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Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

TEFL is the term used to refer to the activity of teaching English to non-native speakers of the language. This activity is also referred to as **Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)**. In the USA, the latter seems to be the preferred term, whereas in Britain 'TESL' is used more specifically to refer to the teaching of English in those countries where English has an official role in the educational or political system, e.g. in former British or American colonies such as India or the Philippines, where English is still used as a medium of education and is recognized as an official language alongside the national language. TESL thus contrasts with TEFL, which refers to those situations where English is not used as a medium of instruction and has no official status. In Britain itself, 'TESL' is often used to refer to the teaching of English to immigrants or non-native speakers born in Britain. Because of the possible confusion between TEFL and TESL, the more general terms **English Language Teaching (ELT)** and **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** are often used, the former in Britain and the latter in the USA. The term ELT will be used in this entry.

ELT can be traced back to the late sixteenth century, when large numbers of French Huguenot refugees needed to learn English and the first textbooks were written (Howatt 1984). English has been taught in Europe and countries that were part of the British Empire since then, but it is undoubtedly the case that there was a huge growth in English language teaching in the twentieth century and particularly since 1945. This is largely due to the growth in use of English as the international language of science, technology, diplomacy and business. Baldauf and Jernudd (1983) and Swales (1985) have shown that the proportion of academic articles written in the areas of science, technology and economics has been increasing rapidly, and it is estimated that of the several million articles published every year at least half are published in English (Swales 1987). No corresponding figures about the proportion of business correspondence and negotiation exist, but it is reasonable to assume that growth in these areas is similar to that in the academic world.

These trends have led to the development of the teaching of **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**, which aims to teach specific language skills related to different activities in academic or business life (see below for a fuller description of ESP). But the teaching of **General-Purpose English** has also grown considerably and the British Council and the American Information Services both run very successful institutes in many countries of the world. The British

Council, for example, stated in its annual report for 1987/8 that it was running fifty Direct Teaching Centres in thirty-one countries and was planning further centres in three more countries. It also reported that over 40 per cent of its revenue was derived from English language services.

The development of ELT has been dominated by issues of syllabus design and methodology. Howatt (1984) describes how the **grammar-translation method** developed at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany and spread throughout Europe. The method involved grammatical explanation of key structures, the teaching of selected areas of vocabulary, and exercises involving the translation of disconnected sentences into the mother tongue. The emphasis was on written text.

The **Reform Movement** developed in the late eighteenth century and was based on three fundamental points:

- the primacy of speech
- the use of connected text as opposed to disconnected sentences
- the use of an oral methodology

The syllabuses that arose from the Reform Movement still involved a graded, step-by-step approach. They thus contrasted with a parallel development in ELT, the rise of what Howatt (1984) refers to as 'natural methods of language teaching'. These have gone under the names of the **Natural Method**, the **Conversation Method** and, most notably, the **Direct Method**. The methodology of these approaches is less structured than that of the Reform Movement and is based on a theory according to which language learning is an 'intuitive process for which human beings have a natural capacity provided only that the proper conditions exist'. These conditions are 'someone to talk to, something to talk about and a desire to understand and make yourself understood' (1984: 192).

The early part of the twentieth century saw the fusion of these philosophies,

particularly in the work of H.E. Palmer and his **Oral Method**. Palmer and Palmer's *English Through Actions* (1925/1979) uses the question–answer techniques of the Direct Method but has a more systematic approach to the selection of vocabulary and the presentation of grammatical points than that favoured by the Direct Method. Subsequent courses in ELT, e.g. Eckersley's *Essential English for Foreign Students* (1938–42) and Hornby's *Oxford Progressive English for Adult Learners* (1954–6), have followed the approach used by Palmer, combining some Direct Method exercises with pattern practice, teaching the main structures of English. Even courses from the 1960s such as L.G. Alexander's *First Things First* (1967), with its extensive use of situations presented in pictures, and the courses that arose from the **Audiolingual Method** developed in the United States by Fries (see for example Fries 1952/1957), which used very controlled pattern practice, are really refinements of the basic Palmer/Hornby approach. The main emphasis is on teaching the form and vocabulary of the language, and the ways in which these forms are used in natural language are largely neglected.

