

QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ESP

Richard Chapman
(*University of Ferrara, Italy*)

Abstract

At a time of crisis it is natural to re-examine the underlying assumptions of our behaviour, and the purposes, both spoken and unspoken, that might be at their origin. The present paper attempts to offer a critical view of the assumptions that inform the claims and practices associated with the teaching and learning of English as a second language, and to tease out possible ideological positions they stem from. The analysis is followed by a series of suggestions as to how English teaching might develop after the pandemic and its economic aftermath.

Assumptions of practicality, neutrality, efficiency, knowledge and value are all identified in current English language teaching practice and the literature associated with it, and these are questioned. The significance of these observations is underlined in relation to practices such as international examinations and certification, the introduction of CLIL, and attempts to encourage ELF. Of particular importance is the role of English as a language of science and of global communication: a reality with both educational and political aspects, but one usually accepted as a given, with little examination of its nature beyond the excessively optimistic or rather polemical critique (Phillipson 1992, 2010). Potential effects of the technological mediation of learning are also discussed, with reference to language use in new contexts.

A radical overhaul of the theoretical underpinning of English teaching is proposed in the concluding section of the article, attempting to posit attested good practice in a changed worldview and altered circumstances and a re-examination of the relationship between the centre and the periphery. This ties in with the eternal challenge of cross-cultural communication: both to interact and analyse interactions without subservience to a single socio-political outlook.

1. Introduction

The intense challenges presented by a crisis invariably prompt reflection on the sometimes automatic assumptions that underpin our behaviour. A desire for change after suffering or threat, or the enthusiasm to embrace new modes of action and interaction often make up the effort for renewal, making a virtue of the necessity of having to respond to an emergency. It is not surprising that during this process hidden confusions in past practice are revealed and are subject to questioning. The crisis engendered by the Covid virus epidemic is, however, more complex than merely a medical emergency

and will perhaps be more far-reaching, affecting a vast range of human activities, of which language teaching is very likely to be one.

The momentum of the Covid crisis is much more than a series of effects of a global pandemic. In the United Kingdom, social disparity and unequal healthcare outcomes have been laid bare, with death rates more than twice as high among ethnic minorities¹, and around the world the effects of an integrated global economy have been seen in the sweeping speed of the spread of the initial outbreak and its devastating results in terms of lives lost and economies severely damaged. But this pandemic arrived in a world already in the throes of a prolonged climate crisis, and in what might be termed a ‘crisis of truth’: fake news and unregulated social media were already calling into question, not only the ways in which we may wish to communicate, but also the skills people need to learn in order to communicate clearly and successfully. Not surprisingly, English language teaching has a part to play in the re-examination of our capacity to interact meaningfully, both on a global scale, and at the personal, local level.

2. The situation pre-Covid

English language teaching has developed hugely since 1945, and this growth has largely followed both British and, perhaps to a greater extent, American interests and ideologies (Phillipson 1992; 2010). We can identify a number of defining assumptions in English language teaching, even if we allow for changes in methodology or approach over previous decades. Firstly, and most clearly, there is a strong *practical* bent to the pursuit of English language proficiency, perhaps most obviously expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe 2020) which has been highly influential in language teaching and learning since 2001 (it was updated in 2020). The can-do statements at its heart emphasize the practical objectives of learning a language, expressed in terms of being able to achieve things in the real world using the language of one’s choice, and this is true at all levels (A1-C2). Along with a laudable interest in empowering learners of all kinds (one recent example is the awareness of signing in the 2020 updated version of the CEFR), the predominant element of practicality in this approach to languages is also to be seen in the framework’s stated attempt to influence state language teaching policies by defining (largely practical) outcomes (Council of Europe 2020: 3).

