Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Preface

The increased learning and teaching of English throughout the world during recent years in both state and commercial educational institutions has produced a new cadre of professionals: teachers of EFL. Some have moved across from teaching English as a mother tongue, others from teaching modern languages; many have been drawn into service for no other reason than that their own spoken English is good, or perhaps because they are native English speakers. Many have started without specific training, others feel they need to rethink the basis of their teaching.

This book is written for teachers of all backgrounds. Our aim is to discuss a wide range of teaching problems – from classroom techniques to school organisation – in order to help practising teachers in their daily tasks. We have adopted an eclectic approach, recognising that the teaching of English must be principled without being dogmatic, and systematic without being inflexible. We have tried to show how the underlying principles of successful foreign language teaching can be applied in the EFL situation. We gratefully record our debt to colleagues and students past and present at the London University Institute of Education, whose experience and thinking have helped shape our own. Particularly, we would like to thank our colleague John Norrish for compiling the bibliography.

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English in the World Today

English as an international language

Of the 4,000 to 5,000 living languages, English is by far the most widely used. As a mother tongue, it ranks second only to Chinese, which is effectively six mutually unintelligible dialects little used outside China. On the other hand the 300 million native speakers of English are to be found in every continent, and an equally widely distributed body of second language speakers, who use English for their day-to-day needs, totals over 250 million. Finally, if we add those areas where decisions affecting life and welfare are made and announced in English, we cover one-sixth of the world's population.

Barriers of race, colour and creed are no hindrance to the continuing spread of the use of English. Besides being a major vehicle of debate at the United Nations, and the language of command for NATO, it is the official language of international aviation, and unofficially is the first language of international sport and the pop scene. Russian propaganda to the Far East is broadcast in English, as are Chinese radio programmes designed to win friends among listeners in East Africa. Indeed more than 60 per cent of the world's radio programmes are broadcast in English and it is also the language of 70 per cent of the world's mail. From its position 400 years ago as a dialect, little known beyond the southern counties of England, English has grown to its present status as the major world language. The primary growth in the

number of native speakers was due to population increases in the nineteenth century in Britain and the USA. The figures for the UK rose from 9 million in 1800 to 30 million in 1900, to some 56 million today. Even more striking was the increase in the USA (largely due to immigration) from 4 million in 1800, to 76 million a century later and an estimated 216,451,900 today. Additionally the development of British colonies took large numbers of English-speaking settlers to Canada, several African territories and Australasia.

It was, however, the introduction of English to the indigenous peoples of British colonies which led to the existence today of numerous independent states where English continues in daily use. The instrument of colonial power, the medium for commerce and education, English became the common means of communication: what is more, it was seen as a vehicle for benevolent Victorian enlightenment. The language policy in British India and other territories was largely the fruit of Lord Macaulay's Education Minute of 1835, wherein he sought to

> form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.

Although no one today would defend the teaching of a language to produce a cadre of honorary Englishmen, the use of English throughout the sub-continent with its 845 distinct languages and dialects was clearly necessary for administrative purposes.

The subsequent role of English in India has been significant. In 1950, the Central Government decided that the official language would be Hindi and the transition from English was to be complete by 1965. The ensuing protestations that English was a unifying power in the newly independent nation, a language used by the administration, judiciary, legislators and the press for over a century, were accompanied by bloody riots. Mr Nehru acknowledged in parliament that English was 'the major window for us to the outside world. We dare not close that window, and if we do it will spell peril for the future!' When in 1965 Hindi was proclaimed the sole official language, the Shastri government was

severely shaken by the resulting demonstrations. Only after students had burnt themselves to death and a hundred rioters had been shot by police was it agreed that English should continue as an associate official language.

