

Occasional Paper

LANGUAGE, DISADVANTAGE & ETHNIC MINORITIES

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1.0 The significance of language

1.1 Language is central to human interaction and plays a unique role in the transmission and formation of the values, identity and culture which make up an individual's and a group's social reality. Because language has this role, it cannot in reality be separated from other matters affecting ethnic minority people who speak English as a second language, such as race discrimination, cultural differences, and sheer lack of information and understanding about many aspects of life in Britain. The task of acquiring English is quite different from learning "a foreign language" in the traditional sense. People who have settled here must acquire far more than the formal linguistic features of the language in order to use it successfully. They must undergo a process of socialisation. This process involves acquiring a knowledge of the social and cultural values of the majority, of the constraints which are imposed on behaviour - including language behaviour, and a knowledge of the ways language is used quite differently in different types of situations. They must often acquire this against a background of hostility and resentment that they have a different first language at all. In addition, if there is to be any equality for the minorities - rather than constant rejection because of failure to measure up to majority social and cultural values and norms of behaviour - there must be an awareness by the majority of the difficulties for most people in acquiring English and the limitations thus imposed on their English. But a recognition of these limitations must not be confused with lack of ability or a lack of motivation to participate in wider society.

1.2 The discussion of language and ethnic minorities is bedevilled by dangerous myths and misjudgements, of which the following are five important and typical examples:

- (a) People are thought to either know English or not to know English.
- (b) Language problems are thought to mainly affect illiterate and uneducated people who know very little English.
- (c) Inappropriate and unfamiliar use of English is mistaken for deliberately different attitudes and behaviour.
- (d) Native speakers of English feel themselves automatically equipped to judge how much English someone knows.
- (e) Poor English is often interpreted as a lack of ability.

- 1.3 In reality, second language speakers can very seldom use English in exactly the same way as native speakers and they constantly find themselves in unfamiliar situations where their powers of communication in English are limited. This is hardly surprising since they occupy a generally isolated and disadvantaged position in our society.
- 1.4 The need for language learning must therefore be recognised as long-term and arising from a person's developing objectives and needs in this society. There are still many people who have only a very limited knowledge of English, but at the same time language learning must not be stereotyped as only "elementary" and "basic". In many ways the label "English as a second language" is unhelpful because it disguises the complexity of the task. For example, the Tavistock research into Race Relations Policy in the Civil Service (1975) revealed significantly greater problems for fluent and well-qualified people from the ethnic minorities than for white people at selection and promotion interviews.
- 1.5 To meet the needs of ethnic minorities, language learning programmes must be linked to broader programmes for education, for training and employment, and for access to public services and facilities. Mother tongue maintenance and the provision of adequate interpreters at critical points such as the courts, health and maternity care and the social services should also be viewed as part of the same context of language and disadvantage. Finally, the greatest single "problem" for ethnic minorities in relation to language is the failure of native speakers of English to make sound judgements about their English or to recognise or take any steps to overcome the inevitable communication difficulties which arise in multi-lingual settings.

2.0 Needs and provision for language learning: young people and adults

2.1 Language learning is relative to what a person needs to do through the medium of English; a person's skills and requirements in English also vary according to the particular contexts and to the degree of pressure and unfamiliarity for the person in them. For example, a young person may have acquired fluent and colloquial spoken language, but may not have the study skills in English to follow successfully a further education course. Again, adequate English speakers, in terms of their present jobs, may be handicapped in both spoken and written English when promoted. People with very little English may work entirely alongside speakers of their own language and seldom feel the need to know English until they have to go to hospital or their children are at school. We can expect communication problems to present themselves wherever there are ethnic minorities for whom English is a second language. On the one hand, all institutions and services should be sensitive and geared to these communication problems, and on the other, language learning and improvement should be an integral part of the work of all such colleges, training programmes (for the employed and unemployed) and adult education programmes.