We can accept that an assumption of practicality is hardly controversial, even if it is still to be seen historically in direct and conscious contrast to the much reviled grammar-translation methodology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, much English language teacher training has specifically aimed at eschewing ‘theory’ and instead is expected to offer practical “tips as to classroom procedure” (Ur 1996: 3). Closely allied to this practical approach, we can identify an *assumption of neutrality* in the claims of approaches to English language teaching. English is presented (e.g. Montgomery 2013: 12-15) as a scientific and objective language, ideal for the international community of economists, researchers, and even internet users. But we are aware that neutrality in language is a myth, and potentially deceptive. A language deemed suit-

¹ See the Health Foundation website (<https://www.health.org.uk/>) for an informative breakdown on disparities, particularly affecting women in deprived areas and ethnic minorities.

able for western scientific discourse probably embodies those same discourse practices and so will be culturally influenced by them. It matters in which language certain values are first postulated and described, or advertised as ‘normal’, or inherently a part of that language itself, as Dunton Downer (2010) makes clear in her introductory chapter. Claims as to the objectivity of English and of its intrinsic appropriateness for scientific endeavour perhaps leading to universality (c.f. Wilkins cited in Montgomery 2013: 21) reinforce the vision of English as having both a suitable structure for scientific debate and having historically come about at just the right moment (Dunton Downer 2010). The presence of English all over the world seems to offer a greater likelihood of overcoming cultural limitations and specificities: as Montgomery says (2013: 54), it is attached to ideas such as progress and internationalism, and carries “[w]hat it means to be cosmopolitan, worldly”.

This historical chance (English inheriting the earth in the post-war period) is implicitly linked to another assumption: that of its essential *efficiency*. English is at once the briefest of languages and of reduced morphological complexity, and at the same time it is the language of neoliberal cost-cutting and high productivity. Although the supposed efficiency of using English in multinationals has been questioned (e.g. by Jenkins 2015, citing misunderstandings between native and non-native speakers, and especially Jenkins 2007: 253), the general view is that having only one pragmatic language aids quick, virtually costless communication (translation costs, for example, are all but eliminated). The financial advantages in terms of internationally shared advertising slogans, research papers or investment proposals are clear.

These assumptions become more significant when we realize that it is human knowledge itself that is often made, adjusted, interpreted and communicated in English, not just scientifically, but in the arts and entertainment or in politics and society. The hegemony of predominant discourses emanating from English (the ‘centre?’) and influencing linguistic and intellectual practices in other cultural areas is in plain sight (witness, for example, the prevalence of calques from English in economic discourse in Italian). While this is an area of some controversy (see Blommaert 2010: 14-20), it appears justifiable to suggest that English teaching risks both following, and imposing, norms of belief and interpretations of knowledge that are far from being culturally neutral (Fairclough 2010), and which are reinforced both through the social practices of teaching and learning English and by its transactional use (Fairclough 2010, citing Bourdieu 1991). Put simply, the implication is: if you can understand English you can ‘know’ something more quickly or upload a more recent app.

But nestled beneath all of these assumptions is the sense that English, perhaps, has a special ‘value’: for Dunton Downer (2010) it is certainly the language of freedom and emancipation (though others in other parts of the world might disagree), and even the enlightened *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF) movement (exemplified by Jenkins 2007) risks ignoring or accepting the air-brushing of many facets of the British imperial past that has been so skilfully detached from the role of the English language in the post-war era (for example, ‘Operation Legacy’, a UK Foreign Office strategy explicitly designed to eliminate incriminating evidence and documentation of crimes against humanity: see Daley 2018: 144). Daley (*ibid.*: 75) even suggests that British English is a language unequipped to articulate an era beyond the empire, citing the lack of significant history teaching in schools, describing it as “little more than aristocratic nation-

alist propaganda” but which somehow left the suggestion that “Britain had basically invented democracy” (*ibid.*). These arguments are dealt with in more detail but with a similar stance by Sanghera (2021).

