

# Industrial language training for multi-racial workplaces

Tom Jupp, Director of the National Centre for Industrial Language Training, describes the work which is being done to provide linguistic integration of immigrant workers.

It is well-known that many immigrants from Asia and the Mediterranean area have communication problems when they are using English. It is misleading to suggest that this is true of all such immigrants; but there is a very substantial problem. We estimate there are up to 200,000 immigrant workers (Asians and others) in need of English language training in relation to their present jobs, or re-employment if unemployed. In the past three years, 25 education authorities have established a special service – through FE or Adult Education – to assist industry with in-company training programmes, to overcome the communication problems which exist in many multi-racial workplaces.

By the middle of 1978 over 6,000 immigrants had been on language skills courses, and some 3,000 supervisors and trade unionists had received related training in communication skills. This is a modest start; but the scheme has introduced a number of employers to a new concept of training for operatives, as well as resulting in a unique form of co-operation between education and industry in which LEA staff work within a particular workplace and on the shop floor over a long period of time. In the process, some valuable lessons for Basic Adult Education and Language Teaching are emerging.

## Helping employers to analyse the problem

A high proportion of immigrants are employed in just a few manufacturing industries. The pattern of their employment within these particular industries is largely restricted to certain geographical regions, and certain jobs or working conditions. Where this combination of location and type of work occurs, the workforce may now consist of between 33 and 66 per cent ethnic minorities: for example food processing in West London, foundries in the West Midlands, textiles in the North, and vehicle building in East London. Within these workplaces there are usually a number of different minority groups employed, which often have no more in common with each other – in terms of language and culture – than they do with English people.

There is not widespread acceptance that this change from a mono-cultural workforce – with one language, culture and ethnic origin – to a multi-cultural workforce is a particularly significant one. Industry usually analyses the situation in terms of short-term problems and compliance with the law, and regards the absence of open racial conflict as evidence of a satisfactory situation. A very different perspective has emerged from industrial language training: a perspective of a profound change which should be reflected in training and manpower policies, but is not.

- Informal learning systems break down, and these have traditionally been the largest source of instruction and information.
- Supervisory systems are under great strain because they depended on a common background and shared values.
- Traditional assumptions about workplace custom and practice are no longer shared, creating difficulties in industrial relations.

- Ethnic (or race) conflicts arise from inadequate selection procedures for staff, lack of understanding of the multi-cultural workplace, and clashes of interest over types of welfare and benefits.
- There are a range of specific problems with health and safety, employment protection, and worker participation.

The possible consequences of this situation are obvious and, if they are to be avoided, a strong and long-term commitment to the labour force is essential, including more investment in training. This commitment must be to policy and training which will restore the essential cohesive role of human relations in the workplace. A common thread in many of the new difficulties is the problem of communication, to which effective use of language – by members of all groups, including English people – is the key.

We recognise, of course, that employers often do not think in terms of teaching their staff English, or equipping their managers with skills and knowledge needed to communicate effectively with people whose mother tongue is not English. One part of the Industrial Language Training Service is, therefore, to offer a survey of communication needs and problems and how they affect working relationships, as well as the effectiveness of induction, training and promotion systems. In order to do this an ILT team participates on the shop floor, and looks at the situation both in terms of the individual worker and the company's objectives.

## Scope of the ILT service

Training courses are on an in-company basis, and are designed and run in close co-operation with workplace staff. The aim is to develop a variety of training within a single workplace spaced over a substantial period of time, and the following services are at present being offered:

Functional Spoken English for Elementary Learners – Courses of about 60 hours covering language for the immediate job, for work flexibility, for simple social contact, and for solving personal problems.

Communicative Skills Courses for More Advanced Learners – These courses may be general in their scope or linked to particular objectives such as health and safety, language skills for instructors, telephone and office practice, trade unions. Courses are of 40 - 80 hours, and the approach is based on dealing with stressful and difficult situations, learning to present facts and arguments, and filling gaps in students' information about workplace procedures.

Short Courses for Fluent Speakers of English – These cover the development of awareness skills for inter-ethnic communication, and/or information about British workplace practice and procedure. 10 - 20 hours.

Courses for Managers, Supervisors and Trade Unionists – A variety of courses are offered usually in conjunction with the training outlined above. They cover the background and culture of immigrant groups, the experience of immigration and life in Britain, and the development of awareness skills for inter-ethnic communication. 10 - 20 hours.

Training courses of these four types are being run mainly in manufacturing industry; but substantial work is also being undertaken in hospitals, catering, transport and hotels. Recently work has also been developed in certain white collar situations.