2.2 These are the reasons why global figures about the scale of need for language training are not very meaningful, and in any case no such accurate statistics exist. The PEP research The Facts of Racial Disadvantage (1976) estimated in round figures that "40% of Asian men and 60% of Asian women speak English only slightly, or not at all". The rest were rated as speaking English "fairly well" (22%) and "fluently" (33%). There was a clear age factor in these figures. No estimates exist for other ethnic groups. Much more meaningful figures would relate to adequate or inadequate language in relation to specific tasks and contexts. For example, adequate or inadequate English for present employment, for adults who are job seeking, or for people seeking particular education or training opportunities. In 1977, the National Centre for Industrial Language Training (NCILT) estimated "there may be up to 200,000 immigrant workers (Asian and others) in need of language training in relation to their present jobs (or re-employment if unemployed)". These figures are partly projected from language surveys in workplaces and, whilst there is some bias in these findings towards older people, surprisingly high levels of language difficulty are still found amongst under 26 year olds.

2.3 No national figures exist on provision for learning English. The National Association for the Teaching of English to Adults (NATESLA) organised a survey of members in January 1980 and the figures from this are awaited. The following description and comment on provision is, therefore, impressionistic.

2.4 Young people 16 - 19

- (a) Some FE colleges offer full-time language and basic education courses for young people who have arrived "late" in this country to join their families. The scale of provision is small and falls far short of what is needed in some areas. The extent of needs depends on the particular ethnic minority community and the region of the country. For example, there is a greater need amongst young people of Bangladeshi origin than East African Asian origin.
- (b) YOPS as a matter of policy does not generally make special provision only for the ethnic minority groups. However, a very few special YOPS, WOC and WIC courses have been established to cater for young people with ESL needs.
- (c) Many young people find themselves only able to learn English through part-time English classes designed for older adults, but what they want and need is something full-time and much broader in scope.
- (d) An important priority in many FE Colleges and YOPS programmes is a proper examination of how language needs are being met and the development of special language and literacy support for young ESL speakers. This support must be properly and fully integrated with the main FE or YOPS programme. There is little evidence that colleges are at present organised to do this sort of integration of language work.

2.5 Adults

(a) Full-time TOPS Preparatory Courses

About 18% of these courses are specifically geared to the needs of ESL students although other courses provide limited ESL training as part of the programme. These are the only full-time courses for adults which provide a thorough grounding in language, literacy, numeracy and life skills as a stepping stone to further training

or to improved employment prospects. There is no LEA provision of this type at all for this age group. Many of the courses now have long waiting lists and the standard of English required to enter the course has, in most cases, risen because of increased competition for training places and for jobs afterwards, and because demand so far outstrips supply.

(b) Part-time Adult and Further Education Classes for adults

This is the largest type of provision, but varies enormously in character, quantity and quality between local authority areas and types of institution. Details on some important characteristics of this type of provision are given in A Strategy for the Basic Education of Adults*. Most classes offer general content, but there is a growing interest in providing classes to teach for a specific need. Great efforts have been made in some LEAs to build up proper referral systems, to site classes outside major institutions and at relevant and convenient buildings - for example, clinics, primary schools, temples, etc. Such classes also require proper support services in terms of creche facilities and opportunities to visit and learn about important aspects of local life. Generally many more women than men attend such classes. This cannot just be explained in terms of level of English amongst women; it also reflects other important factors including the development of a new role in this society for them. In Inner London, the ratio of women to men is 2 : 1. It is generally recognised that the quality and extent of provision for women in the community has improved and is now the strongest area of LEA provision.

Useful though they are, there are also limitations on the general pattern of part-time classes. The most obvious and difficult one is the availability of time to attend as frequently and regularly as is needed. Another important consideration is that many people - particularly younger people and men - are not attracted by the "low level", "education" and "English" labels which such classes are often associated with. They are not motivated to improving

* Pages 59-61 published by the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education, De Montfort Street, Leicester. 1979.

their English as such or to general leisure education - but are looking for new skills and opportunities and only want to study English in support of them. A third point is that, particularly for older people, the recognition and use of their mother tongue would help make such classes more accessible.

