics and TESL.

**Lorena:** *So was that the project that inspired the creation of the Language Resource Center?*

**Russ:** Now that I'm thinking about it, there was one other event that is also associated with China. There was a big retreat about education in UCLA and I was asked

to talk about this international project in China. It was still very exotic for people to go to China. After I talked, the Dean of Social Welfare approached me and said something to the effect of, “I can’t believe you’re running around all over China, solving their problems with English as a foreign language, when in our city—in the area of public health, in hospitals, in women’s abuse cases—there is an enormous need for English as a second language or some way to communicate between our social welfare workers and their clients. Why are you using up all these UCLA resources over there and ignoring these problems?” I said: “Let’s talk.” Eventually we got the Executive Vice-Chancellor involved in the discussions and said, “We can’t go out and teach thousands of immigrants English, but why don’t we teach your students to communicate with their clients in Spanish?” The Vice-Chancellor agreed and before we finished talking we expanded into foreign language education on this campus. That’s how it all started.

**Lorena:** *What did you see as the Language Resource Center’s mission then? And what do you see as its mission today?*

**Russ:** For years, up until the Dean of Social Welfare and the Vice-Chancellor jumped on me, most of my interest was overseas. The rest of it was in Culver City, looking at immersion programs in Spanish and later Korean. The immersion programs got me into foreign language education and heritage language at the same time. I’ve evolved from just TESOL, which were the ESL/EFL projects in China, Egypt, Mexico. Everything in the last five, six, or seven years has been foreign language education. Our mission today is to do what we can to pool the resources of foreign language education on this campus. We have very bright people in French and German, and they literally had never talked to each other before. We fixed all of that. If you pull those resources, then you have some chance of changing things, hopefully for the better. But going back to the difference between what it was and what it is, for the foreseeable future, it’s going to be very much focused on foreign languages of UCLA. I haven’t heard anybody talk about an overseas project for a couple of years now.

**Lorena:** *So which of the LRC projects do you consider the most important?*

**Russ:** In terms of the number of people a project influenced or has influenced, that’s hard to say. If you go to Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, you will find twelve or fourteen UCLA MAs teaching English—we did that. They have probably now taught a million Chinese students and had some impact on their lives. The same thing in Beijing. We’ve had a lot of influence, hopefully good. I think the immersion education project has one of the greatest potentials for foreign language education for Anglos, as well as the maintenance of heritage languages for non-English speakers. My favorites, the ones I really like working on the most, are the immersion programs and heritage language education.

**Lorena:** *Let's talk about heritage language education. This is a relatively new field and, in many ways, you are one of its champions. How would you define the field?*

**Russ:** One way to define heritage language education is to look at the two-way immersion programs. If you go to an elementary school in Koreatown, you will find a five-year-old kid with a very high level of proficiency in Korean equal to his life experience, including phonology, morphology, and general syntax. He's got all that stuff down by the age of five. Heritage language principles are invoked in this situation: There will be opportunities for that kid to maintain, develop, and eventually become a mature, literate adult user of Korean—not at the expense of English. Everybody agrees that in this country you have to know English. Anything that would detract from that or retard it seriously, you have to throw out. Right now we're in our tenth, eleventh year of the Korean two-way immersion project, and have demonstrated that our kids are performing well on all the standardized tests for the local school district, the state, and the nation. They can compete with any *gringo* in any area, plus, they are literate in Korean. So the goal of heritage language education is to serve a national resource that are the languages that the kids bring to school. It's just stupid not to take advantage of it.

**Lorena:** *So is two-way immersion heritage language education?*

**Russ:** It is the most beautiful example of heritage language education. The right age, the right vehicle, total exposure, total communication, totally relevant. The teacher is up there talking about math, geography, and history—but in Korean or Spanish or Arabic. That's heritage language. To replicate that at the college level is almost impossible. You've got five hours a week, not five hours a day as you have in elementary school.

**Lorena:** *How is heritage language education different from and what does it have in common with the field of bilingual education?*

**Russ:** Bilingual education in this country means, for almost everybody including the national government, transitional bilingual education. In bilingual education you use the home language to get students into the *mainstream* — that's the word they use. It's not anywhere *heritage language education*. The difference is in the goals.