It is precisely this *historical* dimension that is missing from these assumptions (and indeed much linguistics and sociolinguistics until at least the 1990s). Blommaert (2010: *xiv*) criticizes the essential synchronicity of modernism (of which Saussure and Chomsky are striking examples), stressing the contribution of ethnology (Hymes among others) in identifying the complexity of the role of language in the world of social interaction. The endless catalogue of moments of linguistic behaviour has a history and meaning that, at the same time, is a product of this behaviour and influences its future characteristics and possibilities of interpretation. Here we might be tempted to think of Bakhtin’s (1986: 103-122) dialogic view of texts or utterances which has a clearly sequential and so historical element. Halliday’s (2004: 29-33) textual and social functions of language are effectively combined in history. The moral aspect of these linguistic, and so cultural, events for language teaching has been underlined by Holliday (2009), and this leads us to recognize that, due to the timelessness with which modernism conceived language, the teaching of English has perhaps enjoyed a ‘free pass’ from historical conscience, if not something more politically manipulative (Phillipson 2010): while taking account of generally accepted current social or political consensual views, as in concern for the environment or a general idea of fair play discernible in most current course books (e.g. Latham-Koenig *et al.* (2020: 36-39) “Are you really as environmentally friendly as you think?”), English teaching materials avoid issues of intense political controversy². This might be an understandable policy from a commercial point of view, but it is always going to be a case of ‘truth’ being mediated, explicitly by text, but also socially in our teaching practices.

An appreciation of language at the level of discourse makes the extraction of language from time unsustainable, as Blommaert (2005, 2010: 20) makes clear, and allows him to state unabashedly “My effort is, in that sense, deeply historical” (*ibid.*: *xiv*), and this results in our understanding the power inherent in the globalization process in which English language teaching has played a significant part. The power of English in this sense comes from its perceived and unquestioned importance, firstly through simple numbers: we can accept Statista’s 2022 estimates of 350 million native *speakers*, but more interestingly 1.5 billion *users* (also cited in Anthony 2018: 28-29, but Ethnologue’s figures cited in Montgomery (2013: 27-28) are comparable), even if they are, of their very nature, highly approximate. While we may accept the caveats as to the future growth of English (Graddol 1997; Ostler 2010: 267-286), its numerical importance is clear. Secondly, though, this power derives from the huge influence it exerts as the language of business and academia: “the de facto language in many company workplaces and in academia as a whole” (Anthony 2018: 27; see also the table in Montgomery 2013: 35 of domains in which English is dominant). This means that English meanings

² We might mention here the absence of gender issues in course-books such as Latham-Koenig *et al.* (2020) as an example: even though it is quite reasonable that such delicate topics are avoided in a text that will possibly be used in schools, the ideal way to deal with such issues might be local and not in an international, one-size-fits-all way (avoidance of politically charged topics).

will achieve social stability through practices expressed and ritualized in English (c.f. Bourdieu 1991 in Fairclough 2010) repeatedly, on a daily basis.

Perhaps it is in the world of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that this becomes most clearly apparent, not merely because ESP fits neatly into our description (above) of English as the global default language of efficiency, science and practicality, but also because of Anthony's (2018: 2) claim that ESP "addresses many of the challenges that language learners face in our increasingly globalised world". We can suggest ESP as in some ways the epitome of today's English language teaching and learning. Anthony (*ibid.*: 9) mentions some features of ESP that he describes as unique to it, but which we might see instead as being highly representative of current thinking in English language teaching: "a commitment to learner-centeredness, a close connection to specialist subjects, and a focus on collaboration in both planning and teaching". The first and last of these are standard practice advocated by most teaching handbooks (e.g. Scrivener 2011, Ur 1996), while the second perhaps links more closely to CLIL methods than Anthony (2018) realizes.