(c) Home tuition schemes

Most areas where there are ethnic minorities have one-to-one home tuition schemes. Voluntary bodies and CRCs have played a significant part in establishing these schemes. The schemes mainly reach women in the home and usually aim to bring people out to part-time adult classes as soon as they are ready. Useful though these schemes are, they can only make a limited contribution because spoken language learning is essentially a social and cultural process. Nor is it surrounded by personal learning difficulties and social embarrassment in the way that adult illiteracy is. There is certainly a need to look beyond the limitations of formal class instruction, but the largest potential for this is in the use of the media and self-study materials at post-elementary levels.

(d) The Industrial Language Training Service (ILT)

ILT units are run by 28 LEAs with finance from MSC and also receive professional support from the National Centre for Industrial Language Training which is the only official national agency in the field of language and ethnic minorities. The funding, and scale of ILT work was set out to the committee in the MSC memorandum of June 1980. A copy of Industrial Language Training: A Progress Report 1980 is attached with this paper which gives further details on the work and significance of the scheme.

(e) Vietnamese Refugees

Special language teaching classes have been organised at reception centres and now steps are in hand for the organisation of language linked to resettlement when needs will become more acute and more difficult to meet.

1.6 Comments on policy, provision, curriculum and teacher-training

(The ILT scheme and the special needs of unemployed people with language problems are discussed separately in later sections of this paper).

A very important fact about provision is that it is estimated that about 40% of all the national provision was made by the Inner London Education Authority at January 1980. ILEA obviously has a large population who speak English as a second language but the imbalance of provision cannot be explained in these terms alone so it is important to explore some of the possible reasons. Firstly, there is a history of policies by the authority which has positively favoured the growth of such provision. ILEA has long had an established and staffed Adult Education Service and in the mid-seventies the introduction of the policy of Education for the Whole Community favoured provision for the disadvantaged and resulted in the appointment of full-time outreach workers which in time led to a proper structure for ESL with considerable full-time staff. This trend was further enhanced by the Multi-Ethnic Policy which was established in 1978. At the same time, ILEA has also put considerable resources into in-service teacher-training and has developed with the Royal Society of Arts a Certificate in the Teaching of English to Adult Immigrants which is now available nationally. Another significant factor may be the population density of the area.

Generally provision throughout the country is unpredictable and varied from LEA to LEA. Much good pioneer work has been done, but there has been a tendency to mushroom small and specialised schemes and not to develop co-ordinated policies and objectives which cut across further, higher, adult and community education as well as the different sources of funding.

It must be added that the existing provision is now threatened by local authority cuts and some LEAs are talking of 20% cut backs in real terms.

Although most of the funding for language learning programmes for adults comes from the government (through section 11, Urban Aid, MSC, and special funds such as for the Vietnamese), there has never been a comprehensive policy or a review of either needs or provision. A proper examination of the evidence of language disadvantage and of different and effective means of tackling it is needed and this examination should look beyond the present accidents of provision and organisation. The aim should be a comprehensive perspective which can inform matters of policy, provision, curriculum and teacher training. At present, there are several obstacles to appreciating the need for

a comprehensive approach:

- (a) Funding and policy responsibilities are split between government departments, and the educational responsibility of DES is often separate again.
- (b) There is a prevalent view that language learning needs are short-term and can be eradicated. The experience of other West European countries and Australia, Canada and America demonstrate this is a mistaken view.
- (c) There is the danger of seeing language as an easy option for positive action in the field of ethnic minorities and not linking it realistically to other questions of disadvantage and discrimination.
- (d) There is no national resource unit responsible for professional support across the whole field of language and the ethnic minorities. Language is far too important to the future of ethnic minorities in this country not to receive comprehensive study from a national point of view.

3.0 The Industrial Language Training Service*

3.1 It has long been recognised that the critical areas of discrimination and disadvantage are employment and education. The ILT service works within the workplace in co-operation with management and trade unions. The ILT service aims to help individuals learn the skills and acquire the self-confidence to communicate effectively in English in multi-racial workplaces. Our first priority is speakers of English as a second language, but we also work with speakers of English as a first language. Better communications in the workplace can contribute significantly to the human environment, to opportunities for individuals, to participation and to particular aspects of efficient working.

