

# BANA v. TESEP: Where does ESP Fit In?

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## **Abstract**

Adrian Holliday (1994) raises a number of interesting questions about the transfer of ideas, particularly about communicative language teaching (CLT), that have developed in what he refers to as BANA countries, ie Britain, USA and Australasia, to countries where English is taught as part of state educational system (TESEP) in other parts of the world where very different classroom conditions and cultures predominate. He identifies a number of problems in the transfer of these ideas to the TESEP situation, notably the difficulty of recreating the conditions in which CLT was originally developed, the lack of ownership felt by non-native speaker teachers and the narrowness of the Second Language Acquisition Research that underlies the arguments for CLT.

*Adrian Holliday (1994) pose un certain nombre de questions intéressantes sur le transfert des idées, notamment de l'enseignement communicatif de la langue qui est né dans ce qu'il appelle les pays BANA, c'est à dire la Grande Bretagne, les Etats Unis et l'Australasie et a été transféré dans des pays où l'anglais est enseigné dans le cadre de l'enseignement public (TESEP) dans des parties du monde où prédominent des conditions d'enseignement et des cultures très différentes. Il identifie un certain nombre de problèmes qui surgissent au cours de ce transfert, notamment la difficulté à recréer les conditions dans lesquelles l'approche communicative a d'abord été élaborée, le fait que les non anglophones ne se sont pas appropriés ce type d'enseignement et l'insuffisance des recherches sur l'acquisition de la seconde langue pour fonder cette approche.*

**I**n this short article I would like to suggest that in the area of English for Specific Purposes similar problems were apparent in its early years, but that now the situation is beginning to change quite significantly. English for Specific Purposes developed in the 60s as a result of a number of projects to which groups of expatriate lecturers participating in a project funded by the British Council made a significant and major contribution. Swales' review of the field of ESP between the years of 1962 and 1981 (Swales, 1988) has fifteen episodes, made up of articles or materials written in all cases by native speakers. Of the fifteen articles eight arise from situations in Thailand, Libya, Chile, Iran (two articles), Sudan, Kuwait

and Colombia where projects were run by expatriate staff (see Higgins, Swales, Ewer & Hughes-Davies, Bates & Dudley-Evans, Phillips & Shettlesworth, Drobnic, Herbolich, Fanning & Skeldon, Herbolich and Moore et al., all 1988).

### **The 'ownership' of ESP**

In the 1990s ESP has ceased to be so dominated by expatriate lecturers and has become increasingly 'owned' by non-native speakers who have developed the confidence, experience and ability to run ESP courses, write materials and publish articles for journals such as *English for Specific Purposes*. An examination of the last 20 articles published in *English for Specific Purposes* at the time of writing this article<sup>1</sup>, 12.5 were written by British, American, Australian and New Zealand native speakers while 7.5 were written by other nationalities, some of whom were native speakers, eg Zimbabwean, and some were not<sup>2</sup>.

Ten to fifteen years ago it was not uncommon to encounter a reaction against ESP amongst non-native speaking teachers of English and a feeling that ESP teaching and materials production was the preserve of the expatriate teacher sent by the British Council, the USIS etc. In Dudley-Evans (1984: 294) I suggested that this reaction arose from five main difficulties that teachers felt in teaching an ESP textbook: the content, a feeling of inadequacy arising from the content, the active use of language required by many of the exercises, lack of time to exploit the book fully and the 'backwash effect' of the examination system.

The evidence is that this has changed, not completely but certainly enough for there to be a substantial amount of ESP work that is conducted by non-expatriate staff. The examples of Chile, Brazil and Zimbabwe are suitable examples; I will describe these as I have some familiarity with them, but I am sure there are equivalents in many different countries. All three originally had projects either set up by the British and led by expatriates (Chile and Brazil) or supported by a link with a British university with frequent visits from British *English for Adults and Professionals* (EAP) lecturers (Zimbabwe). But each of the projects has survived the departure of the British support and has continued to develop in teaching, materials production and research. The various publications that have emerged from those countries provide evidence of this, the journal the *ESpecialist* in Brazil, the special edition of *English for Specific Purposes* (11:2) on ESP in Latin America edited by Horsella and Harvey (1992), and the various articles describing the programmes at the University of Zimbabwe (Morrison, Mparutsa & Love, 1993; Mparutsa, Love and Morrison, 1991; Love 1991 and 1993).

