ELT in a Changing World

ELT in a Changing World:
Innovative Approaches to New Challenges

Edited by

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FOREWORD

The changes taking place across the world today as a result of factors such as globalisation, the unstoppable spread of information technology, the instant transmission of 'breaking news' from Lahore to Lisbon to Los Angeles, and the emergence of English as a global language, are already having a major impact on the way we live, the way we think, and the way we communicate. Those of us in language education can no longer teach our subjects in a safe, antiseptic ivory tower isolated from the context of the real world. With the fast-paced spread of English as a second or foreign language throughout so many parts of the world, the teaching of English today must also aim to be just as dynamic and vibrant in order to meet the new challenges that have arisen. How do we teach a second language such as English, for example, while preserving the dignity and respect for local languages and cultures? What uses can we make of life-long learning outside the classroom? How can we motivate and retain the attention of digital natives who regard multi-tasking as an everyday norm? These are some of the questions that the authors of these papers try to come to grips with in this book. On the one hand, a certain level of communicative competence in English has become vital for success for men and women worldwide in many walks of life. On the other hand, acquiring a second language in situations where there are few opportunities for practice or meaningful interaction can be a difficult and stressful task for both teachers and learners.

This collection of papers written by experienced practitioners in the field looks at the challenges faced by language educators in Asia and attempts to offer innovative approaches, methods and ways of thinking that can help learners to break through the second language barrier and achieve genuine communicative competence in English. The volume will be a valuable addition to recent work on the theory and practice of ELT in Asia. Many of the papers are written with particular reference to Pakistan, but, in our increasingly inter-connected world, the book will be useful for language teachers and researchers everywhere.

—Professor Thomas Farrell
Department of Applied Linguistics, Brock University, Canada

PREFACE

The fifteen authors featured in this book were all presenters at a two-day international seminar organized by the Centre of English Language (CEL) at the Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan, in January, 2011. The theme of the seminar was *ELT in a Changing World: Innovative Approaches to New Challenges*, and, throughout the two days, more than forty scholars, teachers, and researchers from six different countries put forward their views on how English language teaching can best meet the changing needs of ESL/EFL learners in a globalised, digitised, but culturally and educationally diverse world. The event, which was attended by more than 450 participants, showcased speakers from Australia, Indonesia, Oman, Pakistan, Singapore, and the UK. This book is a collection of fifteen of the best papers that were presented at the Centre of English Language's Karachi seminar.

In their own different ways, the fifteen authors discuss changes that have taken place across the world in the last 10 to 15 years and consider how successfully English language teachers, thinkers and researchers have responded to these changes. While some of the authors address changes in syllabus and course design, others offer suggestions for new teaching materials, in-service training, classroom methodology, e-learning and ways of testing language proficiency. The book is divided into three sections: *Global Change and Language Learning*, *Developments in Second Language Theory and Practice in Pakistan*, and *Learning Innovations*.

As Andrew Littlejohn points out in the opening chapter, *The Social Location of Language Teaching: From Zeitgeist to Imperative*, while applied linguists and language teachers tend to see innovations in ELT as coming from research developments within their own discipline, a wider historical perspective may reveal that the changes are actually responses to social events and shifts in the human behaviour of a particular period. In his ground-breaking sociological analysis of past trends in ELT, Littlejohn argues that the Soviet Union's Sputnik programme of the1950s, the hippie, flower-power, 'do-your-own-thing' culture of the 1960s, and the arrival of fast-food burger chains in more recent years have all had their own effects on how we teach languages.

Section One continues with Anjum Saleemi's *Knowledge of Language and Its Late Acquisition through Self-Immersion.* Saleemi states that, while children naturally pair meaning with form in acquiring their mother tongue, this is not generally the case with second language acquisition. Saleemi suggests that an approach he terms 'self-immersion' may be useful in helping the learner to bridge the gap between form and meaning in the study and acquisition of a second language. The third paper in this section is Willy Renandya's *The Role of Input- and Output-Based Practice in ELT.* Renandya argues that many communicative language programmes today give learners considerable output-based practice but do not give them sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful input-based practice. The result is that the learners become fluent users of the second language but their speech and writing are filled with errors because they have been exposed to insufficient input to allow their linguistic system to develop adequately. Renandya concludes his discussion by offering some practical suggestions for increasing input-based practice in the language classroom.

In her chapter *Beware! The Yellow Brick Road Lieth in that Which Is Not What Could Be*, Mirat Al Fatima Ahsan accepts that change is a constant factor in life and that educationists need to address the challenges that go hand in hand with changing situations and needs. However, she feels that, rather than seeking out the latest methods and technological gadgets to help us go forward, we might instead concentrate on looking more carefully at what we already have. Ahsan describes a phenomenographic study she conducted with a group of English language teachers to investigate their personal understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning and the factors that have influenced these views.