3.2 Unique features of the ILT scheme are:

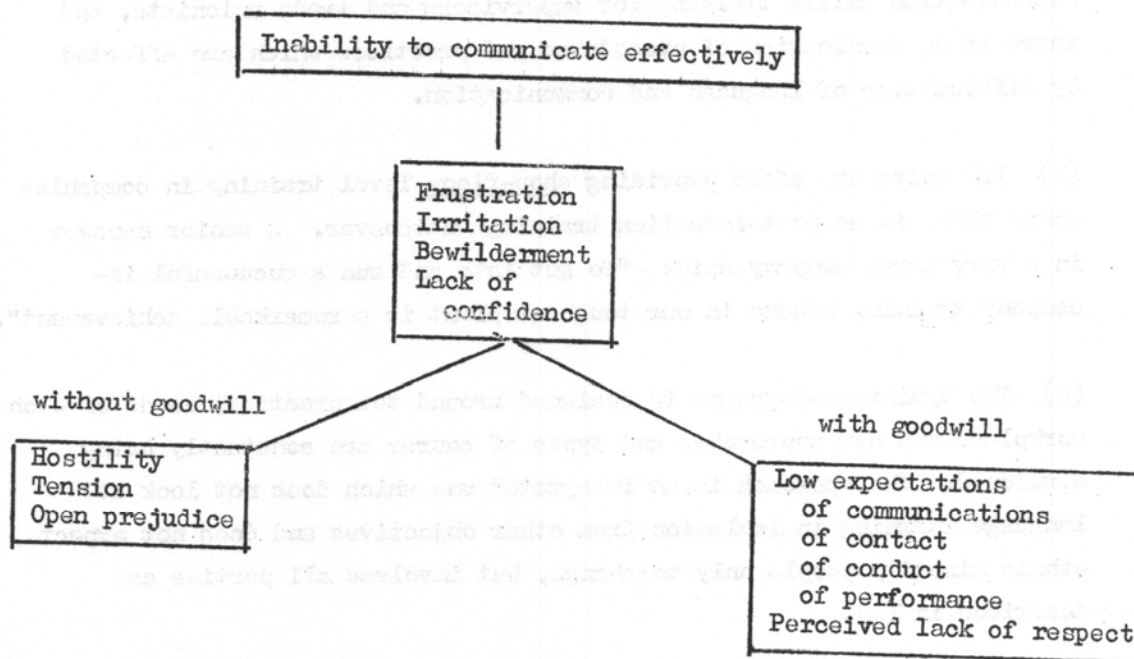
- (a) It can operate across the whole field of language and communication needs within a workplace and is not tied to a narrow ESL brief. Language training is provided for the ethnic minorities, awareness and communication skills training for supervisors and trade unionists, and there is an examination of procedures and practices which are affected by difficulties of language and communication.
- (b) ILT units are often providing shop-floor level training in companies where there is no post-induction training whatsoever. A senior manager in a very large company said: "To get into and run a successful in-company training scheme in our toughest plant is a remarkable achievement".
- (c) The training programme is designed around the practical needs of each workplace and new approaches and types of course are constantly being developed. The approach is an integrated one which does not look at language learning in isolation from other objectives and does not expect ethnic minority people only to change, but involves all parties as described in (a).
- (d) Staff of the ILT units have built up a very detailed knowledge of the working conditions and problems in multi-racial workplaces, and have established close and long-term links with many employers and trade unions

* Sources for the main facts about the ILT scheme are referred to in paragraph 2.5(d) above.

in their areas. Staff have also developed special expertise in developing work-related and functional language training and have contributed a great deal to the whole field of ESL teaching. For example, the new BBC Series Speak for Yourself has been made with IIT expertise.

Since 1978, national planning and funding by the Manpower Services Commission has strengthened the service in important respects and it now has an effective and well-organised capacity in most parts of the country.

