

Current Issues in

TEACHING ENGLISH

as a

SECOND LANGUAGE

to

ADULTS

Edited by
Sandra Nicholls and
Elizabeth Hoadley-Maidment

Edward Arnold



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**Sandra Nichols and
Elizabeth Hoagley-Maidment**

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This book is dedicated to the Inner London Education Authority and all our ESL colleagues. The support of ILEA and the commitment of those working in the field made a significant contribution to the rapid and extensive development of ESL and of work with bilingual adults.

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I. Nicholls, Sandra II. Hoadley-Maidment, Elizabeth

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Introduction

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The teaching of English to bilingual students is a field which has always been marked by rapid growth, a dynamic philosophy and an ever-increasing range of work. Even as we write, the on-going debate is being stimulated by the findings of the CRE Investigation into ESL teaching in Calderdale and the House of Commons Select Committee Report on the Bangladeshis in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Any collection of papers on ESL can therefore only represent a selection of current issues at one point in its history, in this case at a time when the debate is shifting away from a narrow concern with English language teaching towards the place of language in education and a positive recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity in modern Britain.

The book consists of a series of papers reflecting individual views which we as editors have grouped around a common area. Each section begins with a short introduction which pulls out the major themes but there is no attempt to present an agreed view within or between the sections. Not all authors will concur with the ideas expressed by other contributors.

The papers have been written by a wide range of people working in education with bilingual adults. They include teachers with extensive practical classroom experience and advisers with a national or regional overview of practice and curriculum development, those working in community and adult education and others whose context is vocational training and further education. A number of contributors bring a bilingual and bicultural perspective to their writing; all have wide professional experience both within language teaching and in education generally.

Authors have been free to write in their own style. This is reflected not simply in the way they have organized their contributions but also in the language they have chosen to use. Many of the terms used in ESL have political connotations, e.g. *black*. As editors we have not imposed any language on the contributors but readers may wish to refer to the glossary at the back of the book for definitions of terms with which they are not familiar.

The book has been written for all teachers who are interested in language and learning and particularly for those who teach bilingual students, whether as learners of English or as students or trainees studying in linguistically-mixed groups. It is not a practical handbook on how to teach but is intended to stimulate discussion of classroom teaching and related issues. To this end the book is organized so that readers may dip into it to read individual papers or sections.

Over the last decade we have seen the emergence of a range of publications on issues related to this field. We hope this volume will contribute to the literature but look forward in turn to those publications which must supersede it so that the debate can be carried forward into the 1990s.

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Section 1 Influences and Developments

ESL provision in the post-school sector — a historical perspective

Sandra Nicholls

Twenty years ago there was virtually no ESL provision in the post-school education sector. There were, of course, some language classes for foreign students visiting Britain, and there were a substantial number of English and general Education courses for native speakers — and, no doubt, these courses were attended by adult immigrants.¹ However, the notion of a need for specific and specialized provision did not really exist. By the mid seventies the majority of ESL provision was still *ad hoc* and taught either by volunteers or part-time teachers. There was very little professional training available and those working in the field certainly had no professional voice. Today the picture is dramatically different. ESL provision is firmly established in the post-school sector. There are two nationally recognized in-service training qualifications and a national professional organization. There is a high level of political consciousness and concern within the field which is expressed through anti-racist initiatives and the positive validation of bilingualism in the educational process.

From the sixties to the eighties

What, then, has happened across the intervening years to bring about such change? To answer this question it is necessary to delve back into the conscious beginnings of ESL in the post-school sector. I use the word 'conscious' advisedly and in a national sense because, although Britain has always had non-indigenous second language speakers, it was not until forced migration started to cause large numbers of East African Asians to arrive in the 1960s that the need for language provision for adults was officially recognized and ESL schemes came into existence.

The late sixties

The general belief in the late sixties was that once the immigrants had acquired English they would be quickly assimilated into British society

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at large. It was also presumed that the men would pick up the language at work, that the children would absorb it at school, and that it was only the women, isolated in the home, who might require formal English language tuition — and even then, it would probably only be a temporary need, for six months or so.

The organization and content of tuition was, of necessity, extremely pragmatic. Volunteers and part-time teachers taught women (and some men) English for day-to-day interactions. The lessons took place either in the students' homes or in locally convenient centres, such as primary schools, community centres and clinics. There was little, if any, specialist training for the teachers, and apart from home-produced materials the only materials available for adults were those commercially devised for the newly burgeoning EFL market — the contents of which had little relevance to the lives of bilingual British citizens working and bringing up their families in the UK.