Graeme Cane examines Language Awareness as a potential source of input and instruction in second language acquisition. Cane argues that encouraging learners to become more aware of how English works in real contexts can help increase their knowledge, confidence, enjoyment and motivation to learn the language. After discussing the value of using language awareness activities in general, he offers some practical strategies for raising the phonetic, grammatical and discourse awareness of English learners.

In the final chapter of Section One, Fauzia Shamim asks why many teachers are resistant to change and innovation. Is it their natural conservatism or are there other deeper reasons? After analysing a number

of Pakistan-based case studies, Shamim argues that, rather than blaming teachers for not implementing educational changes, we should consciously help them to manage change in the classroom in their own way.

Section Two opens with *Conceptual, Methodological and Analytical Inadequacies in Language Policy Scholarship in Relation to Pakistan* by Muhammad Ali Khan. He argues that recent literature on Language Policy and Planning has shown a move from large-scale, survey-based research to smaller, more intensive studies of specific communication contexts where even basic terms such as *language* and *mother tongue* are debated and deconstructed in line with recent developments in linguistic ethnography. Khan goes on to analyse two works by the well-known Pakistani linguist, Tariq Rahman, and suggests that scholarly work on Language Policy and Planning in Pakistan has been limited by structural functional thinking and now needs to embrace a more modern approach to analysing social communication within the diverse speech communities of Pakistan.

In *Language, Migration and Testing: Perspectives from a Country of Origin* Tony Capstick discusses the gate-keeping role that English is increasingly playing as a means of controlling immigration numbers to English-speaking countries. Since 2010, migrants who wish to enter the UK as the partner of a British citizen have been required to take an English language test, and Capstick's paper examines findings from a study he conducted in Mirpur, Pakistan, which looked at the influence of his research subjects' level of English on their opportunities for migration to the UK. In the following chapter, Aliya Sikandar discusses the concept of identity in the Pakistani context and examines the different social meanings expressed when speakers use the pronouns *I, we, they,* and *you.* In a research study conducted by the author, the collected data demonstrated that her research subjects associated themselves with particular social groups, roles and identities through their use of language.

One of the more obvious changes in the teaching of English in recent years at the university level has been the spread of online or blended learning and the reduction in the time allocated to traditional face-to-face classroom teaching. This change has come about as a result of advances in educational technology, the development of virtual learning environments, the increased costs of face-to-face teaching, and various other factors. However, at present there is still little hard evidence to show that online learning is more or less effective than traditional classroom-based teaching. In their chapter *E-learning in ELT: Potentials and Challenges in*

the Context of Pakistan, Azra Ahmed, Mirat Al Fatima Ahsan, Faiza Saleem and Rubina Sultan examine the potential of e-learning and the pedagogical challenges it presents for instructors and students. The authors discuss a study they conducted on the teaching and learning of English for Academic Purposes with a group of nursing students at a private university in Karachi. The paper shares the findings of their study up to the intervention phase of the project and highlights the insights that have been gained so far.

In the final chapter of Section Two, Isbah Mustafa shows in *English Language Learning Environment in Government Middle Schools in Pakistan* , that, despite the importance given to English language in government schools in Pakistan, this emphasis does not seem to translate into an improved level of English language learning in the schools. Mustafa's study uses recent data from government schools to explore the challenges faced by teachers and students in those areas of Pakistan where English is seldom used in everyday communication and interaction. She then highlights some of the local educational practices that have had some success in these schools and discusses ways to increase their impact on learners.

Noor Amna Malik's paper, *Advances in Teacher Education and Professional Development*, opens Section Three of the book. Malik points out that teacher education is one of the key pillars of the 'Strategic Vision' of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) because it is seen as critical to the country's development as a moderate and democratic nation. Malik, feels that it is imperative to upgrade the quality of teachers through the continuous learning of innovative skills and techniques. She discusses the bold strategic initiative taken by the HEC to establish the Learning Innovation Division in 2003 with the mandate to conduct and facilitate programmes for Master Trainers and set up Professional Development seminars and workshops throughout Pakistan. Malik highlights the successes and challenges faced by the Learning Innovation Division and maps out the way forward for language teacher education in the country.