- 1.3 Extensive work has been done by IIT units in diagnosing communication problems in multi-racial workplaces and building up methods for overcoming them. As with all communication, it is often difficult to separate the different elements of race discrimination, cultural differences and language difficulties. But, we often find a general position which can be summarised for both parties as follows:



It was stressed earlier that language and communication difficulties are not confined to people with very weak English. Substantial needs for IIT have been found in service industries and in white collar jobs as well as in unskilled manufacturing jobs.

3.4 The present industrial recession

ILT projects can only be run with positive involvement and financial commitment from employers. Inevitably, the ILT service, like all in-company training, is affected by the recession, particularly as the hardest hit workplaces are in the labour intensive manufacturing industries where the majority of ethnic minority people are employed. For example:

- (a) Many workplaces with long term language training programmes have closed down, are on short-term working and/or have large-scale redundancies.
- (b) A lot of additional work has, therefore, to be put into marketing the service.
- (c) Many employers are not prepared to consider training at all in the present uncertain economic climate or have no training budgets whatsoever.
- (d) The D.E. imposes a bar on in-company training on days when a company is receiving short-time working compensation payments. But in some cases, language training can be arranged off-site.
- (e) In some parts of the country, a significant proportion of the target trainees are not unemployed.

3.5 Important new developments

At the same time as there are these difficulties, new types of training and applications of ILT expertise are developing and ILT programmes are being established with new types of employers:

Service industries: ILT has long worked with the hotel and catering industry and with the health service. Now we are finding considerable needs for training amongst local government employees, passenger transport workers, and public services such as gas and electricity. Important areas of communication for this type of job are dealing with the public, using telephones, and handling basic paper work.

Retraining programmes: Technical change and redeployment of people often requires retraining programmes inside a workplace. ILT is providing complementary language training as well as support and insights for the workplace instructors.

Promotion: Although in many workplaces, members of ethnic minorities have received very little promotion, in some places, quite a lot of people have moved into more complex and responsible jobs such as key operators and supervisors. These jobs bring substantial new spoken and written language requirements and ILT programmes are being run to meet them.

Training for people who work with ethnic minority clients: There has recently been considerable interest expressed in using ILT programmes for awareness and communication skills training for people providing services to Asian people in the community such as health workers.

The Civil Service: There is some recognition developing of how spoken language can cause problems and can hold ethnic minority people at the lowest clerical levels. ILT programmes are running in two government departments.

- 1.6 The work of the ILT service remains of great importance to multi-racial workplaces. Substantial work continues in traditional industries and the wider relevance in employment of the ILT approach is constantly emerging.

4.0 Unemployment and language

The IIT service has considerable knowledge of Asian experience of unemployment. All units have experience of working in companies which have closed, are on short-time working or have large-scale redundancies. Most units have close contacts with trade unions and with Job Centres and a few IIT units are involved with special training for the unemployed (with separate funding). This topic is examined at length because no detailed analysis has been available before.

4.1 The Extent

Even at this time of very high unemployment amongst the whole population, the ethnic minorities experience above average rates of unemployment. Within this disadvantaged group, Asians from the Subcontinent are particularly badly affected. Groups of Indian subcontinent origin (but excluding East African Asians) make up over 50% of all the EMG unemployed and unemployment amongst these groups is growing faster than among any other ethnic groups.

	Nov 1979	Nov 1980	% increase
1. Total unemployed	1,292,284	2,071,188	+ 60.3%
2. Ethnic Minority Group unemployed	48,420	82,541	+ 70.5%
3. Indian subcontinent unemployed	23,346	43,320	+ 85.6%

Source: D.E. Gazette

4.2 The age range

Figures for unemployment broken down by age are only available annually from the Department of Employment. The last ones (in February 1980) showed that Asian unemployment was growing fastest amongst the over 24 year olds in contrast with blacks of West Indian origin and in contrast with all the unemployed. A local example of this is shown in the age

range of 266 redundant workers in two mills in Lancashire in May 1980:

19 - 25 years	34%
26 - 44 years	46%
45 years and over	20%

The DE figures and other research suggest that the most acute problems of unemployment and dangers of long-term unemployment for Asian people are with the over 19 year olds rather than the 16 - 19 year olds.

