

Language Education in Schools and the Role of British EFL

John Clegg

Abstract

British EFL has for a long time developed somewhat separately from mainstream school practice, due to the peculiarities of its history. Lately it is beginning to concern itself more with school education. In European schools, language is represented by many different strands of practice, from majority mother-tongue teaching to bilingual education. This paper outlines the achievements of these varying language practices in Britain. It argues for the growth of a more coherent concept of 'language education' in European schools and for British EFL to participate in such a development.

L'enseignement de l'anglais comme langue étrangère (EFL) se développe depuis longtemps en dehors des pratiques scolaires générales pour raisons qui tiennent à son histoire. Depuis peu, il commence à s'intéresser davantage à l'enseignement primaire et secondaire. Dans les écoles européennes, la langue est représentée par toute une gamme de pratiques depuis l'enseignement généralisé de la langue maternelle jusqu'à l'éducation bilingue. Cet article souligne les résultats obtenus par ces divers types d'enseignement linguistique en Grande Bretagne. Il plaide en faveur de l'élaboration d'un concept plus cohérent "d'enseignement des langues" dans les écoles européennes et de la participation de l'EFL britannique à cette élaboration.

British EFL and school education

There are signs that, in the 1990s, the British school of EFL is beginning to look outside itself. Concerned for decades with the immediate requirements of classroom pedagogy, it seems to be realising that there are larger issues at stake.

Evidence for this comes from various sources. Teachers of EFL to primary children, for example, are now interested not only in the development of communicative competence, but in developing subject knowledge and cognitive skills across the curriculum (Brewster et al. 1992). Teachers of all age groups are becoming interested in the idea of project work, partly because it can

stimulate efficient language-teaching, but also because it makes claims for the development of the whole person and their relationship to the community (Legutke & Thomas 1991). EFL teachers are taking a second look at language analysis, not only because they have a renewed interest in grammar, but because a flourishing language awareness movement with roots in foreign language teaching (Hawkins 1984) is expanding their views of the whole concept of language consciousness. Lately, the profession has become excited by the complex relations between acquiring a new language and entering a new culture (Byram et al. 1994), and by the political power which speaking a given language can confer (Tollefson 1991). And finally Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is beginning to acknowledge that bilingualism is a fairly normal condition of psychological and social life. It looks, in fact, as if EFL teachers are beginning to talk politics, culture and curriculum and are finding their feet in the wider world of education.

If this is true, one might reasonably say that it is not before time: especially in primary and secondary education, British EFL has been somewhat inward-looking. The two principal charges which one can level against it are that it has historically concerned itself with language rather than with education, and with adults rather than with pupils in school. This reluctance to be involved in schools and in education is still reflected in the practices of EFL institutions. It is only in the last decade, for example, that publishers have focussed strongly on the primary and secondary sectors. British-based EFL training, until very recently, used largely adult education qualifications to train teachers in primary and secondary schools. In British universities, centres of primary and secondary English as a Secondary Language (ESL) education are still a fairly rare phenomenon. In particular, the wider world of language in British school education hardly enters EFL debate.

Isolationism from the idea of school education and of the role of language within it is a phenomenon which is very much restricted to British EFL and to those overseas education systems on which it has over the years exerted an influence, such as former colonial territories (Phillipson 1992). Such isolationism is not a feature of British ESL, English mother-tongue practice, the teaching of Welsh, or of the practice of any other groups within the 'language establishment' in British schools. Neither is it a strong feature of European or North American ELT, where the 'K-12' age range has always been a prime determinant of the interests of teachers, researchers and publishers. When British scholars

ask, therefore, what is 'appropriate methodology' in schools (Holliday 1994), this seems to other traditions in language teaching a distinctly odd question to be asking in the 1990s after decades of vigorous EFL development.

It has to be explained by British EFL history. The key reason why British EFL has developed outside the world of school education is without doubt that it did not grow up within the context of British state schooling (Holliday 1994). Neither, perhaps, was it too well rooted in the educational and cultural traditions of the overseas school systems to which early pioneers of EFL were attached. These were foreign experts, grafted onto a colonial school system and working within the framework of a eurocentric view of overseas education rooted in the wider British imperial project (Phillipson 1992). EFL thus developed with vigour, but in a sort of educational limbo.