### Two examples of ILT on the job

Work started in winter 1975 at Nelson and Colne College in Lancashire in the local textile industry. A series of very successful elementary courses in functional spoken English were run in company time, and a language training manual for the weaving side of the industry was developed with the support of the Cotton and Allied Textiles ITB. In one company there was considerable trade union involvement, and continuation classes were organised at the local trade union office in the workers' own time with shop stewards participating.

The appreciation of workers' language needs and the new teaching methods developed led to considerable development of the College's part-time adult classes for immigrants. A comprehensive range of courses throughout the day to cover shift workers, the unemployed, and women are now offered which cover spoken English, literacy and numeracy. Demand from employers elsewhere in Lancashire led to the setting-up of projects in Preston and Clitheroe through Glover's Court College, but it was generally recognised that the needs and potential for the work could not be met without a full-time team of staff covering the county as a whole.

This summer, a specialist unit was established at Nelson and Colne College to offer the full range of services throughout the county. The unit started with four full-time staff, and some of the financial support comes from the Cotton and Allied Textiles ITB. There is a steering group for the unit which includes representatives of industry and trade unions as well as education and training, and preliminary work is under way for twelve employers.

Another example covers the Outer West London area. The Industrial Language Training Unit of the Pathway Further Education Centre, Southall is well-established, having pioneered this work from 1971 onwards. The industry of the area, which employs immigrants, is mainly food processing, light manufacturing, or linked to London airport services. In the early years, the emphasis was on functional spoken English for elementary learners as the most obvious and urgent need.

The emphasis has now shifted towards more advanced learners as a result of prolonged involvement with large employers. Effective communication, even for fluent speakers of English, is much more difficult between different ethnic groups. Thus workers in a multi-racial workplace require exceptionally good powers of communication to achieve even a moderate level of good human relations between groups, and to overcome the problems outlined earlier in this article. Yet they have very inferior powers of expression, quite apart from the problems caused for them by the high level of prejudice and general tension over race relations which exists throughout our society.

The unit has developed communicative skills courses for more advanced learners which particularly emphasise dealing with the unpredictable and stressful situations which are also problem areas in the factory. There has been continuous involvement of co-operative English staff, and emphasis on supplying vital social knowledge and workplace information which may equally cause

misunderstandings. In companies where this programme is running, encouraging feedback and considerable goodwill has been built up; this is most clearly shown by the desire of companies to continue providing these courses so as to reach the maximum number of employees.

Pathway's work has also led to requests for new sorts of help from companies. For example the unit is at present involved in a specialist functional literacy course for Asian charge-hands, advising a company on the presentation of its induction programme; another covers the cultural and communicative problems of its incentive-bonus scheme.

These are very brief examples of the type of work of two units; there are many other interesting and important developments in new industries and with other types of training. One of the exciting aspects of this work is the constant access to new situations, the discovery of new needs, and the opportunity to work with experienced and enthusiastic people in industry.

### How it works

The scheme has been funded 75 per cent by Home Office Special Grants for ethnic minority group education since it was launched in 1975. Constrained by the difficulties of LEAs and the general scale of provision of Basic Adult Education, it has had to struggle to avoid the dangers of tokenism and flash-in-the-pan success, which is dependent on one or two dedicated full-time staff working day and night and the willingness of part-time teachers to be exploited. Nevertheless the scheme has established a fair measure of credibility with a number of employers, trade unions and training organisations.

The successes achieved are dependent upon the LEAs who understand and support the work, but a number of weaknesses have emerged:

- A failure to provide follow-through resources has already proved wasteful of opportunities created at considerable cost. As a service to industry the scheme has also lost credibility, when a satisfied employer or ITB asks for a similar project in another place and finds that no service at all, or no similar standard of service, is available.
- Experience has shown that very small units represent an inefficient use of resources as well as being unable to provide the full range of service necessary. Larger units are often needed covering wider areas.
- The high-quality service necessary for securing co-operation of all parties and good results cannot be provided on a "doing-good for immigrants" basis, which often results from placing it at the very margin of LEA activities and responsibilities.
- A skilled and systematic approach is required to promote the scheme nationally.

The government has recognised these weaknesses, and the importance of the scheme, by recently announcing a new funding arrangement through the Manpower Services Commission which it is hoped:

will provide a more stable system of funding with advantages from the point of view of planning and expanding the provision to be made, and of keeping and developing staff of the necessary quality.