4.3 Occupational factors

The extent and age structure of Asian unemployment is partly explained by the group's occupational structure. Asians have been disproportionately employed in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in manufacturing industry (about three times the average for the white population in 1976). In some parts of the country - particularly in the North and the Midlands - they have spent their whole working lives in industries which are now experiencing massive redundancies and permanent closures: textiles, clothing, foundries, engineering and leather goods. For example, a survey of workers in eight foundries in the West Midlands (1978) showed 30% - 80% to be Asian. In Blackburn a local survey showed that whereas only 12% of the total working population was employed in textiles, 54% of Asian workers were employed in that industry. The Asian workers are also often employed in the most vulnerable and unskilled parts of these industries. Non-Muslim Asian women are also strongly represented amongst the unemployed. Many of their jobs, particularly in clothing and footwear in the Midlands, have disappeared along with a wide range of unskilled jobs in the more mixed industrial areas of the South-East.

4.4 The impact

Unemployment amongst Asian people has meant particular hardship in parts of Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Midlands and East London and one can talk of a collapse of Asian working life in some of the towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire. In these places, the unemployment rate is far higher among Asian people than the national statistics, e.g. about 20% of the total unemployed. Asian communities which have prided themselves on their mutual support, their self-help in finding jobs, their hard work and their financial commitment to the education and training of their children find this way of life collapsing.

1.5 Language and unemployment

It is obvious that Asian people, like other people, are unemployed because of the lack of work. In the past, Asian people, who have been less selective than other workers about job-seeking have found that a lack of communication skills in English is not a barrier to employment. Increasingly now they are being turned away by employers and by Job Centre on the grounds that they have not sufficient English for a job. So they suddenly find language is a major disadvantage, but they suspect that language may be an excuse for discrimination, particularly as such judgements are usually made in an inconsistent and uninformed way.

How far is language an important factor in Asian adult unemployment?

The Policy Studies Institute (PSI) research Unemployment and Racial Minority Groups (1980)* suggests that Ethnic Minority Groups are more vulnerable to unemployment because of race discrimination and because of a cluster of other factors and of disadvantages of which language is one. The experience of the Industrial Language Training units confirm that language can be a significant factor. This point is illustrated by a survey of the language levels of 254 redundant workers in two mills in Lancashire.

Very low oral communication skills (categories D and E of survey)

Under 26 years old	39%
26 - 46	57%
46 and over	79%

Very low written skills in English (D and E)

Under 26 years old	45%
26 - 46	65%
46 and over	81%

The low levels of language skills amongst the under 26 year olds is very notable. We can say that for a number of reasons Asians with poor English are likely to be "selected" for unemployment.

* The PSI research is based on data collected in early 1979 and unemployment has increased dramatically since.

There is a danger that by highlighting the language issue one is ignoring and covering over more important factors. However, at a time of such high unemployment, we have a lot of evidence that people are not seriously considered at all for employment or training unless they have the ability to present and sell themselves through personal communication. But, at the same time, it must be emphasised that people who interview Asians need the skills and awareness to perceive their employment potential accurately. Thus many Asians who have a satisfactory work record going back many years may find English now a very serious disadvantage. Poor English often means that Asians are disqualified even from a place in the job-seeking queue.

The following report illustrates how language may now affect job-seeking and trigger prejudices. The report came from an English language tutor who was running a class for unemployed people. The class included work on procedures at the Job Centre. Then she took her class on a visit to the real Job Centre: "An Indian male student then requested an interview about a bakery job in x. Before he went to the desk I explained the early hours to him. He came back without the job details.

The girl who had interviewed him came up to me and all the group saying that the Indian did not know enough English. She said all of the group needed to speak English all the time and that it was no good just understanding their teacher. It was no good sending them for an interview unless it was an employer who took people like them. It was a waste of a £1 bus fare. At one point she looked at a student, who was looking at me for clarification, and said 'See she doesn't understand me'. The students were rather disheartened after this but we carried on looking round."

