

University Training and Research
in the
Teaching of English
as a
Second/Foreign Language

Memorandum presented
by
THE LINGUISTICS PANEL
of
THE BRITISH COUNCIL

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**Memorandum on University Training and Research in the
Teaching of English as a Second/Foreign Language**

The Problem

1. This paper is submitted by the Linguistics Panel of the British Council at the request of the Council's Universities Advisory Committee. The original reason for the request was that H.M.G. granted funds to the British Council to send teachers abroad according to the recommendations of the *Teaching of English Overseas Report* of 1956, but no provision was made to train U.K. teachers for this purpose, or for research. Since 1956, the oversea teachers coming to the U.K. who need training in this subject have increased. The recommendations of the Commonwealth Education Conference, 1959 (Report Command 841, pp. 33-34, paragraph 17; p. 44, paragraph 5) will increase still further the numbers both of British teachers going overseas and of oversea teachers coming to the United Kingdom for training. No funds have been allocated to increase the number of places available in universities.

Teaching

2. We do not think that the training and research required can be provided by a limited programme directed to the teaching of English as a second language alone, though this is necessary. But we note the continued concern about the English of U.K. undergraduates, and we believe that if the study of contemporary English were more firmly established at our universities, it would benefit the teaching of English not only overseas, but also in our own schools. In our view, indeed, the two problems are inseparable.

3. In a few universities, contemporary English is already being taught and studied in close connexion with general linguistics and the comparative study of grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics (see Appendix A). We earnestly hope that wherever universities propose developments of a similar kind, the University Grants Committee will actively encourage them. The establishment of departments of general linguistics would assist collaboration between English and other language departments.

4. Ancillary to the teaching of contemporary English to undergraduates is the provision of complementary courses in English for oversea students, particularly those studying science, medicine, and technology. They need help in comprehending and using the kind of English appropriate to their subject. Courses are already being given in some universities (see Appendix B). We believe that complementary courses will often prove necessary for recently-arrived oversea students whose native language is not English. Courses of this kind also provide the opportunity for research into the use of second-language English as a medium of instruction (see again Appendix B).

Training

5. We hope that an increasing number of graduates in English, Modern or Oriental Languages, or Classics will be prepared to spend part of their career overseas as teachers of English in universities, training-colleges, or schools; or teaching the special courses for overseas students run in this country by institutions of further education and private language schools, where the standard of such teaching badly needs improvement. We also hope that graduates in other subjects will be increasingly available for teaching their subjects overseas. Whether they have already taught in the U.K. or not, both groups need special training: the former needs perhaps a year, including the teaching of English as a second language; and the latter, a shorter period of training on using English as a medium of instruction to those for whom it is a second language. Some information on existing facilities for training is listed in Appendix C. We would emphasize that in our opinion these facilities are at present utterly inadequate. So also are the facilities for overseas students of English as a second language, even if the intake were restricted to teacher-trainers and intending teacher-trainers who are going to participate in a planned programme for the improvement of English-teaching in their country. A further point is that overseas (particularly Colonial) authorities find staff shortages an impediment to releasing numerous serving teachers for further training in Britain, and are unlikely to modify this policy unless assured that the courses of training are extensive enough to be adequately planned, highly staffed, and directly relevant.

6. It would be advisable to arrange some training in the use of English as a medium of instruction for those overseas university teachers of other subjects than English (particularly science, medicine and technology) who come to the U.K. for further specialist training, and who normally teach in English in their own countries.

7. It is difficult to estimate the increased need, but it is likely that the British Council will recruit 250 teachers to go overseas in 1960 and that in later years this number will be increased. Under the Commonwealth Education Conference plan, at least 75 U.K. teachers will be proceeding overseas annually (some of whom may be recruited by the British Council), and those of the Scholars and Fellows coming to this country who specialise in the teaching of English as a second language will require a year or more's training. There will also be the teacher-trainees in other subjects (see paragraph 6 above). The need in the U.K. itself for qualified teachers of English as a second language is also increasing. At the moment, less than 10 per cent. of the U.K. teachers recruited to teach English overseas are receiving a year's training; the rest are receiving at most some weeks' *ad hoc* preparation. Training for varying periods between these two is needed, and the specialist services required can be provided only by the relevant departments of the universities.