The early seventies

By the first half of the seventies the assimilationist 'melting pot' theory had been replaced by the longer-term view of integration. It was recognized that acquiring English for the workplace, the school curriculum and day-to-day needs was both more complex and required greater time than had at first been thought. ESL was obviously not the temporary band-aid that had initially been envisaged. Nor was it only the women who had need of English language tuition.

In 1974, money was made available to establish a national industrial language training scheme which was to concentrate on providing English language tuition and management training in the workplace. At the same time, the post-school sector, particularly adult education, began to make a more structured offer to second-language speakers of English. This was done both through 'graded' classes at adult education centres and through a more complex network of classes in the community. Diversification was beginning to take place — although the concern at that time was more to do with the extent than with the nature of ESL provision. ESL literacy classes were becoming more commonplace and there was a growth in specific-purpose classes for groups such as those seeking employment or attending ante-natal clinics. This additional provision did not replace the volunteer home-tuition schemes; indeed, they were still seen as an essential link between the community and the educational establishments. The new provision complemented and extended what already existed. A national training scheme, specifically designed for teachers of ESL to adults, began in 1975 when the Inner London Education Authority piloted the Royal Society of Arts' Certificate in the Teaching of English to Adult Immigrants. Before then, the little training that had existed had been mainly for volunteers — a situation reflected by the publication of a home-tutor kit in the early seventies by the Community Relations Commission. A second publication appeared in 1978.

The late seventies

During the second half of the seventies, ESL received a new impetus largely through statistics revealed in the 1977 *PEP Report* (Smith, 1977) — stark figures like those shown in Table 1, about the amount of English spoken by Asian adults.

Table 1 *Speaking English only slightly or not at all*

	%
African Asian men	19
Indian men	26
Pakistani men	43
African Asian women	41
Indian women	60
Pakistani women	77

These revelations prompted the BBC to produce its first series aimed at the 'non English-speaking' community. *Parosi*, a soap opera, actively encouraged Asian women to learn English, either through home-tuition or by joining an ESL class. Many local education authorities, anticipating the same flood of requests for tuition that had followed the BBC Adult Literacy series *On the move*, looked seriously at their local *ad hoc* provision, and began to make contingency plans.

Unfortunately, central government did not set aside the one million pounds which had been made available for staffing during the Adult Literacy Campaign – although some money was earmarked for new equipment and materials in the Urban Aid Programme. In the event, the *Parosi* campaign did not bring forth the number of requests that had been anticipated. What it did do, however, was put the language needs of adults firmly on local and national education agendas, and by bringing ESL teachers and organizers across the country into a network for the first time, it sowed the seeds of what was to become the national professional organization, The National Association for Teaching English as a Second Language to Adults (NATESLA).

People in this field were still very much concerned with the availability and accessibility of ESL provision for all who needed it and desired it. Among other ventures, a caravan was used to provide mobile ESL in Bradford and a double-decker bus was fitted out as both classroom space and crèche in South London. Information leaflets were produced in as many local languages as possible and libraries displayed the national logo to signal the availability of ESL tuition in their area.

As far as the curriculum was concerned, the cornerstones were still the day-to-day language and literacy needs of adult migrants 'adjusting' to life in Britain, although there was emerging a concern about the relevance of what was being taught. This concern was, of course, to grow, but meanwhile the overwhelming belief held by most ESL providers was that a greater command of the English language would inevitably lead to better education and employment prospects which in their turn would, again inevitably, enhance the quality of life of the migrant communities. Looking back, we can shudder at the naïveté of this view and realize that it was based on an extreme deficit model of the ethnic minority communities. Despite the approach to ESL teaching being grounded in the best traditions of adult education, we had neither thrown off its monocultural yoke nor come to terms with the wider and more far-reaching issues affecting Britain's ethnic communities.

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Meanwhile, the seventies closed with the second BBC series designed for bilingual adults, *Speak for Yourself*, and the accompanying radio programmes for teachers of ESL. This series not only focused on the language and access information required for day-to-day situations, but also explored the issues of cross-cultural awareness, underlining the fact that communication is a two-way process with the onus for effective communication lying with both non-native and native speaker of English alike. This refinement reflected the changing focus of the ESL curriculum at the time.