But is ESP simply a highly efficient way of learning English in a rather unreflective manner? At first glance, this may seem to be true: "the main challenges in ESP seem to be deciding what the needs are, prioritising them in some way, and then finding a way to balance them all" (Anthony *ibid.*: 190). It is a "pragmatic approach that prioritises the immediate or near-future needs of learners" (*ibid.*: 191). Again, however, it is impossible to simplify these needs within the framework of the neutral, efficient global tongue that English is supposed to represent. Difficulties experienced in the workplace or in academic settings can include reduced efficiency, high costs in training, stress and feelings of inadequacy that can lead in extreme cases to documentation being excessively simplified or not being read or produced, and, worst of all, discrimination and resistance. Anthony (*ibid.*: 40) quotes Neeley: "Using English as a business language can damage employee morale, create unhealthy divides between native and non-native speakers, and decrease the overall productivity of team members". The development of critical ESP (see Starfield 2013 for an analytical summary) is a response to these problems and is of particular interest to us in the challenge it offers to the norms of English-led social behaviour, the assumption of non-native speaker communicative inadequacy, and the supposed need to have publications checked before publication.

This reaction in ESP can be seen in parallel with the attempts of the ELF movement to democratize English language use and behaviour (see especially Jenkins 2007 and 2015), but both have had little transformative effect: Jenkins (2007: 58-59) complains about this and little has really changed since. Native speaker norms are still prevalent, for example, in international certification (which is, by definition, highly influential), as bemoaned by Jenkins (*ibid.*: 241-243), and this has not changed greatly in the intervening years. Nowhere are the meritocratic, practical, neutral and internationalist claims of English more explicitly made palpable than in the arena of language testing; the reasons for this may be perfectly laudable (fairness and tests that are professionally produced and economically accessible, among others), but the centrality of certain linguistic behaviours (and so, potentially, values) is blatant. Despite a growth in local and nationalist politics in recent years (the 'sovereigntist' movement is one example of this, and perhaps Brexit is another), the global role of English appears established and on a continuing trajectory (e.g. Anthony (2018: 40) and Montgomery (2013: 19): "As the

developing world advances, it will become a greater and more complex user of English”), and most commentators have found themselves suggesting linguistic and social mitigation through careful policy rather than radical philosophical reconsideration.

3. The jolt of the virus

“It would require a profound and disrupting change to the global scene for any other language to replace English” (Montgomery 2013: 18). Montgomery, does, however, immediately afterwards qualify his statement with the recognition (*ibid.*) that “such change is always possible”. The crisis engendered by the pandemic surely qualifies as sudden, disruptive and deep, perhaps most of all because it has revealed itself to be longer-lasting than we might have imagined. Two years after the Covid 19 virus reached western Europe (in February 2020, if not before), we are still in the midst of transformed circumstances, not least in our social interactions and educational practices. But it is not only our modes of interaction that have changed. There is also a significant and highly visible failure of the supposed global system to respond to the threat of the virus. The nationalistic race to buy up vaccines is the most salient sign of this, but the disjointed, somewhat aggressive diplomatic reactions (the strained relations between the World Health Organization and the Trump administration in spring and summer 2020 are testament to this) revealed the sheer lack of solid reality to many of the claims made for globalization. Pennycook’s (2010) critique of simplistic notions surrounding globalization have been borne out by events, and any advantages of assumed unity in discourses about medicine or economics have turned out to be less beneficial than imagined or assumed.

And where does language learning find itself in this? English, as we have seen, is not merely a hugely popular or effective lingua franca, it is also an arena for ideas and discourses, and a locus for rituals of social interaction. As both Bourdieu (1991) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) postulate, repeated iterations of expected behaviour reinforce themselves, and English experiences this, and benefits from it, to the tune of a market of 50 billion dollars in 2010, according to Montgomery (2013:13). In other words, each and every decision to use English as a medium of communication reinforces its role and importance, and potentially gives pragmatic salience to patterns of behaviour associated with the language (the forms of greeting used, honorifics expected, typical ways of making requests and apologizing, among many others). The decision to use or to teach English can thus influence, or even define the nature of cross-cultural interactions, and this can be seen in assumptions as to the role of English, sometimes enshrined in company policy (Anthony 2018: 31).