The following LEAs provide an Industrial Language Training Service:

Barking, Berkshire (Slough), Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford, Brent, Calderdale, Coventry, Dudley, Ealing, Enfield, Hertfordshire, Hounslow, Inner London, Kirklees, Leicestershire, Lancashire, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Oldham, Rochdale, Sandwell, Tameside, Walsall, Waltham Forest, Warwickshire.

Further information is available from: The National Centre for Industrial Language Training, Recreation Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5PF.

In Britain we seem to be at a halfway house. The representatives of junior academic staff certainly enjoy far more power than they did 15 years ago. There are student representatives on Councils and Governing Bodies, and sometimes on Senates and Academic Boards. But non-academic staff are normally not represented, and the universities at least are fighting a strong rearguard action against proposals to give them representation. Further there are reserved areas – subjects in the discussion of which student representatives may take no part. There is in the public sector a great lack of clarity about the respective roles of the Academic Board, the Governing Body, the ‘administration’ (Directors and Principals and their assistants), and the maintaining local authority – the theoretical funding body. Systems vary in practice from benevolent autocracy, normally but not always together with widespread consultation, to genuine attempts to apply the representative democratic model to all policy areas save those few which are ‘reserved’.

In the universities proper; there is a further complexity. The ‘administration’ in theory exercises very little power; even the Vice-Chancellor is only *primus inter pares*. When I was a Minister in the Department of Education & Science I observed with amusement how often a deputation of Vice-Chancellors would be at pains to tell me that they did not speak for the universities as a whole – nor even for their own universities. Only the Council and the Senate could do that. This contrasts strongly with the situation not only in Lausanne, but in many Western countries.

Appearances are not of course always exactly the same as reality. Vice-Chancellors exercise far more power than many of them care to admit. Indeed one weakness of ‘participation’ in any extreme form is that, in order to avoid organisational paralysis, decisions are taken by informal cabals of senior academics and administrators, outside the theoretical democratic structure. Within it you may have demagogy, and ‘playing to the gallery’; outside it you have a secret oligarchy.

If merely to ask such questions sounds reactionary, I should hasten to say that I am wholly in favour of participatory government in post-secondary educational institutions – provided only that the structure adopted is consonant with the objectives of the institution and its constituent parts. It is where the two are irreconcilable that tension inevitably arises. An inward-looking college or university, with traditional teaching and research objectives, the principal educational concern of which is to transmit in conventional fashion what is deemed to be knowledge by the senior academic staff, will find it hard to cope with widespread external community participation in its government, and will find no role for student or non-academic staff representatives on its committees. The ‘administration’ will devote much time to ensuring that their presence has no practical effect; and they in turn will become increasingly frustrated, and perhaps in the end bored and uninterested.

By contrast, a college which sees its principal task as that of meeting the needs of the community in which it is set – and its needs as the community itself perceives them, not as they are perceived by paternalist academics – will make great use of ‘external’ participants in its government, as well as of the representatives of its student body, who may be presumed to have some informed view on what they themselves require of the college. At the extreme, a college seeking to develop continuing or recurrent education must take account of what its students and

potential students demand; otherwise they will simply not enter its portals. Continuing education has to be geared to the requirements of the – often sophisticated – adult learner, whose view of what he wants must, albeit after counselling, prevail.

### Spreading the Godspell

An ‘open access’ policy, or the encouragement of independent study, or even a substantial say for the student in determining the make-up of his total educational package, also places much greater responsibility and power of decision-making upon the junior members of the academic staff. They are no longer simply doing what a God-like Principal or Head of Department has decreed in his wisdom is necessary and desirable. Since the content of what is taught and learned determines the demand for resources, and the allocation of resources must be negotiated, this entails a say for junior staff in policy-making throughout the college at every level of government. Likewise non-academic staff have in such a context a right to express their own views of what is practical, and how best it may be achieved.

The problem may be summarised in a sentence of Basil Bernstein’s:

The selective organisation, transmission and evaluation of knowledge is intimately bound up with patterns of authority and control.

If senior academics alone select and organise, they alone should be represented in the policy-making structure. If the perceptions of junior academics also have validity, then they too must be represented. But if we accept that students and potential students can also evaluate knowledge and organise selected elements of it to meet their own requirements, then we must have the widest and most liberal participation in institutional government.

The old limerick put into the mouth of Jowett, the famous Master of Balliol, the words: What I know not is not knowledge. There are still those who have a similar, if better-concealed, arrogance. Such people are cynical or self-deluding if they seek to make a participatory structure of government work. For doctrines of participation make sense only in the context of a statement of what is to be taught, by whom, to whom, and how. The government of educational institutions cannot be divorced from their educational purposes. It is the face-to-face learning situation which must determine the government structure – not *vice versa*.

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