As faculty members of the School of Nursing at a private university in Pakistan, Jacqueline Maria Dias, Basnama Ayaz and Rozina Barolia have different insights to offer in *Accelerated programmes: The Way Forward in Curriculum Development and Innovation* from those of most of the other authors featured in the book. They begin by underlining the importance of introducing a system of regular curriculum reviews as a

safety check to ensure that each part of every educational curriculum is fulfilling its target aims and objectives. They go on to describe an innovation that has taken place in the Post RN B.Sc. nursing curriculum at their university: the introduction of an accelerated programme in nursing. The chapter discusses observations by the programme designers, feedback from the teaching faculty, as well as evaluations by students of the accelerated programme. Dias et al. assess the advantages of accelerated learning and conclude by looking into the possibility of replicating this innovation in other disciplines.

Fatima Shahabuddin in her paper *The Changing English Language Needs and the Unchanging Ways: What Can Be Done?* discusses recent language learner needs which have arisen in the past decade or so in Pakistan. Shahabuddin points out that, in modern Pakistani cities, young people now require a certain level of English to secure a good job, better educational opportunities, and greater access to information. She then investigates how successfully the teaching/learning framework in the country has responded to these new learner needs and asks if it is possible to make the necessary fundamental changes to the system without creating too many unsettling ripples across the educational pool.

In the final chapter of Section Three, Fatima Dar's chapter, *Social Competence and Language Learnin*g, reminds us of our responsibility as educators to create a learning environment where learners acquire social as well as academic skills. Dar believes that educational institutions currently give too much emphasis to academic achievement and ignore other important life skills. As a result, we tend to produce individuals who may have the right technical or professional qualifications but lack the essential social and behavioural skills to fit happily and productively into the complexities and competition of modern society. Dar recommends a language curriculum which is both academically and socially driven and advocates using socially appropriate texts and methodologies to support a positive learner-friendly ambience in the language classroom.

The editors hope that the fifteen chapters in this volume adequately reflect the ideas, insights, critical debate and lively discussion that filled the lecture rooms of the Aga Khan University in January 2011 during CEL's Sixth International Seminar. After the two days of plenaries, parallel sessions and panel discussions, speakers and participants came to realise that the world has always been and will always be in a constant state of change, and that education cannot stand aloof and detached in its own

ivory tower, indifferent to what's going on elsewhere. Recognising this fact, the seminar participants concluded that all of us, teachers and learners alike, have to respond to the daily changes and challenges we face in the best ways we can. It is hoped that the present book will, in its own small way, offer some useful suggestions on how we might accomplish this complex but crucial task.

—The Editors

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The editors are indebted to the Aga Khan University for facilitating the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development's Centre of English Language (CEL) in organising the Sixth international seminar titled: *ELT in a Changing World: Innovative Approaches to New Challenges*, in 2011. The seminar was attended by some of the leading ELT experts who presented and have contributed their papers for this book. We are grateful to all the authors for their willingness to share their knowledge and ideas.

We are truly grateful to Professor Thomas Farrell for writing a thought-provoking Foreword, which lucidly captures the contents of this book.

Our sincere thanks are extended to Cambridge Scholars Publishing. We would especially like to thank Ms Amanda Millar for her enthusiastic and expert editorial guidance, Ms Carol Koulikourdi for her help during the entire process of this publication, and Ms Soucin Yipsou for designing the cover page.

We also owe our thanks to the entire CEL faculty for their encouragement and to our students who have contributed in a fundamental way to our understanding of the *how*, *what* and *why* of language teaching and learning. Finally, we wish to acknowledge Mr Ramzan Rajwani's technical expertise and the kind support he so willingly provides us in this area.

—The Editors

SECTION ONE

GLOBAL CHANGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

CHAPTER ONE

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF LANGUAGE TEACHING: FROM ZEITGEIST TO IMPERATIVE

ANDREW LITTLEJOHN

Abstract

Drawing on ideas from social theory, this paper argues that the nature of language teaching is intimately related to its social and temporal location. To show the impact of context, the paper first presents a brief overview of the evolution of language teaching from the late 1950s onwards, showing how, in general terms, innovations in language teaching have always resonated in harmony with developments in the wider social context. The argument of the paper, however, is that in recent years the nature of the influence from 'outside' has moved from being simply a *zeitgeist* towards being an *imperative*–direct determination which shapes the details of what is done in classrooms. The paper focuses on two concepts in particular, McDonaldisation and neoliberalism, to show how these have impinged on language teaching today.

Keywords: *language teaching, standardisation, McDonaldisation, Neoliberalism*

Introduction

It is not altogether surprising, of course, that language teaching has almost exclusively been concerned with the dual themes of *language*, on the one hand, and *teaching*, on the other. Language teaching, as a field of professional activity, has its origins in linguistics, with the fruits of language analysis long since a cornerstone of the content of classroom work, in the form of listings of grammar, lexical sets, functions, notions,

discourse structures and so on. More recently, teaching (and learning), that is, methodology, has taken a particular emphasis in the debate, specifically from the 1950s onwards, with the blossoming of what we now know as second language acquisition theory and moves towards communicative approaches.