But here we risk committing ourselves to a classical modernist fallacy: that a language is something homogenous that can be measured, counted and adequately described with some permanence. Pennycook (2010) argues the opposite, and both he and Blommaert (2010) convincingly describe languages which we conveniently name as “English” or “French” as complex groups of repertoires that shift and alter in a fluid way, and which no two people share perfectly. So, the first understanding of the (possibly) post-globalized world is the absolute complexity of linguistic experience, and of what we call languages themselves. This, incidentally, is one of the reasons we can suggest for the difficulty of mastering another tongue. It also means that our descriptions

(linguistic or pedagogical grammars, and even dictionaries) will always be slightly out of date (lacking a few new developments)³ and a little inadequate (hence ‘exceptions’, as these details in complexity are often called).

Reflection on language teaching is hardly ill-equipped to deal with the scenario of complexity. In many ways, the ELF debate attempts to tackle exactly this issue with its concern for and acceptance of variation, both of accent and of grammar and lexis, and its interest in the pragmatics of successful but non-standard (judged by native-speaker norms) interactions (see Jenkins 2007). Plurilingualism is another attempt to face up to the significant social issues involved (Beacco and Byram 2007). According to the Council of Europe (2007: 36):

The development of plurilingualism is not simply a functional necessity: it is also an essential component of democratic behaviour. Recognition of the diversity of speakers’ plurilingual repertoires should lead to acceptance of linguistic differences: respect for the linguistic rights of individuals and groups in their relations with the state and linguistic majorities, respect for freedom of expression, respect for linguistic minorities, respect for the least commonly spoken and taught national languages, respect for language diversity in inter-regional and international communication.

It is to be noted here that the text cited is immediately followed by a clear declaration of the importance of language teaching as the “ideal locus” for intercultural contact. Perhaps the models of most classroom approaches to learning English have underplayed, or even ignored, what is the essence of language teaching: meeting the other in all its variety and specificity⁴. If we have been working on promoting practical (and marketable) abilities in what is supposed to be the global tongue, then we should hardly be surprised if a crisis like the present pandemic has been so challenging, intellectually and politically (because it is so *linguistically*). The contrast between the accelerated scientific success in producing several vaccines against Covid within a year, and the inability for us to distribute them quickly and equitably around the planet is blatant. It is as if the scientific community is able to communicate the information necessary for research, but the world community is wholly unable to share and negotiate experience empathetically and with an awareness of local difficulties.

4. A modest proposal

Canagarajah’s (1999: 233) definition of proficiency in languages in the postmodern world as “the ability to shuttle between different varieties of English and different speech communities” is relevant here and it gives us the beginning of a possible answer to the dilemma of a globalized English that has failed to unite the world. It is the

³ It is worth noting in this regard that even corpus-based or corpus-driven descriptions of language and dictionaries suffer from a time lag between planning, data collection and compilation, interrogation and eventual publication. Some corpora, such as the British National Corpus (BNC), which is still often used today, have achieved surprising longevity, even though it was assembled from 1991-1994 and has been described as “no longer an accurate reflection of the English language” (Burnard 2002: 64).

⁴ This can be considered true of the Direct Method or the Audio-lingual method, but even the communicative approach is not always rich in its understanding of the complexity of encounters: see Holliday 2009 for an analysis of this.

objectives of current teaching and learning that require re-evaluation and, perhaps, a substantial overhaul. The environment has already been changed by the advent of technology that has created entirely new contexts for language use: the social media, that are essentially multi-modal, are the most obvious example (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok etc.). There are new modes and channels, but teaching approaches have failed to truly take these into account, linguistically and pragmatically. English language teaching has done little to adjust to this new reality, besides superficial uses of text types, or, more often, practical tips on netiquette or being media-savvy (as an example, see “8 tips on how to spot fake news” in Latham-Koenig *et al.* 2020: 83), which do not explore the transformations in language use that these technological innovations are provoking. People can participate in these new contexts surprisingly easily, but deeper understanding and awareness are lacking (which goes some way to explain the fake news problem mentioned in the text that gives the eight tips, cited above). It is quite possible to contribute on social media, writing and responding, without ever achieving a detailed level of comprehension (with the inherent risks involved).