Into the eighties

By the late seventies and the beginning of the eighties, the belief in integration had been replaced by the reality of cultural pluralism. Britain was having to recognize and try to accept that it was now a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial and multi-faith society and that this diversity was not temporary – it was here to stay. Statements made at the time about the aims of ESL provision reflected this new climate of opinion (Nicholls and Naish, 1981):

English as a second language provision is designed for people living, working and bringing up families in this country. Like all adults, second language speakers need to:

- make informed choices about their own lives and the lives of their children*
- be able to take advantage of the opportunities for further education and training*
- understand the institutions and structures of the society in which they live so that they can play an active part if they so wish.*

This was the period when local education authorities began producing multicultural policy statements, and when school curricula were called into question over their cultural bias. It was also the time when major changes began to take place in ESL – changes which were brought about by a combination of three sets of factors – content and pedagogy, the changing economic situation, and racism.

Content and teaching methods

Firstly, the earlier battles to establish ESL provision for adults had to a great extent been won. No one now questioned that ESL should be made available as part of the post-school education offer for bilingual adults. This situation was reinforced by the arrival of the Vietnamese 'boat people' and by the subsequent government funding of English language tuition in the reception centres and, later, as part of the resettlement programme. The recognition I have already mentioned released ESL organizers from their earlier preoccupations with the funding and quantity of provision, and enabled them instead to focus more on the quality and relevance of what was on offer. Questions were raised about the linear progression of ESL provision. Did such a step-by-step model help or hinder adult bilinguals? Was the implied goal of 'native-speaker competence' either realistic or even desirable? How could ESL teachers best establish realistic goals – goals which would include not only language and literacy, but also access, study

skills etc. -- and how could they demonstrate the transferability of these skills and thereby increase the students' confidence and autonomy? Other questions were raised concerning the adult nature of the ESL offer. How far were the life experiences of students attending ESL classes really being taken into account? To what extent were their skills and interests being tapped in the language learning process? How could the ESL classroom acquire a more democratic base, and how could the ESL teacher create a more equal learning partnership?

These, and other questions like them, led to various developments, the most influential of which was the creation of linked-skill courses where the acquisition of communication skills is integrated with the learning or expression of practical skills (e.g. dressmaking, car maintenance, computer programming). This form of provision proved extremely successful, providing students with a realistic and stimulating language learning environment in which their confidence increased. Such classes continue to play an important part in provision for bilingual adults. However, a significant development has been the extension of this notion of language support into the main curriculum where it is applied to a wide range of academic and vocational courses at all levels.

Another area that ESL organizers focused on was that most challenging of teaching situations -- the mixed level community class. Despite all the difficulties that these classes presented, they were for logistical and very good community reasons, the mainstay of provision in many areas. In this situation how could the isolation of the lone teacher be overcome? What was the most appropriate and most possible form of syllabus design for groups which might include a newly arrived graduate bride learning alongside a recently widowed woman who had no experience of formal education but who had lived in Britain for many years? There were no ready answers then, and there are still few today, but the use of more team teaching was explored, and greater effort was put into the development of suitable resource materials.

The changing economic situation

Another major factor that affected ESL at the time was the dramatically changing economic situation. The recession was now deepening and in its wake came the high growth of unemployment -- a situation which often hit ethnic minority communities earliest and hardest. The government response to growing unemployment overall was to use the Manpower Services Commission to fund 'up-skilling' and retraining courses for adults, and vocational preparation courses for young people. The majority of these courses were based in colleges of further education, and although initially the particular needs of bilingual adults and young people were overlooked, eventually some special programmes were evolved. These included ESL preparation courses for adults, skills training for particular minority groups and work experience courses for bilingual school-leavers. These courses had an important, if indirect, effect on the development and growth of ESL provision and language support for bilingual students in the further education sector. However, at this time energies were mainly focused on obtaining a greater number of preparatory courses for bilingual adults, on establishing

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study skill courses for those wishing to gain access to academic programmes, and on providing more foundation courses for those school-leavers who had not had sufficient time within the school system to acquire the language and the general education that would enable them to enter further education 'mainstream' provision.

Growing awareness of racism

The third factor, one which caused a shift in our perspective in ESL, was the increasing national awareness and concern among teachers about the growth of racism, particularly in the urban areas. In ESL we began to question our provision in terms of racism. We asked what we were actually achieving through what were, by now, our traditional language programmes. Were we contributing to the educational offer to bilingual adults, or were we, in fact, by not challenging the monolingual entry requirements of both mainstream education and the market place, hindering people's chances? Questions like these also caused us to look at our own steadily increasing ranks of language teachers and to note the very obvious lack of ethnic minority teachers in our own area of work. Were we as guilty of institutional racism as those establishments which we were so quick to criticize? It was, however, not until we were well into the eighties that practical steps began to be taken on these matters (FEU, 1987).