The 65 million speakers of Hindi were a strong argument for selecting it as India's national language. But a number of newly independent nations have no one widely spoken language which can be used for building national unity. In West Africa (there are 400 different languages in Nigeria alone) English or French are often the only common languages available once a speaker has left his own area. English is accordingly the official language of both Ghana and Nigeria, used in every walk of daily life. Indeed, English has become a significant factor in national unity in a broad band of nations from Sierra Leone to Malaysia. It is the national language of twenty-nine countries (USA and Australia, of course, but also Lesotho and Liberia) and it is also an official language in fifteen others: South Africa and Canada, predictably, but also Cameroon and Dahomey.

There is, however, a further reason why English enjoys world-wide currency, apart from political and historical considerations. The rapidly developing technology of the English-speaking countries has made British and American television and radio programmes, films, recordings and books readily available in all but the most undeveloped countries. Half the world's scientific literature is written in English. By comparison, languages like Arabic, Yoruba and Malay have been little equipped to handle the concepts and terms of modern sciences and technology. English is therefore often the only available tool for twentieth-century learning.

When Voltaire said 'The first among languages is that which possesses the largest number of excellent works', he could not have been thinking of publications of the MIT Press, cassette recordings of English pop groups or the world-wide successes of BBC television enterprises. But it is partly through agencies as varied and modern as these that the demand for English is made and met, and by which its unique position in the world is sustained.

English as a first language and second language

It is arguable that native speakers of English can no longer make strong proprietary claims to the language which they now share with most of the developed world. The Cairo *Egyptian Gazette* declared 'English is not the property of capitalist Americans, but of all the world', and perhaps the assertion may be made even more convincingly in Singapore, Kampala, and Manila. Bereft of former overtones of political domination, English now exists in its own right in a number of world varieties. Unlike French, which continues to be based upon one metropolitan culture, the English language has taken on a number of regional forms. What Englishman can deny that a form of English, closely related to his own – equally communicative, equally worthy of respect – is used in San Francisco, Auckland, Hong Kong and New Delhi? And has the Mid-West lady visitor to London any more right to crow with delight, 'But you speak our language – you speak English just like we do', than someone from Sydney, Accra, Valletta, or Port-of-Spain, Trinidad?

It may be argued, then, that a number of world varieties of English exist: British, American, Caribbean, West African, East African, Indian, South-east Asian, Australasian among others; having distinctive aspects of pronunciation and usage, by which they are recognised, whilst being mutually intelligible. (It needs hardly be pointed out that within these broad varieties there are dialects: the differences between the local speech of Exeter and Newcastle, of Boston and Dallas, of Nassau and Tobago are on the one hand sufficiently different to be recognised by speakers of other varieties, yet on the other to be acknowledged as dialects of the same variety.)

Of these geographically disparate varieties of English there are two kinds: those of first language situations where English is the mother tongue (MT), as in the USA or Australasia, and second language (SL) situations, where English is the language of commercial, administrative and educational institutions, as in Ghana or Singapore.

Each variety of English marks a speech community, and in motivational terms learners of English may wish to feel themselves members of a particular speech community and identify a target variety accordingly. In several cases, there

is little consciousness of choice of target. For example the Greek Cypriot immigrant in London, the new Australian from Italy and the Puerto Rican in New York will have self-selecting targets. In second language situations, the local variety will be the goal. That is, the Fulani learner will learn the educated West African variety of English, not British, American or Indian. This may appear self-evident, yet in some areas the choice of target variety is hotly contested.

For example, what kind of English should be taught in Singapore schools to the largely Chinese population? One view is that of the British businessman who argues that his local employees are using English daily, not only with him, but in commercial contacts with other countries and Britain. Therefore they must write their letters and speak on the telephone in a universally understood form of English. This is the argument for teaching British Received Pronunciation (RP), which Daniel Jones defined as that 'most usually heard in the families of Southern English people who have been educated at the public schools', and for teaching the grammar and vocabulary which mark the standard British variety. The opposite view, often taken by Singaporean speakers of English, is that in using English they are not trying to be Englishmen or to identify with RP speakers. They are Chinese speakers of English in a community which has a distinctive form of the language. By speaking a South-east Asian variety of English, they are wearing a South-East linguistic badge, which is far more appropriate than a British one.