In the 1970s, however, a very considerable change in emphasis arose, largely as a result of the writings of various British applied linguists, notably Widdowson (see for example Widdowson 1978). Widdowson argued that language courses should concentrate on the **use** of language rather than **usage**. He defines **usage** as 'that aspect which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistic rules'; **use** is 'another aspect of performance: that which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication' (1978: 3).

Widdowson's ideas have had a profound influence on ELT, particularly on ESP. The striking development has been the rise of

a **Communicative Approach**, which emphasizes language use rather than language form. The Communicative Approach aims to teach **communicative competence** (Hymes 1972), which is the ability to apply the rules of grammar appropriately in the correct situation.

The actual syllabuses that have arisen from attempts to put the Communicative Approach into practice have varied considerably. Many courses have followed a **functional/notional** syllabus, putting into practice the ideas expressed in Wilkins' *Notional Syllabuses* (1976). The aim of such syllabuses is to base teaching on what people do with language, such as requesting, inviting, informing, apologizing, ordering, etc. These are **communicative functions**. **Notions** – or **semantico-grammatical** categories, as Wilkins calls them – are more difficult to define; they are the basic 'building blocks' that constitute meaning, such as **location**, **time**, **duration**, **space**. The most general notions, such as **time**, are clearly too abstract to form the basis of teaching materials, but others that are more concrete, such as **quantity**, **location** or **cause** and **effect**, may be used. Most coursebooks following a functional/notional syllabus, e.g. *Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn 1975), have concentrated on functions rather than notions, even though the very full syllabus worked out by van Ek (1975) in *The Threshold Level* does integrate both functions and notions.

Many have argued (notably Brumfit 1980) that functional/notional syllabuses have done little more than reorganize and reorder the grammatical syllabus and have failed to address the question of methodology. The basic aim of a **communicative syllabus** should be the creation of tasks in which learners have to communicate in English in order to complete them. A typical **communicative task** would be the labelling of a diagram using information from a written or spoken text. The most interesting experiment in this regard is the

project directed by Prabhu in Bangalore, south India. This project arose from dissatisfaction with the previous grammatical syllabus rather than with a functional/notional syllabus, and its underlying philosophy is that grammatical form is best learned when the learner's attention is on meaning. The syllabus is thus based on a series of graded tasks for which the teacher provides necessary input and learners show their comprehension by carrying out an activity such as labelling a diagram. Grammatical points are not taught, but results of the project indicate that learners have in fact performed better on tests of grammar than learners following a traditional grammatical syllabus (Prabhu 1987).

Since the late 1980s, both applied linguists and course designers have seemed to favour an **Eclectic** Approach, which selects features from grammatical syllabuses, functional/notional syllabuses, and task-based approaches. *The Cambridge English Course*, the most widely used coursebook in Britain in the late 1980s, is a good example of this eclecticism. An interesting development, however, is the reawakening of interest in the teaching of vocabulary and the emergence of the idea of a **lexical syllabus**. *The COBUILD English Course, Level I* (Willis and Willis 1988) is designed for **false beginners** (people who have had some experience of the foreign language, and usually some tuition, but who, for one reason or another, have not progressed beyond elementary level, or have forgotten what they had once learned) and aims to teach the 700 most common words in English. The list is derived from the 20-million-word corpus built up at the University of Birmingham by the COBUILD Dictionary Project (see CORPORA).

The **English for Specific Purposes** movement has played an important and influential role in ELT since the 1960s. In ESP, the aims of the course are determined by the particular needs of the learners, and the growth of the use of English in science,

technology and business has led to both research into the nature of learners' needs (**needs analysis**) and the preparation of teaching materials to meet those needs. In ESP, as in ELT in general, there have been considerable changes in approach. Early courses, such as Herbert's *The Structure of Technical English* (1965) and Ewer and Latorre's *Course in Basic Scientific English* (1969), adopted a grammatical approach concentrating largely on those structures, such as the present simple (both active and passive) and the present perfect, that register analysis has shown to be important in scientific and technical English.