With the eighties came an expansion in specialist in-service training which signalled the increasing professionalism in the field. The original RSA Certificate, Teaching English to Adult Immigrants, since renamed the Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Second Language in Further, Adult and Community Education, continues to be offered in various parts of the country. Materials developed by teachers as part of their course work make an important contribution to local ESL resource banks, as well as sometimes being published more widely. In 1981 the RSA launched a new certificate — the Initial Certificate in the Teaching of English as a Second Language to Adults² — which has had far-reaching effects, one of the most important being the increased recruitment and training of ethnic minority teachers. This in turn has led those responsible for leading courses to re-examine the ethnocentric bias of much of the training and methods of assessment (NATESLA, 1986).

Continuing concerns

In the past decade the debate on ESL has diversified, and it is now taking place at a variety of levels within a wide range of educational provision. However, two overriding matters of concern remain for everyone involved in the teaching of bilingual adults:

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The first of these is the importance of recognizing and utilizing the linguistic and cultural resources that bilingual and multilingual adults bring with them to both language acquisition and other areas of learning. The ILEA (1983) discussion document *Mother Tongue and ESL* has led to some important developments. In the classroom, teachers are using their students' knowledge of other languages within their

lessons; in some local teacher-training programmes, bilingual methodologies are being developed as an alternative approach to language teaching and learning; the recruitment of more teachers from ethnic minority groups is making it possible to extend the scope and nature of provision and to provide more appropriate counselling services. ESL organizers have also been turning their attention to the world outside the educational establishments, and following the example set by Industrial Language Training, have been working with professional agencies on language and cross-cultural awareness programmes for groups such as health visitors and staff at job centres. Similar work is also taking place within the adult education service, though at present it is still on a small scale (Shackman, 1988).

Equality of opportunity

The second concern is more complex and relates to the problems teachers face in confidently discussing the need for equality of opportunity for all, while operating in a climate which seems to do little to combat institutionalized racism and in an education system in which it is difficult to bring about the changes necessary actively to encourage and support bilingual adults within mainstream provision. Here we are facing two dilemmas. On the one hand we recognize that no real progress can be made until fundamental structural and attitudinal changes take place, both within the educational service and outside. On the other hand, we are aware of the needs of bilingual adults who at present are having to function in a system which equates less than total native-speaker fluency in English (just one of the languages used by bilingual or multilingual adults in this country) with a general deficiency in all other areas of learning (Robson, 1988).

Various steps have been taken to try and minimize the disadvantages facing bilingual students, including the development of a variety of forms of language support, specific targeting of vocational courses and the creation of alternative access routes for those who do not possess the traditional entry qualifications, but who wish to enrol in professional training programmes. These developments obviously represent an important shift away from the view that it is merely language which impedes the bilingual adult from participating fully in the education system. However, such provision must be perceived as only an interim measure, and continuing efforts must be made to bring about fundamental changes within the education service and society as a whole (FEU, 1987).

As teachers we have a particular responsibility to help bring about these changes. In the classroom, we must be certain that value is always given to the students' linguistic and cultural diversity, and that all our teaching is built on the knowledge and skills that they already possess. In the institutional context we must continue to challenge the deficit image of the bilingual adult and to work towards a provision where equality of opportunity is secured for all students. Most important of all, within the education service we must work with others to achieve a post-school provision where no bilingual adults are impeded in their progress through the system because of racial, cultural or linguistic bias.

Notes

1. Students who do not speak English as their first language have been variously characterized in the education service as immigrants, second-language speakers, ESL students and bilingual students. These terms are used throughout this article in order to reflect the particular perspective of the period under discussion. Currently the term 'bilingual' is used because it most accurately describes an adult who has to operate in two or more languages. Its use, however, does not denote any specific level of attainment or fluency.
2. This part-time course was designed to meet the growing need for an introductory level qualification which could be taken by experienced volunteers, trained language teachers wishing to move into ESL from other areas, and less experienced ESL teachers.

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Minority languages in England — a neglected resource?

Euan Reid

Languages and speakers

For many centuries refugees and migrants have settled in England from all parts of Europe. There have, for example, been speakers of Flemish from the Low Countries, French-speaking Huguenots, Spanish-

speaking and Portuguese-speaking Sephardic Jews, Italians from both the North and the South, Polish-speaking, Yiddish-speaking and German-speaking Ashkenazy Jews. By now these older migrations have been almost entirely assimilated, at least in terms of language use in daily life.