Language Education in British schools

Significantly, however, while in the post-war years EFL developed away from school education, British schooling entered a period in which language became a powerful theme. This gave birth to a robust growth of thinking and practice in language in education, first in general primary practice (Clegg 1964), then in the teaching of English mother-tongue and in the language in education movement (Britton 1970, DES 1975), and further in ESL (Levine 1990), bilingualism (Houlton 1985), foreign language teaching and language awareness (Hawkins 1992). In the past thirty years a great deal has been learned in the UK about the role of language in school and community, and developments continue to flourish. For every category, for instance, in the catalogue of contemporary interests of EFL teachers outlined above, one could find bodies of recognised theory or practice which this wider language 'lobby' has generated.

It is the achievements of these currents of 'language education' that it is my purpose in this paper to outline. In doing so, I would also like to propose a new direction for EFL teachers. As they emerge from a narrower preoccupation with language into a wider world of general educational practice, it is important that they should join the other players in the field; partly, because their interests overlap and EFL should avoid reinventing the wheel, but partly also because EFL teachers should contribute from the richness of their own experience to fill some of the gaps in language education expertise. In other words, I argue not so much that EFL should look for appropriate methodology, but rather that it should develop appropriate school policy.

In what follows, I will outline what I mean by 'language education' in European school contexts. I will use as an example the context of British primary and secondary education in a typical metropolitan area. Before doing this, I should enter two caveats. Firstly, I do not mean to imply that this British experience is immediately transposable to other European countries; nor that it is a model of good practice to be emulated, though it does have an honourable history. Secondly, I am aware that language education is already a going concern in many European countries (see, for example Volume 1 of the 'Language Awareness' journal 1992); I refer to British experience simply because I am more familiar with it.

I will outline six main 'theatres' of school language activity: *cross-curricular language use; second-language support; majority mother-tongue teaching; minority language development; language awareness, and foreign language teaching*. For each domain I will set out in the briefest of outlines what language issues preoccupy teachers, and why teachers of English as a foreign language might be interested in it.

Forms of School language education

Cross-curricular language use

This is one of the most wide-ranging, but least well understood aspects of language in education. Its importance derives from the belief that language is the driving force of a child's school learning. To succeed in school a child must learn to deploy the set of complex cognitive abilities which we refer to as 'higher order' thinking skills; and to do this a child needs to learn to use the specific variety of language for learning which functions in an interactive and interdependent relationship with these skills. Cummins (1984) has referred to this variety as cognitive academic language proficiency or 'CALP'. What interests people in language in education is the relation between classroom activity and cognitive development. A prevailing view is that teachers teach in different ways according to deep-seated beliefs about how pupils learn. A teacher who believes that subject knowledge is an entity to be transmitted from one person to another, may rely mainly on a rather one-sided, teacher-centred discourse as a vehicle for this 'transmission' (Barnes 1975). Another teacher, by contrast, will believe that knowledge is (re-)constructed by each learner in interaction with the environment and mediated crucially through language, under the guidance of a teacher, but with a vital degree of self-direction and self-motivation. This teacher will run

a more 'active' classroom, fostering learning by purposeful variation of a range of classroom phenomena such as: forms of interaction (group-, individual and whole-class work) and their associated discourse patterns; group composition; task design and sequence; visuals, manipulatives and other equipment; ethos and atmosphere.

This latter mode of teaching and learning has lively support. It flourished actively in the post-war British primary school, developing into the 'Plowden' (DES 1967) model and recently being adapted controversially, but one hopes, usefully, through government-inspired revision (Alexander et al. 1992). In the secondary school, language-sensitive innovation in the classroom was given strong impetus by the Bullock (DES 1975) enquiry, but has not had such a coherent practical impact in the teaching of secondary subjects. A rich and interesting vein of practice, however, has been stimulated by an influential group of writers such as Britton (1970), Rosen (in Barnes et al. 1969), Barnes (1975) and Wells (1986), and by a range of government-sponsored initiatives such as the National Writing Project, the National Oracy Project (Norman 1992) and the Language in the National Curriculum initiative (Carter 1990) (see below).