This cluster of disadvantages which are affecting Asian workers is devastating: race, lack of skill, lack of varied work experience, lack of English. It is not surprising that so many should be found on the bottom rung of the unemployed despite the evidence that they are less selective than other work seekers. Language enters into the process of indirect discrimination and disadvantage, because the "gateways" to employment and training increasingly involve literacy and formal oral interviews. So people are increasingly evaluated and judged on the basis of their ability to communicate. In addition, at the present time, an initial judgement is often made about whether a person's English is good enough for them to be considered at all. These judgements are almost

invariably made on little evidence and by people with little skill and no training in language assessment. The result is that Asians often find themselves turned away before they are even considered. Important aspects of this process are:

(a) Language selection tests. ILT units have found evidence that many employers (including many traditional employers of Asians) now regard the completion of a complex application form as a language selection test justified on the grounds of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The effect of this practice can be to debar Asian workers with good and safe work records and adequate spoken English from a job interview. Alternatively or in addition, the job interview itself is regarded as a language test although this is not stated.

(b) Employment Services. Language acts as a barrier to the employment services counselling and assisting Asians. In addition, the attitude of employers to poor English also has a "knock-on" effect at the Job Centre in terms of not referring people to employers. The PSI research found: "..... Asians, especially those whose English was poor, stood out as a group who were substantially less likely than others to have found a job through the public employment service ... Asians had almost as much contact with the service as whites, but received many fewer specific job suggestions ... The fact that the employment service did not help Asians as much as other groups is closely connected with linguistic difficulties."

Local research confirms this. Of a sample of 98 redundant Asian mill Workers in Lancashire, only 9 attended job interviews arranged by the Job Centre over a period of about 6 weeks after they finished work. Poor speakers of English are therefore less likely to go into the Job Centre to seek work at all and if they do, are less likely to be able to use the service offered there. The sheer numbers of unemployed Asian workers with limited English and few transferable job skills presents a daunting challenge to already over-pressed Job Centre staff. There is the evident danger that a large section of the Asian community will be classified as unemployable and that others in the community will be stereotyped in the same way.

- (c) Training. This obvious alternative for unemployed workers with little English also usually turns out to be closed to them. Skills training requires fluent and specialised written and spoken language skills. Some preparatory courses are specifically designed for people with weak English but they only provide about 500 ESL places a year and now tend to select out the weakest. It is interesting that the Lancashire sample found that amongst the redundant Asian Workers: "There is almost total recognition that their skills acquired in textiles appear to be irrelevant to other industries ... The majority expressed a desire for re-training; many have specific skills in mind." But with cuts in TOPS training, enough training places do not exist for adults generally, and it is people with weak English who are again often the first to be excluded. 58% of the Lancashire sample were also interest in language training.

The above factors highlight how language often excludes Asians from consideration for employment and training. One other factor is also relevant to a consideration of language disadvantage and unemployment:

- (d) The increasing importance of communication skills in jobs. This has already been mentioned in connection with in-company language training. Service jobs often require far more communication than process industry jobs because they involve such things as dealing with the public and use of the telephone. A large number of Asians will have to upgrade their English considerably in order to cope with this type of work in the future as it is likely to be the only possible source of employment for them.

Many of these factors must be affecting the Lancashire sample of 254 redundant workers, for after 5 - 9 months only seven have found re-employment; one in London, one is self-employed and the others are re-employed in textiles. As far as is known none have been placed through the employment services and none have been placed in training.