The overhaul that is needed might be founded, I would like to suggest, on a much greater focus on reception skills. English morphology, and its propensity to homophones and homographs, along with the vagaries of its non-transparent system of transcription, have contributed to wariness of comprehension issues and an imbalance in methodological approaches that tend to favour productive skills which give a certain instant satisfaction, offer a practical appearance (you notice what you can say at each new level attained) and give an illusion of control (you know what you are trying to say) to the detriment of receptive skills, and, especially, deeper understanding (which would include negotiation of meaning and so of social values and culture). This renewed emphasis would have distinct significance for ESP courses as well, as misunderstandings are one of the greatest threats to effective use of English in a professional context, along with other serious difficulties as outlined by Anthony (2018: 41) considering academia. Threats to local languages might be mitigated in this approach, and it should indeed include translation, the ‘fifth skill’ in language learning, repeatedly forgotten, often for commercial reasons (an examination or course-book ceases to be marketable worldwide if translation is a significant component). But translation requires exactly the depth of interpretative understanding that we see is missing, for example, not only from audio-lingual methodology, but also from communicative approaches and associated tasks (see Cook 2010 for an argument in favour of translation in language learning).

Instead, perhaps we have been offering students little more than add-ons to their truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010: 103-106). As Blommaert explains, our linguistic knowledge will always be incomplete, and when we learn a new language it is inevitable that our experience of it will be somewhat fragmentary, but it is awareness of this that is lacking in learners. Even in a limited context such as ESP, it is the gaps which can be fundamental for failures of communication, and it is a fundamental linguistic skill to be aware of these risks and to know how to deal with them (checking information, asking for a translation, questioning assumptions etc.). This might also offer a solution to the problem with idioms presented, quite polemically at times, by Jenkins (2007: 41): “NS idiomaticity is irrelevant or counterproductive”. Jenkins’ critical attitude emphasizes the non-transparent and culturally limited aspects of idioms, which may result in misunderstanding, particularly in communication between native- and

non-native-speakers. Hostility to the use of idioms is thus understandable as they are opaque and depend on shared knowledge. However, outlawing linguistic behaviour is seldom savoury, as it risks being discriminatory or highly subjective, and even more rarely is it successful. This is tantamount to approaching the problem from the wrong end (of the stick!): it is precisely this idiomaticity that defines and localizes varieties of language, and there is no reason why ELF speakers cannot develop their own. It is the reception skills that need to be developed, along with cultural knowledge and having the pragmatic tools necessary to clarify an utterance and its nuances.

The local aspect is most important of all. All understanding happens in situ, and each locality will add its gloss of accent, implication and context (Pennycook 2010), even to phrases in the most generalized forms of English, or any other language. Indeed, this is linguistic behaviour: it is partly what Bakhtin (1986: 105-121) means with dialogic relations and dialogic understanding. Developing the ability to explore these relations and possibilities should be an aspect of every language lesson. Instead, our practical, efficient version of English prioritizes one message, often to the elimination of all others (e.g. in multiple-choice or true-false listening tests). It is context that allows us to make meaning, and decontextualized language has been the bugbear of linguistics and language training throughout the modern era. Localizing the learning experience, on the other hand, offers enhanced authenticity (see Gilmore 2007 for a good analysis of this controversial issue) and contrasts with the challenge of creating authentic learning experiences with globalized materials (it is certainly possible, but not automatic or easy, to render a course-book perhaps published in the UK intensely real in a distant society, and meaning risks being diluted or lost if a text is distant from the locality in which it is used, or far from learners' realities: *ibid.*: 6-23). This localization should go further. The advent of online materials presents an opportunity and a challenge for language teachers. On the one hand, learners are faced with a plethora of courses (Language Massive Open Online Courses: LMOOCs) that are free and potentially attractive, but which invariably represent the very extreme of this globalized lack of context and meaning. On the other, we as teachers can find a significant quantity of OER (Open Educational Resources) that are ripe to be selected and transformed (known as 'remixing') into suitable and meaningful materials in our classrooms. Open Learn is a typical example of a particularly good quality site offering resources free of charge and with high compatibility (an important consideration), and the Open University explains how to go about putting together your own resources (Open University 2016).