The above attitudes reflect the two main kinds of motivation in foreign language learning: instrumental and integrative. When anyone learns a foreign language instrumentally, he needs it for operational purposes – to be able to read books in the new language, to be able to communicate with other speakers of that language. The tourist, the salesman, the science student are clearly motivated to learn English instrumentally. When anyone learns a foreign language for integrative purposes, he is trying to identify much more closely with a speech community which uses that language variety; he wants to feel at home in it, he tries to understand the attitudes and the world view of that community. The immigrant in Britain and the second language speaker of English, though gaining mastery of different varieties of

English, are both learning English for integrative purposes.

In a second language situation, English is the language of the mass media: newspapers, radio and television are largely English media. English is also the language of official institutions – of law courts, local and central government – and of education. It is also the language of large commercial and industrial organisations. Clearly, a good command of English in a second language situation is the passport to social and economic advancement, and the successful user of the appropriate variety of English identifies himself as a successful, integrated member of that language community. It can be seen, then, that the Chinese Singaporean is motivated to learn English for integrative purposes, but it will be English of the South-east Asian variety which achieves his aim, rather than British, American or Australian varieties.

Although, in some second language situations, the official propagation of a local variety of English is often opposed, it is educationally unrealistic to take any variety as a goal other than the local one. It is the model of pronunciation and usage which surrounds the second language learner: its features reflect the influences of his native language, and make it easier to learn than, say, British English. And in the very rare events of a second language learner achieving a perfect command of British English he runs the risk of ridicule and even rejection by his fellows. At the other extreme, the learner who is satisfied with a narrow local dialect runs the risk of losing international communicability.

English as a foreign language

So far we have been considering English as a second language. But in the rest of the world, English is a foreign language. That is, it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life. In Spain, Brazil and Japan, for example, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese are the normal medium of communication and instruction: the average citizen does not need English or any other foreign language to live his daily life or even for social or professional advancement. English, as a world language, is taught among others in schools, but there is no regional

variety of English which embodies a Spanish, Brazilian or Japanese cultural identity. In foreign language situations of this kind, therefore, the hundreds of thousands of learners of English tend to have an instrumental motivation for learning the foreign language. The teaching of modern languages in schools has an educational function, and the older learner who deliberately sets out to learn English has a clear instrumental intention: he wants to visit England, to be able to communicate with English-speaking tourists or friends, to be able to read English in books and newspapers.

Learners of English as a foreign language have a choice of language variety to a larger extent than second language learners. The Japanese situation is one in which both British and American varieties are equally acceptable and both are taught. The choice of variety is partly influenced by the availability of teachers, partly by geographical location and political influence. Foreign students of English in Mexico and the Philippines tend to learn American English. Europeans tend to learn British English, whilst in Papua New Guinea, Australasian English is the target variety.

The distinctions between English as a second language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are, however, not as clear cut as the above may suggest. The decreasing role of English in India and Sri Lanka has, of recent years, made for a shift of emphasis to change a long established second language situation to something nearer to a foreign language situation. Elsewhere, political decisions are changing former foreign language situations. Official policies in, for example, Sweden and Holland are aiming towards a bilingual position where all educated people have a good command of English, which is rapidly becoming an alternate language with Swedish and Dutch – a position much closer to ESL on the EFL/ESL continuum.

It may be seen, then, that the role of English within a nation's daily life is influenced by geographical, historical, cultural and political factors, not all of which are immutable. But the role of English at a given point in time must affect both the way it is taught and the resultant impact on the daily life and growth of the individual.

The place of English in the life of many second and foreign language learners today is much less easy to define than it

was some years ago. Michael West was able to state in 1953:

> The foreigner is learning English to express ideas rather than emotion: for his emotional expression he has the mother tongue. . . . It is a useful general rule that intensive words and items are of secondary importance to a foreign learner, however common they may be.