The functional/notional syllabus probably worked more effectively in ESP courses than in General English courses. Allen and Widdowson's *English in Focus* series (1974 onwards), based largely on functions, and, more particularly, Bates and Dudley-Evans' *Nucleus* series (1976), based on scientific notions or concepts, have both been influential courses. Subsequent courses, e.g. *Reading and Thinking in English*, edited by Moore and Widdowson (1980) and *Skills for Learning*, which developed from a project at the University of Malaya directed by Sinclair (Sinclair 1980), have concentrated on particular study skills, particularly reading. Task-based approaches have also been very appropriate for ESP work; a course called *Interface*, written by Hutchinson and Waters (1984) and developed originally for a group of technical students preparing to study in Britain, is a good example of such an approach.

It has become common to make a distinction between two main branches of ESP: **English for Academic Purposes (EAP)** and **English for Occupational Purposes (EOP)**. In the United States, English for Occupational Purposes is usually referred to as **English for Vocational Purposes (EVP)**. EAP began as the dominant branch, but with the increased interest in business English EOP has become increasingly important. Most EOP courses, except for early courses,

have been strongly influenced by task-based syllabuses. The results of genre analysis (see GENRE ANALYSIS) are likely to have an increasing influence on both branches of ESP.

The relationship between ELT and linguistics or applied linguistics has always been interesting. At certain times, research carried out by either descriptive or applied linguists has had a strong influence on ELT materials and methodology. At other times, pioneering work done in the classroom has been ahead of applied linguistics, which has subsequently provided a theoretical framework to explain what has already been discovered in the classroom. The pattern seems to be that most new developments in ELT have been prompted by new work in linguistics or applied linguistics; the work in ELT then expands in a number of directions and leads to discoveries which feed back into applied linguistics.

Howatt (1984) describes how the Reform Movement of the late nineteenth century was closely associated with the development of phonetics and the formation of associations such as the International Phonetic Association (see INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET). Similarly, the professionalization of ELT in the first half of the twentieth century begins with the work of Daniel Jones in phonetics (see PHONEMICS) but was developed by the more practically orientated work of Palmer, West and Hornby. Their work in developing teaching materials and ideas for using those materials culminated in a number of books on teaching methodology published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, notably West's *Teaching English in Difficult Circumstances* (1960) and Billows' *Techniques of Language Teaching* (1962). Abercrombie's *Problems and Principles* (1956) was also influential. As noted earlier, Widdowson had a considerable influence on the emergence of the Communicative Approach to language teaching and he in turn drew on the tradition of relating language and social context that begins

with Firth and continues with Halliday (see FUNCTIONALIST LINGUISTICS). But the various interpretations of a Communicative Approach in the actual classroom and discussion of the claimed successes of these approaches have played an important part in the applied linguistics literature, both in journals such as *English Language Teaching Journal* (*ELTJ*) and books such as Johnson's *Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology* (1982).

It is interesting to note that in the USA the influence of both descriptive and applied linguistics has been more direct. Howatt (1984) reports Fries as stating that the relationship should be hierarchical, with the descriptive linguist providing the description of the target language, the applied linguist selecting and grading the structures from this description and also providing a contrastive analysis of the source and target languages. The applied linguist then prepares the materials that the teacher uses in the classroom. It is perhaps noteworthy that the main American journal concerned with ELT, *TESOL Quarterly*, has always published many more data-based empirical

Text linguistics

Background

As Hoey points out (1983–4: 1),

> there is a tendency . . . to make a hard-and-fast distinction between discourse (spoken) and text (written). This is reflected even in two of the names of the discipline(s) we study, discourse analysis and text linguistics. But, though the distinction is a necessary one to maintain for some purposes . . . it may at times obscure similarities in the organisation of the spoken and written word.

The distinction Hoey mentions is made in this volume on practical, not theoretical

studies related to classroom methodology than the British *ELTJ*. It is likely that, with the increased numbers of ELT teachers following postgraduate courses in applied linguistics, the gap between the two professions will diminish and that more systematic approaches to the development and validation of teaching materials and methodology will emerge.