5. Conclusion: will it work?

At this stage, it is legitimate to ask whether this highly localised approach, which is, in some respects, in contrast with current (international) practice (e.g. the global market in course materials and international examinations and certification), will have any traction in the language learning or teaching community. One of the few advantages of a crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic is the case in point, is that it tends to offer opportunities, as there is a general acceptance that things can, and perhaps should, change. In addition, technology has already transformed our linguistic world, and it is time that pedagogy recognized this explicitly, not merely in making use of tools and devices in class, or adjusting teaching techniques, but in recognizing significant changes in linguistic

behaviour (e.g. the habitual use of multi-modal ways of communicating such as Twitter or Instagram) and so in rethinking the basis of teaching goals and practices. We should be developing greater selection and comprehension skills in our learners who are faced with a plethora of TikTok clips and an infinite variety of YouTube tutorials, all of which require negotiation of relatively new kinds of instances of language, that hold cultural values and assumptions as well as any information explicitly offered. Also, our assumptions about mobility will probably be renegotiated after the pandemic, changing both the habits and expectations of social interaction. More profoundly, we may even face the end of the economic hegemony of globalization, with calls for increased regulation, social and environmental responsibility and some kind of legal and political mechanism to deal with potentially huge migratory flows. Language will need to adapt in order to enable understanding and debate about these highly political issues, and different discourses and narratives used⁵. This will require precisely the more complex skills we have mentioned (deeper awareness, better techniques of understanding, contextualization), along with an intense intercultural, or better, multicultural element in language learning. This is not an impossible challenge, as it indeed represents a transformation of the underpinning of the aims of learning, but will allow many classroom routines to continue: good practice is possible in any approach or method, it is merely the context and purpose that is changed. Indeed, there are many aspects of current techniques that fit well with this view of learning, exemplified, for instance, in the lexical approach (e.g. Dellar and Walkley 2016: 7-32). We will never create complete repertoires, of course, but we can deepen them, and help our learners to make them communicatively more effective. Perhaps ELF offers an ideology for this. Indeed, in many ways education is all about expanding and opening up repertoires, and enriching students and society.

This connects seamlessly with issues in cross-cultural communication. In the post-war era we have largely been teaching language learners how to communicate, but the approach proposed here aims to help them work on nuanced understanding, deepening awareness of interlocutors and honing delicate skills of interaction. In other words, Hymes' model (1974) can be deepened and made more relevant to cross-cultural communicative needs. Critical assessment of meanings, the examination of translation skills, and awareness of complexity should all be significant parts of what we consider language learning to be, and this in turn equips learners better to engage with 'others' rather than communicate *to* them. Language education is at the basis of cross-cultural experiences and we should recognize this and how it can empower or delimit these experiences.

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⁵ It is worth observing the complete inadequacy of the English language to deal with immigration in a way that is, if not necessarily fair (a political perspective perhaps), but at least accurate. Blommaert (2010: 154-159) describes the deleterious effects of inadequate linguistic skills on both sides of the classic immigration situation (a hearing for asylum in the UK) in detail.

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