**Lorena:** *What are the main issues and concerns of this emerging field?*

**Russ:** The research and the work ahead of us are immense. We've got tens of thousands of modern language teachers prepared to teach Spanish, French, German, Chinese as a foreign language, that is, to teach Chinese to Anglos, or Spanish to

*gringos*, and so on. And then all the publishers write textbooks for students learning a foreign language. The tests—there are no tests. We don't know how to test the heritage speaker. What do these students know? We can make one by guess or by golly. In Spanish we're far ahead because of Guadalupe Valdés at Stanford, who's been collecting data since the 70s. But we still don't understand many things; for example, we don't know what the curricula look like for Spanish as a foreign language vs. Spanish as a heritage language.

**Lorena:** *Where do you see the field going?*

**Russ:** It's got a lot of momentum now. The National Security Education program is prepared to give, if Congress supports it, millions of dollars—eight, nine, ten, twelve, lots of money beyond my imagination—to the National Foreign Language Center in Washington to engage universities in developing programs that bring people from an ACTFL Advanced Intermediate to Superior Professional or an ILR 2, 2+ to 3. Richard Brecht and William Rivers wrote this book called *Language and National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which lays out the US government's needs for people with high level proficiency 3 and above. They talk about 87 different agencies—CIA, FBI, Peace Corps, the Department of Energy, anybody who is doing work in ecology, general information, National Science Foundation—that need people with a high level of proficiency. They also list all the languages. They say “Where are we going to find people or institutions that are educating, training people to get from a 2 to a 3.” So what they say, and this is now finally the answer to your question, if there is any group of people that we have some hope of getting from level 2 to 3, it is the heritage language speakers. Not all of them. But, say we have 3,000 Korean American undergraduate and graduate students on this campus. Some twenty-five percent of them don't know enough Korean to differentiate them from you and me. For the twenty-five percent who just came here or whose parents provided all sorts of opportunities for them to acquire and develop Korean, there's nothing we can do for them. It's like taking in a TOEFL student at 650 and trying to figure out how to get them up to 660, if there were such a number. But that middle group of students who already know more Korean than UCLA's Korean program can ever teach them, who would be at a 2 or 2+ level, constitutes a cohort of people that we can possibly get up to level 3 proficiency. So the future of heritage language education, at least in government support, is going to be great.

**Lorena:** *Why do you think that preservation of heritage languages is so important?*

**Russ:** War, peace, science, espionage. These are high, high priorities coming from current events. But also, there's the experience of heritage families in one or two generations. These kids frequently now cannot communicate not only with their grandparents but with their mothers and fathers. This barrier between the two

generations has mental health consequences.

**Lorena:** *You're extremely passionate about the projects you work on and direct. What is it about language and language education that intrigues you and keeps you so involved in the field?*

**Russ:** I have no idea!

**Lorena:** *That's an honest answer.*

**Russ:** It's just bloody fun! The use of language, the power of language—it is just intrinsically fascinating. The question of why some people learn and others don't: What an interesting question! Why is it? But why are they particularly of interest to me? I have no idea. Some people like grapefruit and some don't. I guess I do.

**Lorena:** *Finally, what advice do you have for graduate students and junior faculty in the field of language education/applied linguistics?*

**Russ:** Presumptuous of me to be giving advice. It's something quite personal and I challenge you to put it in there so it doesn't sound mushy! There's something about the pressures on young scholars, students, and young faculty that, if they aren't careful, will literally eat them up. Maybe any field does that, I don't know. But I can speak from personal experience and from observing other young scholars that the system puts sufficient pressure on them at the expense of the rest of the world and other things they might be doing, family and kids, and all that stuff. I think they have to govern or control the time and energy they devote to their academic life and they have to make sure they get involved in politics and family—all those things necessary to live a well-rounded life. That's just introspection now, and retrospection to some extent because your whole career is over before you know it! I literally remember going home in Ann Arbor when I was writing my dissertation. You come home, say hello to the kids if they are still awake, crawl down to your little office, close the door, and work. You get up the next morning, go off to campus, blah, blah, blah. Three years later you say, "My goodness, how you've grown!" I don't know how many people function like that, but we certainly put an awful lot of pressure on graduate students and I think graduate students ought to protect themselves at all times to maintain their sanity.

**Lorena:** *That's actually good advice. Thanks, Russ!*

## NOTES

This interview was conducted in the Language Resource Center office at UCLA in the Fall of 2002.

<sup>1</sup> 'What is the donkey? The donkey is an animal. Is the donkey big? No, Mr./Miss. It's very big.'

<sup>2</sup> Irregular past tense conjugation of the verb "to be" and "to go"

<sup>3</sup> 'Get by'

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