T.D.-E.

Suggestions for further reading

Dudley-Evans, A. and St John, M.J. (1998) *Developments in ESP: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Howatt, A.T.R. (1984) *A History of English Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

White, R. (1988) *The ELT Curriculum*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Widdowson, H.G. (1983) *Learning Purpose and Language Use*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

grounds, and the overlap between text linguistics and discourse and conversation analysis should be borne in mind.

Early modern linguistics, with its emphasis on discovering and describing the minimal units of each of the linguistic levels of sound, form, syntax and semantics, made no provision for the study of long stretches of text as such; traditional grammatical analysis stops at sentence length. It is even possible to argue that 'the extraction of tiny components diverts consideration away from the important unities which bind a text together' (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 21) and, although Zellig Harris (1952) had proposed to analyse whole discourses on distributional principles, employing the notion of transformations between

stretches of text, this emergent interest in text and discourse study was lost at the time in Chomsky's modification of the notion of transformation to an intrasentential phenomenon.

Early large-scale enquiries into text organization remained essentially descriptive and structurally based (Pike 1967; Koch 1971; Heger 1976), with occasional expansion of the framework to include text sequences or situations of occurrence (Coseriu 1955–6; Pike 1967; Harweg 1968; Koch 1971). **Text** was defined as a unit larger than the sentence, and the research was orientated towards discovering and classifying types of text structure; these were assumed to be something given, rather than something partly construed by the reader, and dependent on context. 'We end up having classifications with various numbers of categories and degrees of elaboration, but no clear picture of how texts are utilized in social activity' (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 23).

The descriptive method, however, tends to break down because the language is too complex, with too many and diverse constituents to be captured. Ironically, it was the concept of transformations, lost by Harris to Chomsky, which allowed a new outlook on text that encouraged the upsurge in text linguistics during the 1970s. In transformational grammar, the infinite set of possible sentences of a language are seen as derivable from a small set of underlying deep patterns plus a set of rules for transforming these into the more elaborate actual surface structures. It was argued, first (Katz and Fodor 1963), that a whole text could be treated as a single sentence by seeing full stops as substitutes for conjunctions like *and*. This approach, however, deliberately leaves out reference to speakers' motives and knowledge. In addition, it ignores the fact that 'factors of accent, intonation, and word-order within a sentence depend on the organization of other sentences in the vicinity' (de Beaugrande

and Dressler 1981: 24). This was noted by Heidolph (1966), who suggests 'that a feature of "mentioned" vs "not mentioned" could be inserted in the grammar to regulate these factors'. Isenberg (1968, 1971) lists other factors which could be dealt with within a single sentence, such as pronouns, articles and tense sequences, and 'appeals to coherence relations like cause, purpose, specification, and temporal proximity' (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 24).

Similar approaches to text analysis may be found in the school of rhetorical structure analysis, where the emphasis is on how units of meaning (which are not necessarily sentences) relate to one another in a hierarchy, and how such devices as exemplification, summary, expansion, etc. build on core propositions to construct the finished text (Mann and Thompson 1988), an approach which in its turn owes much to the text linguistics of Longacre (1983).

The **Konstanz project**, set up at the University of Konstanz in Germany, is related to these traditions of analysis. A group of researchers, including Hannes Rieser, Peter Hartmann, János Petöfi, Teun van Dijk, Jens Ihwe, Wolfram Köck and others, attempted to construct a grammar and lexicon which would generate a Brecht text; some of the results of this project are presented by van Dijk *et al.* (1972). The project highlighted more problems than it solved, though (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 24): 'Despite a huge apparatus of rules, there emerged no criteria for judging the text "grammatical" or "well-formed". . . . The problem of common reference was not solved.' The basic assumption of the undertaking was questioned by Kummer (1972), who points out that 'the "generating" of the text is presupposed by the investigators rather than performed by the grammar' (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 25).

In contrast to the grammatical method employed by the Konstanz group, Petöfi's (1971, 1974, 1978, 1980) **text-structure/**

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