4.6 The need for special action and training provision

There are signs of government recognition of the position of adult Asian workers. Timothy Raison (Minister of State at the Home Office) was reported on 16 July 1980 as saying: "As far as economic policy as a whole is concerned, clearly high unemployment has serious significance for the minorities - not only for young blacks but, for example, Asian textile workers in Lancashire and Yorkshire". The MSC memorandum to this committee in June 1980 stated, " .. the relative burden of unemployment in the minorities falls on those aged 19 or over. Here, particularly following the reduction in STEP, there is a sizeable gap between needs and provision". Job Centre staff have been instructed to look out for language problems, but all they can do is advise people to improve their English.*

There has been no special education and training provision made to meet the situation. TSD (TOPS) has a very limited Preparatory budget and can only juggle with priorities within it given the gap between supply and demand. LEAs have no consistent pattern or policy for adult English language learning and certainly not in relation to the special needs of work seekers. In any case, in a number of areas cuts are now being planned. European Social Fund money would undoubtedly be available to help for two reasons: the special programmes would apply to immigrants and to unemployment in failing industries, such as textiles and foundries.

Three forms of special action are needed:

- (a) Proper educational provision for the longer-term adult unemployed with weak English language skills covering a broad and carefully planned curriculum. These courses should not be tied to specific short-term employment goals.
- (b) Special training courses of two sorts: 1) language courses for newly redundant workers and 2) introductory skills courses linked to language training.
- (c) Action within workplaces and the employment services to increase the ability of "gatekeepers" to evaluate Asians for employment.

* For example, a London Job Centre informally estimates that up to 1,000 of their registered unemployed need language training although this may well be an exaggeration.

I shall here enlarge on (b) and (c) as particularly relevant to the knowledge and skills of the Industrial Language Training Service.

1.7 Special training courses

These courses should be linked to short-term goals and to be successful they cannot concentrate on English in isolation. The courses must include practical experience and involve people who will later place the trainees.

Intensive courses for redundant workers

This type of short course (4 - 8 weeks) would be aimed specifically at particular groups of redundant workers urgently seeking immediate employment in unskilled work of a type comparable to work they have already done, and who are assessed as having some working knowledge of English, but are unable to present themselves to Job Centres and employers as applicants worth considering. The course would concentrate on specific skills to achieve this and cope with new job induction. Courses should be closely linked to Job Centres and Benefit Offices. An element of practical job application rehearsal and work experience should be built into the courses in co-operation with Job Centres and employers.

Skills linked language training courses

These courses offer introductory skills sampling or training/sampling, information and practical experience of the new industry, and integrated language training covering both of these areas and language for self-presentation. Courses of this kind (up to 18 weeks full-time) have been successfully piloted on a small scale in West Yorkshire and are now being piloted in Lancashire. This has been done with funding from TSD (TOPS) and linked to ILT units. The courses are aimed at people with little or no schooling in England, some basic knowledge of English and the potential to transfer into a new type of work. These courses would be run in conjunction with Skill Centres or colleges. Skills instructors would be directly involved in aspects of the language work.

Action within workplaces and the employment services

The analysis of language and unemployment described above suggests that Asians are often unfairly excluded from proper consideration for employment because of language and that interviewers give language a disproportionate weighting compared with the applicants' work history or may exaggerate language problems by misjudging the significance of what they read or hear. Recruitment and personnel staff need training to improve their interviewing skills with second language speakers and they need back-up in designing and handling induction programmes where special communication problems present themselves. The IIT service can already offer this type of specialist training, but consideration should be given to making this a higher priority and for offering it much more widely to employers and not just linked to language training. In particular, there is scope for such training in local government, and in the service industries including the public services.

Complementary to this, proper communication skills training should be offered to Job Centre and Skill Centre staff to overcome the demonstrated weaknesses of the employment services in relation to poor English speakers. This could be an extension of existing Race Relations Employment Advisers in-service work, but would be more specialised. Such training could also be arranged in conjunction with the first type of special language training course proposed.

4.8 Conclusions

This examination of language and the unemployed raises the question of the long-term access to employment of a substantial portion of one ethnic minority group in the present circumstances of rapidly changing industry and job markets. It also highlights how language cannot be separated from others matters of discrimination and disadvantage, and how the language learning needs of ethnic minorities are long-term and changing. Finally, who is responsible for setting-up the provision which is needed?

Note: This paper is based on a memorandum submitted to the Race Relations and Immigration Sub-Committee of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee in January 1981.