It has to be said that this work is generated more by language than by subject specialists and has thus had, at least at secondary level, a more obvious impact on the teaching of English mother-tongue (see below) than on language across the curriculum. There are, however, initiatives in language and subject study which will interest EFL teachers. Teachers of English for Adults and Professionals (EAP), for example, from their preeminent position in EFL and subject study in further and higher education, will find interesting developments in secondary reading, emerging for instance from the Reading for Learning in the Sciences project (Davies and Greene 1984), which shares common ground with EAP traditions. EFL teachers in general, encouraged by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory to look at talk and especially at its manifestations in task-based learning (Skehan 1992), will find a good deal of parallel interest amongst people exploring the influence on learning of pupil discourse and teacher intervention in small groups studying different subjects (Norman 1992). Particularly insightful results have come recently from observing children working with computers (Mercer 1994).

It is, however, in the primary sector, that language is most solidly established in teachers' views of learning; not only as 2 of the classical 3 'Rs', but also in post-Plowden traditions of child-centred learning. Here, British expertise forms

part of a large and reputable body of theory and practice in language and literacy in primary education which draws on experience across the world. It is authoritatively represented in the work of the Centre for Language in Primary Education. The much younger practice of primary EFL, as it becomes more widespread, needs to see itself as a close relation of this school of general primary practice. It needs to go beyond the narrower linguistic boundaries of traditional EFL and make a commitment to the cognitive and personal development of its young learners. Many of the new wave of primary EFL authors seem to be doing this. Topics are well exploited as links to mainstream curricular work, and there is a smaller but growing interest in the development of cross-curricular learning skills. Books for primary EFL teachers, however, have still only tenuous links to mainstream primary language theory (e.g. Tann 1991) and training still tends to aim at expanding the practical language activity repertoire, rather than at grounding EFL solidly in mainstream educational practice.

Second Language Support

The oddest example of non-communication between EFL teachers and other branches of language education is surely the split between EFL and ESL teachers. Separating foreign from second language teaching is a British phenomenon, and perhaps also a European one; one does not encounter it much in North America. Whatever the reasons (which, in addition to the history of British EFL mentioned earlier, may be to do with the marginalisation of migrant communities in Europe), it is a great pity, since both are equally lively branches of the same discipline.

British ESL has changed out of recognition in the past twenty years. It developed out of EFL in the 1960s with a narrowly linguistic brief, as a way of providing language development in the medium of instruction, outside the mainstream classroom, to pupils from ethnolinguistic minorities (Brumfit et al. 1985). It is now offered within the mainstream classroom through forms of team-teaching (Bourne & McPake 1991) which integrate language with subject knowledge, reunite Native Speakers (NS) and Non Native Speakers (NNS) pupils, encourage bilingualism, recognise linguistic and cultural diversity and challenge racism. This, it may be objected, sounds too good to be true, and indeed it is a picture of ideal practice. But ESL teachers are nothing if not motivated: they strive for these standards and some achieve them.

Of all language specialists, ESL teachers understand language in subject

study better than most. In outline, their work requires them to analyse the language demands which a subject teacher makes on a group of pupils, and use a fairly elaborate pedagogy on the one hand to support the pupils - especially the non-native speakers - in fulfilling those demands; and on the other to nudge the teacher towards a more language-sensitive teaching style. On a European plane, the London-based Intercultural Education Project has now received an EU grant to form a clearing-house for European practice in providing this kind of language support to pupils from language minorities.

For EFL teachers, contemporary ESL practice is a rich source of ideas, the most interesting being its key purpose, which is to link linguistic and cognitive development. In European EFL, teachers with similar aims are those who teach the secondary curriculum through English - part of the wider bilingual subject teaching movement (Arnsdorf et al. forthcoming); British ESL teachers would be interested to see, for instance, the high-quality materials for history and geography through English published in Germany (e.g. Biederstaedt 1993). EAP teachers would also find that they share common ground with ESL teachers: the ESL task repertoire is broad and owes something, perhaps, to EAP traditions. It is also sensitive to diversity in group and class composition and is aimed at giving learners access to subject tasks at a range of language ability levels.