However, since the Second World War, urban England has been linguistically transformed. In the first place, many refugees and 'displaced persons' from Eastern and Central Europe had settled here by the late 1940s, resulting in important communities of speakers of languages such as Polish and Ukrainian in various parts of the country, (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985). Later, like other industrialized countries in Western Europe, Britain attracted a large immigrant workforce to feed the expanding economy of the 1950s and 1960s. In Britain's case, workers came in particular from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan, Cyprus and Hong Kong. Families followed from all these countries, and are still following when they can meet the now much more stringent immigration control mechanisms.

In the 1970s and 1980s, refugees and settlers have continued to arrive from, among other places, East Africa (after the expulsions during the Amin regime), Vietnam (in the wake of the settlement of the war there), Iran, Ethiopia and Chile (as a result of civil strife in these countries), and from Bangladesh — the main source of current 'secondary' immigration.

From 'ESL learner' to 'bilingual student'

It is probably above all the arrival in British schools and colleges of so many students from South Asia and the Caribbean that has made it impossible to continue with the *de facto* assimilationist policies that have typified the mainstream educational response to immigration over the centuries. As long as the migrants had white skins, they had the option of more or less complete anglicization, and nearly all took that option — at least as far as language was concerned.

However, comparative economic decline, the growth of racism among the indigenous white population, and the response of many minorities to that racism is closing off the option of complete cultural assimilation. We find in this context increasing interest in alternative linguistic and cultural values.

The expression of this in terms of the education system is, at least in part, an extension to a more comprehensive approach of the formerly exclusively ESL-focused language education. In this teachers look at all aspects of what the language learner brings to the classroom and take as their target the development of a full linguistic repertoire, appropriate to the multiple roles which language users may adopt in the course of living in a multilingual society.

The role of 'teacher of ESL' has therefore been extended, and needs to be extended further, to embrace skills which will facilitate the development of other components in the bilingual or multilingual repertoires of their students. Hence the inclusion in this collection of a contribution about minority languages.

Facts and figures?

No one at the moment is in a position to say with confidence how many speakers of different languages there are in England, or how these languages are distributed. This is because even this most basic linguistic-demographic information is not collected through the ten-yearly National Censuses as conducted in England. (The otherwise identical Census forms for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland do have such questions – but only about the indigenous Celtic minority languages.)

Language surveys of their school-age populations conducted by local education authorities do, however, provide a reasonably reliable indication of the current distribution of languages other than English in selected areas. These were first carried out by the Inner London Education Authority, beginning in 1978 (ILEA, 1979), and from 1981 onwards on a two-yearly basis (ILEA, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987).

In 1980 and 1981 the Linguistic Minorities Project (LMP) collaborated with five LEAs in other parts of the country, to conduct Schools Language Surveys in their areas. Fig. 1 represents a summary of the findings of these surveys, and more detail is available in the Working Papers from the project (Reid, Morawska and Couillaud, 1984).

A word of caution is necessary when interpreting the data in Fig. 1. Although these schools language surveys were very carefully planned and conducted so as to minimize the risk of serious distortion, what is represented there is the total numbers of school pupils who answered positively a teacher's question about languages other than English used at home. It is very likely that some pupils chose not to reveal their use of other languages, where, for example, they believed that the teacher or the school did not value or even approve of such use. It is also possible that other pupils exaggerated their linguistic skills.

Since these studies were completed, further surveys using the same instrument have been undertaken in the Outer London Boroughs of Brent (1982 and 1985), Hounslow (1983), and Ealing (1985), as well as in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1984). Bradford undertook further surveys based partly on the LMP model (1983 and 1985), and Barnet has used the ILEA approach. In most cases details of these surveys are available direct from the LEAs, even where they have not been more widely published.

The situation represented in Fig. 1 is at the moment the nearest approximation available to a partial linguistic demography of urban England. Since the school population surveyed represented in each case approximately ten year-cohorts, multiplication of the individual language figures by five or six gives an indication of the probable total numbers of speakers of a particular language in the place surveyed.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to extrapolate from these figures to totals for numbers of speakers of particular minority languages in the country as a whole. Nevertheless, even incomplete information is helpful to local educational administrators and planners. It ought also to be useful to local minority organizations, as they attempt to negotiate equitable and rationally-based decisions about local provision and distribution of educational resources.

What is common to all areas so far surveyed is that everywhere a very wide range of languages is represented – Inner London schools in 1987 had more than 170. Nevertheless, outside Inner London some three or