This remains true for learners in extreme foreign language situations: few Japanese learners, for example, need even a passive knowledge of emotive English. But Danish, German and Dutch learners, in considerably greater contact with native speakers, and with English radio, television and the press, are more likely to need at least a passive command of that area of English which expresses emotions. In those second language situations where most educated speakers are bilingual, having command of both English and the mother tongue, the functions of English become even less clearly defined. Many educated Maltese, for example, fluent in both English and Maltese, will often switch from one language to the other in mid-conversation, rather as many Welsh speakers do. Usually, however, they will select Maltese for the most intimate uses of language: saying their prayers, making love, quarrelling or exchanging confidences with a close friend. Such a situation throws up the useful distinction between public and private language. Where a common mother tongue is available, as in Malta, English tends not to be used for the most private purposes, and the speaker's emotional life is expressed and developed largely through the mother tongue. Where, however, no widely used mother tongue is available between speakers, as in West Africa or Papua New Guinea, the second language, English, is likely to be needed for both public and private language functions. It has been argued that if the mother tongue is suppressed during the formative years, and the English taught is only of the public variety, there is a tendency for the speaker to be restricted in his emotional and affective expression and development. This situation is not uncommon among young first generation immigrant children who acquire a public form of English at school and have only a very restricted experience of their native tongue in the home. Such linguistic and cultural deprivation can give rise to 'anomie', a sense of not belonging

to either social group. Awareness of this danger lies partly behind a recent Council of Europe scheme to teach immigrant children their mother tongue alongside the language of their host country: in England this takes the form of an experimental scheme in Bedford where Italian and Punjabi immigrant children have regular school lessons in their native languages.

Why do we teach English?

Socio-linguistic research in the past few years has made educators more conscious of language functions and therefore has clarified one level of language teaching goals with greater precision. The recognition that many students of English need the language for specific instrumental purposes has led to the teaching of ESP – English for Special or Specific Purposes. Hence the proliferation of courses and materials designed to teach English for science, medicine, agriculture, engineering, tourism and the like. But the frustration of a French architect who, having learnt the English of architecture before attending a professional international seminar in London, found that he could not invite his American neighbour to have a drink, is significant. Specialised English is best learnt as a second layer built upon a firm general English foundation.

Indeed, the more specialised the learning of English becomes – one organisation recently arranged an English course for seven Thai artificial inseminators – the more it resembles training and the less it is part of the educational process. It may be appropriate, therefore, to conclude this chapter with a consideration of the learning of English as a foreign/second language within the educational dimension.

Why do we teach foreign languages in schools? Why, for that matter, teach maths or physics? Clearly, not simply for the learner to be able to write to a foreign pen friend, to be able to calculate his income tax or understand his domestic fuse-box, though these are all practical by-products of the learning process. The major areas of the school curriculum are the instruments by which the individual grows into a

more secure, more contributory, more total member of society.

In geography lessons we move from familiar surroundings to the more exotic, helping the learner to realise that he is not unique, not at the centre of things, that other people exist in other situations in other ways. The German schoolboy in Cologne who studies the social geography of Polynesia, the Sahara or Baffinland is made to relate to other people and conditions, and thereby to see the familiar Königstrasse through new eyes. Similarly the teaching of history is all about ourselves in relationship to other people in other times: now in relation to then. This achievement of perspectttive, this breaking of parochial boundaries, the relating to other people, places, things and events is no less applicable to foreign language teaching. One of the German schoolboy's first (unconscious) insights into language is that *der Hund* is not a universal god-given word for a canine quadruped. 'Dog, chien, perro – aren't they funny? Perhaps they think we're funny.' By learning a foreign language we see our own in perspective, we recognise that there are other ways of saying things, other ways of thinking, other patterns of emphasis: the French child finds that the English word *brown* may be the equivalent of *brun*, *marron* or even *jaune*, according to context; the English learner finds that there is no single equivalent to *blue* in Russian, only *goluboj* and *sinij* (two areas of the English 'blue' spectrum). Inextricably bound with a language – and for English, with each world variety – are the cultural patterns of its speech community. English, by its composition, embodies certain ways of thinking about time, space and quantity; embodies attitudes towards animals, sport, the sea, relations between the sexes; embodies a generalised English speakers' world view.