ESL breaks new ground within ELT as a whole in its development - originating mainly from Mohan (1986) and the Vancouver ESL team - of the use of visuals (such as tree-diagrams, flow-charts etc.,) to represent knowledge structures in different subjects, and thus to help learners who are still learning the medium of instruction to do cognitively demanding classroom tasks. EFL teachers interested in classroom discourse from the SLA point of view will find ESL specialists thinking a lot about how to shape teacher- and pupil-talk in subject classrooms in order to exploit its SLA function. Project work and the use of stories, cornerstones of mainstream primary practice, are now basic ingredients of primary ESL, and it is partly on this language-enhanced form of primary practice that the new wave of EFL young learners' materials is now drawing (Ellis & Brewster 1991). Finally the forms of cooperative teaching which ESL prefers (Bourne and McPake 1991) can only function within the framework of a whole-school language policy supported by Head and staff; the experience of second language teachers in getting such a policy off the ground must find echoes in European schools in which, for whatever reason, language becomes a whole-school preoccupation.

Majority mother-tongue teaching

British teachers of English as a mother-tongue (EMT) are a lively group. They have recently been very active in the defence of their subject against what they perceive to be hostile government pressure to depoliticise it and bring it 'back to basics' in the guise of accuracy in spelling, grammar and standard pronunciation, as well as the traditional literary canon (Carter 1993). English teachers, however, see their subject as fulfilling a variety of different roles. The recent government-commissioned report on the teaching of English - the 'Cox Report' (DES 1989) listed five models: 'personal growth', cultural analysis', 'cross-curricular', 'adult needs' and 'cultural heritage'. English teachers are reported by Goodwyn (1992) to rank these in the above order of priority, the last two being ranked equal.

Specific cross-cutting themes also recur in current EMT debate, which should find an echo amongst EFL teachers. One is the idea of teaching 'language'. Here, government exerts strong pressure through the National Curriculum to highlight sentence grammar and spelling, whereas many teachers prefer a discourse-level model which allows them to draw pupils' attention to socio-linguistic variation. EFL teachers also have a renewed interest in linguistic - and especially grammatical - analysis (Ellis 1993). They may find it interesting to compare the broader and more sociopolitically contextualised model of EMT. Another key theme for some EMT teachers is that their subject should enable learners to deconstruct the political ideologies - as they experience them in literature and the media - which keep them in their place. EFL tradition, again, is considerably less political than this. But there is surely no doubt that cultural analysis is beginning to interest EFL teachers, both in the study of how language learners acquire cultural knowledge (Byram et al. 1994), and more politically through the influence of critical linguistics (Wallace 1992). When politics arrives in EFL, there will be a lot of scope for collaboration with EMT teachers.

Finally, writing is also an area where EMT and EFL interests meet. 'Process writing' has become a familiar and well-elaborated concept to EMT teachers in Britain, North America, Australia and New Zealand through writers such as Graves (1983) and through the 'Whole Language' movement. Process writing highlights stages of the recursive process from original stimulus to final product. While British EFL teachers are aware of 'process', they have tended to focus more on the repertoire of writing tasks. Both approaches seem to me to have complementary strengths and are incomplete without each other. Genre

theory (Reid 1987) is another movement in writing which has been very stimulating for the teaching of EMT and is just beginning to be so for EFL.

Minority Language Development

In some parts of Europe, bilingualism is officially fostered and bilingual education is available. Recognition of a language in these terms depends largely on its status. A great deal of bilingualism in ethnolinguistic minority communities does not have such recognition. Europe has been the target of a lot of immigration and will doubtless continue to be so. Metropolitan schools in Europe are therefore normally multilingual: large numbers of minority home and community languages may be represented in the school population: a survey of London schools in 1980 put it at about 150 (Rosen & Burgess 1980). This means that schools are places where a lot of second language acquisition is going on and where for large numbers of children bilingualism is routine. Often, however, because of prejudice against low-status languages, teachers are not aware of this; and both the acquisition of the second language, and the maintenance of the first may be unrecognised and unsupported. In an environment such as England, bilingualism may only be recognised when a child is learning a second European language; when a child is adding fluency in the majority language to the native command of a low-status minority language, this will look to many teachers like the remedying of a deficiency.