### **The local development of ESP**

There are a number of reasons for this very encouraging trend. The first is that each of these ESP projects developed in a particular situation and was adapted to that situation; the two South American projects rapidly made reading skills their main focus, the Zimbabwean project took advantage of the relatively high level of general English competence of the undergraduates being taught to develop a more specific subject related approach. To some extent, ESP was an idea that was exported from Britain to these countries, but it rapidly adjusted itself to the local environmental conditions and thus survived (Holiday and Cooke, 1982). Thus ESP avoided the problem that Holliday identifies, the rather narrow interpretation of communicative activities. Both Chilean and Brazilian ESP courses have developed their own approach, partly made up of precisely the kind of text analysis activities, often in their first language rather than English, that Holliday advocates (Holliday, 1994: 6-7). PSecondly the training of teachers was made an absolute priority. The Chilean course training teachers to teach English for Science and Technology described by Ewer (1975 and 1983) was one of the earliest ESP teacher training courses. It combined a practical component with a theoretical component. In the former teachers read authentic scientific texts and focussed on the concepts as well as the language, and also undertook micro-teaching. In the latter the course emphasised how the teaching of EST is very different from the General English teaching that they have been used to.

In the Brazilian situation the need for teaching training and the particular forms it took arose from the nature of the actual project itself. The project was concerned exclusively with the reading skill, but, given the size of Brazil and the various approaches favoured by different participating institutions, it did not seek to establish one uniform set of materials to be used in each institution. Rather it sought to establish a common project philosophy about the nature of ESP and the reading skill but left the actual production of materials and the teaching to individual universities and departments. The need for training courses and regular seminars, organised by one university in one region for all participants in the project was thus paramount and 'grew from the perceived needs of teachers in classrooms' (Alderson & Scott, 1992: 28).

The Zimbabwean project was a much smaller project, but regular visits of Birmingham staff to Harare and vice versa led to the development of materials and methodologies that were to a certain extent influenced by Birmingham's approach to ESP, but were very much adapted to their own situation.

In each of these projects the result was that the teachers developed a feeling of ownership of their project. They were writing their own materials, developing their own methodologies based on their own experiences and students, and eventually developing their own approaches to teacher training. Many even began to develop their own research and, particularly in Brazil, the broader kind of second language acquisition research that relates to 'pupils and students in real classroom settings, where there may be many other influences on language learning from society outside as well as within the classroom' (Holliday, 1994: 8-9). The research reported by Nunes (1992) and Holmes and Ramos (1993) is typical of this kind of work and of the very many excellent articles and papers presented in either the ESPecialist or at Brazilian ESP seminars.

### **Conclusion**

I have presented a possibly rather optimistic picture of one aspect of the development of ESP. I have suggested, with some justification, I hope, that ESP projects have largely developed in particular situations and that the advisors from what Holliday refers to as the BANA countries, who initially dominated such projects, have gradually ceded control to local teachers. This has assured that the projects and the materials have been ecologically sound and have therefore survived<sup>3</sup>. I have also suggested that the role of teacher training, both that given by expatriates to local teachers or from experienced local teachers to less experienced teachers is crucial. This is also completely consistent with Holliday's suggestion that teachers with their knowledge of their students in their local context 'are the key' (Holliday, 1994: 9).

Nonetheless there are some inevitable difficulties. One problem that has arisen from the increasing independence of ESP teachers in different situations is the danger that in fact they lose contact with new ideas in the subject. There is evidence that in some situations ESP teachers cease to question certain ideas about materials or text that were current at the time of the establishment of their project, but have become increasingly questioned since elsewhere. It is, for example, now generally accepted that 'connectors' that bring about text cohesion are sometimes over-taught in EAP classes, leading to over-use in some student writing; many ESP projects, however, continue to place great and perhaps excessive emphasis on this point. As Holliday himself suggests (Holliday, 1994 9-10), the desirability of local teachers achieving independence and ownership of projects should not lead to an almost total loss of contact with

BANA institutions and staff. It has sometimes been suggested that ESP has been a revolutionary movement that has tried out ideas that have subsequently become part of the mainstream of ELT teaching. The use of notional/functional syllabuses in the early 70s and the use of project work are cases in point. If indeed this claim for ESP is not an overstatement of the role and influence of ESP on General English teaching, then there would appear every reason for expecting that the same process will occur with communicative language teaching.

### Notes

- 1 The articles are from four issues, 12(2), 12(3), 13(1) and 13(2).
- 2 The halves are accounted for by one article written jointly by a native speaker British lecturer and a non-native speaker.
- 3 Some early projects such as the Tabriz project in Iran that generated the Nucleus materials (Bates and Dudley-Evans, 1976 onwards) did not survive the departure of the expatriate lecturers as no attempt had been made to train local teachers.

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