Research

8. We recognize that departments of general linguistics and applied linguistics are needed for many reasons that may interest H.M.G. Fundamental and applied research will have an increasing part to play in making various kinds of communication more efficient. Machine translation will not develop unless the engineer collaborates with the linguist. The technical and administrative efficiency of underdeveloped countries depends on their also developing carefully-selected English for science, technology, law, medicine, armed and administrative services, engineering projects, telecommunications, etc. (The use of restricted varieties of language was demonstrated practically in the last war). But in this paper we are confined to the application of language research to the teaching of English. And in so confining ourselves, we can learn from the mistakes as well as the achievements of the Americans. Their analytical interest has developed so fast and so far, and has so much absorbed their best linguists, that the application of analysis to teaching has lagged behind.

9. In large centres there is room for the establishment not only of departments of general linguistics and phonetics, but also of applied linguistics or (alongside the department of education) linguistic pedagogy. Appendix D gives some details of the research now being and waiting to be carried out. But most centres will need in the first place to increase their facilities for teaching contemporary English and training teachers of English as a second language, arranging such collaboration as is suitable to local circumstances.

10. The main topics with practical implications should, however, be mentioned here. They are:—

- (a) The descriptive analysis of contemporary English that is needed as a foundation for handbooks for all levels both at home and overseas.
- (b) The systematic comparison of English with the language of the learners that gives the teacher a more rapid insight into their difficulties (replacing the *ad hoc* work of years).
- (c) The function of literature in second-language teaching programmes.
- (d) English for science, medicine and technology.
- (e) The problems of pronunciation: U.K., American, local.
- (f) Methods of language learning and language testing.
- (g) Audio-visual aids, especially films for television.

11. It would help research forward greatly if one or two full-scale speech laboratories were developed, possibly on the basis of what already exists in London and Edinburgh.

12. Resources will be needed for co-operation between institutions in the U.K. and between U.K. and overseas institutions, particularly in Asia, Africa, and the United States. The pattern of such co-operation will be clear when the world survey of second-language teaching projected by the Centre of Applied Linguistics in Washington with the collaboration of the Linguistics Panel of the British Council is completed in about a year's time.

Conclusion

13. It would not be appropriate for us to make detailed suggestions about where the teaching, training, and research we have discussed above should be developed. It has been our aim to set down the main problems and requirements in the hope of interesting universities to make further proposals; and of providing a summary that may be of use to the Universities Advisory Committee, and, if they so think fit, to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the University Grants Committee.

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Appendix A: The Teaching of Contemporary English

1. Where literature and language are studied together, the language is usually treated from an historical point of view. Only incidentally is the contemporary language dealt with. A good deal of stylistic study is devoted to contemporary literature, but only rarely are stylistic points linked with linguistic ones.

2. Some study of contemporary English is inevitable for those studying linguistics or phonetics, or the teaching of English as a second language. Opportunities therefore exist for expanding this study at London (the University College Department of Phonetics, the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Institute of Education), Edinburgh (the Department of English Language and General Linguistics, the Department of Phonetics, the School of Applied Linguistics), Durham, Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, and Manchester.

3. At Leeds, Contemporary English has been given a deliberate place in the English syllabus. General students of English take English grammatical structure and Phonetics, those who take Special Studies English have a two-term course in Phonetics, and a two-year course in Phonetics for a first degree is possible.

4. *Examinations.* The London University Certificate of Proficiency in English is mainly a language test. The Cambridge Lower and Proficiency Certificates and the Diploma are tests of language, though directed mainly to literature. All these examinations are for overseas students.

Appendix B: English for Overseas Students in U.K. Universities

1. Courses lasting one year for overseas students whose subject is not English are held at Birmingham, Durham, Edinburgh (Department of English), Exeter, Leeds (including remedial courses in English pronunciation given by the Department of Phonetics), the London School of Economics & Political Science, and Nottingham. A part-time course of this type is held at Bristol.
2. (a) Many overseas students, particularly from the Colonies, have to complete their examination requirements before proceeding to a university in this country. They do this at technical colleges and other colleges of further education, and their instruction includes English.
(b) Many colleges of further education under local authorities give classes for other overseas students who wish to improve their English. These classes frequently lead up to the Cambridge Lower Certificate and Cambridge Proficiency Examinations.
(c) There is also a large number of private schools catering specially for overseas students of English. A list of those approved by the Ministry of Education (having been inspected by the Ministry and the British Council) is published from time to time. The rapid growth of schools of this kind since the war shows how great is the demand for teaching English.
3. On the whole, teachers at these schools and colleges are not qualified to teach English as a second language, although in the course of their duties they may pick up a good deal of information about how to do it. The university courses, on the other hand, are usually run by staff with some knowledge at least of the problems of teaching English as a second language, although the number of such persons of university status who are qualified for this work is less than the demand.

Appendix C: Training in the Teaching of English as a Second Language

London University.