In the absence of bilingual education, schools may find ways of offering bilingual children support for their home language (Reid 1984). In England, this may take the form of bilingual support; that is, support for a transitional bilingualism; in which a native-speaker teacher of a minority language works with speakers of that language in a mainstream classroom, in order to help them move to fluency in English. It may also take the form of *mother-tongue maintenance*, in which children are taught their minority mother-tongue in classes, inside or outside the formal curriculum. Minority language speakers may also be taught their mother-tongue to a public examination standard. A degree of recognition may also be given to language diversity in a school which adopts a multicultural or antiracist policy and thus attempts to raise the status of minority languages in such areas as language awareness (see below), book-stock, visuals, pupils' work, school assemblies and communication with parents (Houlton 1985).

For the European EFL teacher, it is useful to recognise that teaching English as a foreign language is only a part of the less 'official' L2-development which many pupils are daily engaging in. Indeed, for many pupils, learning English will mean acquiring a third or even fourth language. In any metropolitan multicultural school, language diversity may indicate a broad but somewhat subterranean culture of bilingualism. If this were brought to the surface and celebrated through a campaign of the kinds of activities described above, for the achievement it actually represents, it could greatly enhance the learning of both minority and majority languages.

Language awareness

Language awareness as a body of theory and practice is gaining ground in Europe, not least as a consequence of the newly-launched 'Language Awareness' journal. Within British language education it took shape in the early 1980s under the aegis of the National Council for Language in Education. It drew partly on the belief that language may be a subject of school study in its own right and partly on the opinion amongst foreign language teachers that a brief course in the analytical study of language or languages - structure, variety, change etc. - motivates pupils for learning to use a language (Hawkins 1984). Such preparatory courses are now established in several British schools. Within this new and somewhat hybrid area of language awareness, it is possibly this concept of the pre-FL course which EFL teachers may find most readily interesting.

In England, the concept of 'knowledge about language' (KAL) received a boost from the direction of English mother-tongue, when in the course of the recent major curriculum reform, it was decided the primary teachers should receive training in KAL and the government funded the 'Language in the National Curriculum' (LINC) project for this purpose (Carter 1990). Ultimately, amidst national controversy, the government banned the publication of LINC materials on the grounds that they did not reflect the model of language which the government wished to propound, but 'samisdat' versions of this material have won national and international acclaim. EFL teachers working in countries where similar KAL projects have been introduced, will be interested in getting their own 'under the counter' copy.

Foreign language teaching

I hope I will be forgiven for giving short shrift to foreign language teaching.

This is partly because its development has rather paralleled the development of foreign language teaching in Europe as a whole, with which European teachers of EFL are clearly familiar. British foreign language teachers have thus continued to refine practice in the communicative classroom, especially in recent years under the influence of National Curriculum reform. On a lesser scale than in Western Europe, they have revived the practice of teaching foreign languages in the primary school, especially in Scotland. British EFL teachers, who have remained as aloof from their foreign language colleagues as they have from the rest of the language education lobby, may find interesting the 1980s 'graded objectives' movement, which seeks to increase student motivation by setting out language learning objectives in clearly achievable steps. In addition to language awareness courses, which I have already mentioned, they may also be interested by the recent flowering of interest in how language learners acquire knowledge of a foreign culture (Byram et al. 1994), by the development of expertise in self-access learning, and finally by the advance of information technology, multi-media programs and computer networking.

Language Education

This rich and kaleidoscopic language activity could be replicated in many European countries. At first sight, it is clearly a welcome development. If, as a more orchestrated movement, it could encompass the variety of such activities across Europe, it could be a good start to giving language in European schools the status of a unifying curricular theme, which, in this culturally and linguistically varied part of the world, it deserves.

However, although language education is a vigorous strain of educational activity, it is by no means a coherent movement, rather a variety of disparate local initiatives promoting their own interests. In Britain, as in Europe, these groups thrive, but they thrive separately; their activities overlap, but they do not communicate. England in this sense is probably typical of European education in that language does not have a coherent formal place in the English national curriculum, in examinations, in teaching or in teacher-training.

It is, therefore, a second purpose of this paper to argue for a project of European language education. This would accord language the official status of a coherent, formal cross-curricular theme, give all teachers an understanding of language in initial teacher education, charge them with a responsibility for language development within their own subject, and provide a framework within

which diverse types of language specialist can collaborate. It is a potentially exciting development, especially within the European Union, for any individual school or education authority to support. And it would certainly be incomplete without the contribution of British EFL.

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The Author

John Clegg is Senior Lecturer in English Language Teaching at Thames Valley University, UK.