As language teaching asserts itself as a speciality, as an area of particular academic interest complete with professorships, research grants, journals, conferences and such like, it is comforting to think that we may be getting closer to an understanding of these two themes–that is, what precisely language *is* and what makes *successful* teaching (and learning, of course). Our debates aim to reveal and refine, to show that previous visions of our discipline were lacking in some way, even if we do sometimes give a gentle nod of approval to our own history. Yet, the position taken in this paper is that such a view of what we are engaged in misses one fundamental point. That is, that despite an emphasis on an apparently deepening understanding, the specific forms that language teaching takes and the specific foci of language teaching research and thinking are *cultural* activities, located, just as any other cultural activity, in a particular period of time and in a particular social milieu. As such, despite the internal logic of our discussions, there are likely to be themes, perspectives, concepts, rationales–call them what you will–that resonate in tune with similar themes, perspectives, concepts, and rationales in other areas of social life, often very distant from our own.

Just why this should be so has been discussed and examined by a long line of social theorists, who aim to show how our particular modes of thinking are derived from wider social forces. Marx (1852, 1969), for example, most famously argued that

> Upon different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existences, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundation and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and starting point of his activity. (p. 421)

Marx's original formulation of the relationship between historical context and forms of thought is now generally seen as rather mechanical, unable to explain the subtleties in variations of consciousness. The individual is seen as essentially powerless, unable to resist domination from above, a victim

of a one-way process of contextual indoctrination. Later neo-marxist analyses have offered considerable refinements of this basic formulation and now see ideology–quite literally, meaning 'ideas'–as woven into our day to day 'lived experience', in which a particular view of things appears as 'common sense' and as a natural way of thinking and behaving (see, inter alia, the considerable volume of work produced by writers such as Gramsci, Giroux, Bourdieu & Foucault). The process of maintaining ideology is thus seen as a process in which we are all collectively engaged, as our daily actions reaffirm a particular historically and socially located perspective. Ruling elites, in this view, are continually engaged in a struggle for 'hegemony', a struggle to naturalise *their* view of things and to legitimatise *their* priorities, a struggle which they undertake through institutions such as schools, churches, legal systems, the media, advertising, government regulation, and so on.

It is not my purpose in this paper to discuss the various formulations of the relationship between thought and action, on the one hand, and historical and social context, on the other. Drawing on the social theorists I have mentioned, I simply wish to establish a basic proposition: that is, that language teaching is no less a cultural activity than any other form of social practice and will be subject to the direct influences of the ideology of the time, and, in particular, to pressure from ruling elites and social classes, however indistinctly voiced, to direct our thinking in particular directions. In short, 'common sense' views, being struggled for in the wider society in matters quite unrelated to language teaching, will have an influence on what happens in classrooms. Language teaching will always be underpinned by ideology (see, on this, Littlejohn, 1997).

My contention in this paper is that the nature of this influence has, in recent years, become a lot more defined and a lot more assertive, as standardisation and centralisation have become the hallmarks of advanced industrial societies. I wish to argue that we are moving from a *zeitgeist* relationship with our social and temporal context, to a much more directive one of *imperative*, in which specific ways of doing language teaching are being increasingly presented as the *only* ways to do it, with other views marginalised, presented as wasteful or not fit for purpose. To do this, I want to first offer a brief historical review of recent developments in language teaching to show how language teaching has continually marched in tune with developments way beyond the language classroom.

English Language Teaching – A Brief Historical Overview

Any account of history is necessarily partial, selective and subjective. This is true in at least two important ways in respect of the overview which I offer here. Firstly, I have chosen to focus mainly on social developments in Britain and the United States and relate these to British and American approaches to language teaching. As the major powerhouses of much contemporary thought in language teaching, this is, I believe, a reasonable and justifiable limitation to my review. Secondly, I recognise that I have been highly selective in what I have cited as important moments in social change, and equally selective in my identification of echoes in classroom work. I am sure it is perfectly possible to identify many occurrences of both social change and classroom practice which appear to have no clear resonance, though, following social theory, it would remain a major theoretical challenge to explain why that should be so. My intention here is to provide a broad sweep, provocative in nature and ambitious in the claims it makes. I will begin first with what I see as the major impetus for 'modern' language teaching–political developments in the United States in the 1950s.