By operating in a foreign language, then, we face the world from a slightly different standpoint and structure it in slightly different conceptual patterns. Some of the educational effects of foreign language learning are achieved – albeit subconsciously – in the first months of study, though obviously a 'feel' for the new language, together with the subtle impacts on the learner's perceptual, aesthetic and affective development, is a function of the growing experience of its written and spoken forms. Clearly the broader

aims behind foreign language teaching are rarely something of which the learner is aware and fashionable demands for learner-selected goals are not without danger to the fundamental processes of education.

It may be argued that these educational ends are achievable no less through learning Swahili or Vietnamese than English. And this is true. But at the motivational levels of which most learners are conscious there are compelling reasons for selecting a language which is either that of a neighbouring nation, or one of international stature. It is hardly surprising, then, that more teaching hours are devoted to English in the classrooms of the world than to any other subject of the curriculum.

Suggestions for further reading

P. Christophersen, *Second Language Learning*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

P. Strevens, *New Orientations in the Teaching of English*, Oxford University Press, 1977.

P. Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

Chapter 2

In the Classroom

The previous chapter has described something of the role of English in the world today. It is against this background and in the kinds of context described that English language teaching goes on and it is clearly part of the professionalism of a teacher of English to foreigners to be aware of the context in which he is working and of how his teaching fits into the scheme of things. However, for most teachers the primary focus of attention is the classroom, what actually happens there, what kinds of personal encounter occur there – and teaching is very much a matter of personal encounter – and especially what part teachers themselves play there in facilitating the learning of the language.

It may be helpful, therefore, to sketch briefly one or two outline scenarios which might suggest some of the kinds of things that happen in English language teaching classrooms around the world.

Lesson 1

First then imagine a group of twenty-five girls in a Spanish secondary school, aged between 14 and 17, who have been learning English for two years. Their relationship with their teacher is one of affection and trust which has been built up over the year. They are about halfway through the second term. They are familiar with the vocabulary and structures necessary to describe people, jobs, family relationships and

character – in very general terms, also to tell the time, describe locomotion to and from places and to indicate purpose.

Phase 1

The teacher has a large picture on the blackboard. It has been enlarged, using an episcope, from one in *What Do You Think?* by Donna Byrne and Andrew Wright. It shows a queue outside a telephone box. The characters in it are to some extent stereotypes – the fashionable bored girl, the pin-stripe-suited executive with his briefcase, two scruffy lounging boys, and a rather drab hen-pecked husband type. The girls and the teacher have been looking at the picture and discussing it. The girls have identified the types fairly well and the teacher is probing with questions like 'What's happening here?' The English habit of queuing is discussed. 'What time of day is it?' The class decides on early evening with the people returning from work or school. 'Who are the people in the picture? What are their jobs? Do we need to know their names? What might they be called? Where have they come from? Where are they going? Who are they telephoning? What is their relationship? Why are they telephoning? What is the attitude of the other person? How does each person feel about having to wait in the queue? Is there any interaction between them?' and so on.

Phase 2

The girls are all working in small groups of about four or five. The teacher is moving round the class from group to group, supplying bits of language that the pupils need and joining in the discussion. There is some Spanish being spoken, but a lot of English phrases are also being tried out and when the teacher is present the girls struggle hard to communicate with her in English. There is also a good deal of laughter and discussion. One girl in each group is writing down what the others tell her. The class is involved in producing a number of dialogues. Most groups have picked the teenage girl who is