1. *Institute of Education.* A Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (including practice teaching) in which English as a foreign language can be taken as a special subject. This lasts one year and is particularly designed for British graduates intending to teach overseas. Fourteen of the trainees studying in 1959/60 are British Council stipendiaries.
2. A one-year course for qualified teachers leads to a Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

Edinburgh University.

3. *School of Applied Linguistics.* Inaugurated in 1957. In collaboration with the Departments of Phonetics, English Language and General Linguistics, English literature, and Education, the School organizes a one-year course leading to a diploma. This includes general theory of language-teaching, method, pronunciation, and psychology.

Leeds University.

4. Since 1958 there has been a one-year course in English studies (language and literature) leading to a diploma. It is run by the Department of English Literature in collaboration with other departments and includes a course on teaching English as a foreign language given by the Department of Education. The course has been composed with College lecturers from India and Pakistan in mind.

Non-university Courses.

5. Training courses are given at the Welsh College of Technology; Moray House, Edinburgh; St. Paul's College, Cheltenham; at Kirkby (Liverpool), and Brinsford Lodge (Wolverhampton—these last two for Malay teachers); and at Bangor and Carmarthen Training Colleges (these on the teaching of English to Welsh children). These courses are suited to the present level of teacher-trainers in Africa and Asia, but long-term arrangements should be initiated to deal with student-teachers in their own countries; only the key personnel for these arrangements should be trained in the U.K., and they should be trained in the universities.

6. *Davies' School* runs a short course to train teachers of English as a second language. This has largely been taken by British teachers who wish to teach English as a second language in the U.K.

Appendix D: Research in the Teaching of English as a Second Language

1. *Descriptive Grammar.* Some work is being done sporadically in a number of University Centres. At Durham, where Professor Quirk is working with two assistants, there is a ten-year programme which aims at a full description of English usage from which practical teaching manuals for home and overseas can be produced. This work is supported by the Clarendon Press, and by the Danish Naturmetodens Sproginstitut. There is great need that this work should be completed in a shorter period than ten years if the quality of the teaching of English as a second language is to be improved during the next fifteen.

2. *Phonetics.* Research work and experiment highly relevant for the development of improved teaching material are being carried out at the University College Department of Phonetics, London, the Departments of English Language and General Linguistics and Phonetics, and the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh, and the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

3. *Comparative Studies.* Only a few attempts have been made systematically to make use of descriptive grammar and phonetics to compare English with other languages. Some of the theses produced at the Institute of Education, London, and the School of Applied Linguistics, Edinburgh, are contributions in this field. Systematic work is badly needed to compare English with such major languages as Spanish (where the Americans have already done some work), Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu.

4. *English for Scientific and Technical Education.* Work has been done on vocabulary (with the collaboration of Dr West) by Dr Flood in Birmingham. More general work including syntactic and phonetic difficulties is in progress at Birmingham (Miss Adamson) and Manchester (Mr Perren). Some of the theses from the Institute of Education, London, have been in this field. Work is also being done at the School of Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh by Mr Catford. Research on the language used in most subjects is needed to improve the writing of textbooks and lecturing in a restricted form of English, translation (human and mechanical), bilingual dictionaries, etc. Preliminary consideration is being given at Cambridge to the production of new word-frequency lists, based on various kinds of scientific and technical English, by a new and potentially quick method, involving the use of Monotype spools and an electronic computer.

5. Possibilities of basic research along the above lines exist where there are linguistics staff, i.e. at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, University College Department of Phonetics, London University,

Institute of Education, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, and Glasgow. There is a Lectureship in Linguistics vacant at Bangor. Oxford is considering Readerships in Linguistics and Phonetics, the finance for which was unsuccessfully sought for the last Quinquennium.

6. Other subjects, the development of which can make a contribution to the problem, are machine translation (Birkbeck College) and communication research (University College London and the Imperial College of Science and Technology). There is a new chair of Communications at Keele, not yet filled.

Linguistic Pedagogy.

7. *Institute of Education, London.* Many of the investigations leading to the Associateship, the M.A., or Ph.D. degrees are relevant, including as they do linguistic and sociological factors. Many of the staff of the Institute are experienced in overseas education. At the research level, there is collaboration with other specialist departments at London University. The special relation of London University with the new universities of the Commonwealth provides a further opportunity for collaboration which has not been made full use of because resources of staff and finance are not sufficient.

8. *Bilingualism.* Research is carried on at Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, and Swansea on this problem in Wales. This research is relevant to the use of English as a medium in primary and preparatory schools in many Commonwealth countries.