The 1950s/60s and the Cold War

In many ways, the post war period was one of broad optimism. The horrors of war were behind the West, and economies were now booming, fuelled in part by the Marshall Plan in Europe, with British Prime Minister Harold McMillan declaring in 1957 that Britons "had never had it so good". A major component in this boom was the rapid development of technology—the war itself had, after all, been finally ended by a major piece of technology in the shape of the atomic bomb. Technology and rationale solutions were very much the flavour of the times. In architecture, we saw designs such as the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1959) and the Sydney Opera House (begun in 1950), with their perfect, geometrical, curved shapes. In the home, this was the era of 'mod cons'–modern conveniences–which brought technology and efficiency to the kitchen with serving hatches, pull-down work surfaces, cookers with timers, and flush fitted kitchen units (Ferry, 2011). In the air, the first plans for the design of a supersonic aircraft, Concorde, were beginning in the early 1960s, with the first flight in 1969.

In the period prior to the late 1950s, English language teaching had remained largely free of major innovations. Grammar translation was still the predominant approach, as it had been for hundreds of years (see Howatt, 2004), with the Berlitz Method and the Direct Method the only major pedagogic rivals. All of this changed dramatically, however, with a single event in 1957, when language teaching was kicked abruptly in the technological age.

In October, 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, thereby heralding the beginning of what we now call the Space Age. The impact of this and further USSR space achievements on the United States was colossal. This was the era of cold war tensions between the two countries, and it seemed that communism had achieved a major scientific, political and propaganda coup, out-pacing American space ambitions, and seriously denting the national psyche.

The immediate response in the United States was one of panic, with the inadequacies of American education, science and research blamed for falling behind in the race. A major failing was identified in the abilities of American scientists to keep up with developments in other countries, so 'emergency measures' were introduced to pour money into foreign language teaching through the 1958 National Defense Foreign Language Act, with massive grants to strengthen research, materials and methods (Flattau, et al., 2005, 2007).

In an atmosphere which emphasised technical, rationale solutions it is perhaps not at all surprising that the lack of foreign language skills was immediately seen as a problem requiring a technical solution. In harmony with the spirit of the times, behaviourism offered just such a technical view, with its conceptualisation of learning as the establishment of habits through technically specified routines. Thus it was that behaviouristic approaches to language teaching became the main beneficiary of the massive injection of funds from the National Defense Act and habit-forming routines became cemented into language teaching for all time. Language laboratories, mim-mem exercises, pattern practice drills and dialogue repetition all owe their origins to this period, and still today comprise much of a staple diet for language teaching, exported globally as American language learning technology. It is interesting to speculate what today's language teaching might have looked like had Chomsky's eventual rejection of Behaviourism come sooner—or, indeed, if the USSR had delayed their launch of the Sputnik by a decade or so.

The Late 1960s to the Late 1970s

Through the 1960s a wave of rebellion occupied many Western governments, with outright rejection of authority and 'The Establishment' seemingly coming under direct attack. The 1968 Paris riots, the occupation of universities in many Western cities, the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights marches all signalled a change in public mood. The notion of *an alternative* was predominant, with a break away from a conformist, middle-class lifestyle. 'Flower power', 'dropping out', 'psychedelia' and 'do your own thing' were all buzz words from this era. Hippies, yippies, beatniks and the 'love generation' seemed to threaten the very foundations of decency. In music, The Beatles posed a major threat with their non-conformist attitudes, and their eventual morphing into hippy-inspired styles.

In the context of this rejection of mainstream values and establishment control, it is not difficult to understand why language teaching, too, took a sudden lurch towards 'alternative' methodologies. It is in this period we see the popularisation (at least in language teaching writings, if not in actual practice) of 'fringe' methodologies such as the Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972) and Suggestopaedia (Lozanov, 1978). It is also in this period that we find the 'do your own thing' theme resonating in language teaching in the form of self access centres, individualisation and autonomous learning, already well established in many parts of the world by the beginning of the 1980s (see, for example, de Silva, 1983; Holec, 1980; Littlejohn, 1983; Riley, 1974). It is also interesting to note that, towards the end of this period, we find the emergence of 'natural' approaches to language acquisition (Krashen, 1981), in itself a rejection of institutionalised approaches to language development, and a return, much as the hippies had promised, to a simpler, more natural way of living and learning.

The 1970s to the Mid-1980s onwards

In contrast to the community-centred movements of the 1960s, the subsequent decade has been characterised by many social commentators as one which emphasised the needs, desires and distinct differences of the *individual*, summed up in Tom Wolfe's (1976) coining of the term the 'Me Decade'. Certainly, the period from the 1970s onwards can be characterised by a focus on the special demands of the individual, particularly members of identifiable social groups, who maintained their