

# Industrial language training: three approaches

It is ten years since *Industrial English* by Jupp and Hodlin was published and a national scheme for Industrial Language Training was established. During that period several approaches to communication training for multi-racial workplaces have developed. This paper, after describing the concept of Industrial Language Training and outlining the employment situation of Asian workers, examines three approaches to training which have been particularly influential. These are: language training for speakers of English as a second language, cross-cultural communication courses for native and non-native speakers of English, and finally projects in team building. The paper aims to evaluate critically each of these approaches, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

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## 1. Introduction to Industrial Language Training

The concept of Industrial Language Training (ILT) originated in the early 1970s at the Pathway Education Centre, Ealing [an area of West London] when a special unit was set up to experiment with English Language Training for Asian employees at local places of employment. In 1974 the ILT service was established as a national scheme when government funds were made available to Local Authorities under the Urban Aid Programme & Section 11 of the Local Government Act of 1966. The work of the scheme is founded on the view that improved communications can increase opportunities and participation for individuals, and can contribute to overall efficiency in the workplace. The Department of Employment described the benefits of the scheme in the following way:

*Where language training had already been introduced it had improved communications and standards of safety and increased productivity. Relations between immigrants and indigenous workers had also improved. Language training could also have important social consequences, enabling immigrants to participate more fully in the life of the community.*

(Department of Employment, 1974)

The decision to establish a national scheme was made against the background of Government concern over the issues of racial disadvantage. These had been examined and reported on during the early 1970s in studies carried out by Political & Economic Planning (PEP)<sup>1</sup>.

Today there are 50 specialist ILT units organised by local education authorities throughout the country and funded by the Manpower Services Commission. The National Centre for Industrial Language Training (NCILT) is responsible for co-ordinating the work of the separate units and for providing internal training and support services.

The initial aim of the ILT scheme was to provide in-company language training for speakers of English as a second language. Language courses were designed with two principal aims:

*a) to teach the English a learner needs for his immediate job and for simple social contact.*

*b) to teach English which will enable him to communicate more freely about the work situation in general and to express his personal problems and needs at work.*

(Jupp and Hodlin 1975:47)

However the location of language issues within the whole context of racial disadvantage, (see David Smith, 1977) and the realisation that a basic mastery of the linguistic forms of English is not sufficient to make communication effective, has led ILT to widen its aims. It is now concerned with the broader issues of improved communications and relationships in multi-racial working contexts, and especially with examining the linguistic dimension of disadvantage and discrimination.

The aims of ILT today are therefore described as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Political and Economic Planning (PEP) was a British policy think tank, formed in 1931 in response to Max Nicholson's article *A National Plan for Britain* published in February of that year in Gerald Barry's magazine *The Week-End Review*. The original members included Nicholson and Barry, the zoologist Julian Huxley, the agronomist Leonard Elmhirst, the financier Sir Basil Blackett, the civil servants Dennis Routh and Sir Henry Bunbury, the research chemist Michael Zvegintzov, and Israel Sieff, a director of Marks & Spencer. Sieff was Chairman in the 1930s, followed by Elmhirst in 1939 and by Nicholson in 1953. It was a non-governmental planning organisation financed by corporations. This prolific organisation was influential in the formation of the National Health Service, World War II and post-war planning, and the development of the African colonies. After the war it shared the offices of The Nature Conservancy in Belgrave Square, London, producing reports such as *Opportunities in Industry* (1957) and *Advisory Committees in British Government* (1960). In 1978 PEP merged with the Centre for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), and became the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) [<http://www.psi.org.uk>]. [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_and\\_Economic\\_Planning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_and_Economic_Planning) accessed 11 September 2013]

*a) to help individuals learn the skills and acquire the self confidence to communicate effectively in English in a multi-cultural workplace.*

*b) to undertake this work in a way which contributes constructively to the needs of everyone in the workplace who supports the aims of ILT including the management and trade unions.*

*c) as a result of ILT to enable individuals to continue developing their communication skills in English and their self-confidence, and apply them in all aspects of their lives.*

*d) to work in the specific field of employment towards the building of a genuinely multi-racial society.*

(NCILT 1981; Information sheet 27)

The main difference between the 1975 aims and the 1981 aims is that the term 'language training' has been replaced by 'communication skills' and attention is now focussed on everyone in the workplace rather than the ethnic minority worker. Concern with the essential two-way process of communication is reflected in the fact that ILT aims at improving communication skills on both sides by (a) improving English language skills of workers from overseas in ways relevant to their work and (b) by providing management, trade union officials and others with information and skills relevant to effective communication between people in different cultural groups. Training programmes run by ILT Units today include communications training for E2L speakers [Speakers of English as an additional language], cross-cultural training for multi-racial workplaces and organisations, Anti-Racism Training for Agencies with a Multi-Racial Clientele and Equal Opportunity Training. This paper is concerned with the training that involves shop floor operatives in multi-racial workplaces.

The training programmes that have been developed to achieve these aims have been run mainly in workplaces which employ significant numbers of South Asian people – i.e. people from North India, Pakistan, East Africa [i.e. people of South Asian descent settled in East Africa] and Bangladesh. In order to evaluate their appropriateness and success it is necessary to examine the socio-economic position of Asian workers in Britain and their relationship to the majority group. As Spolsky points out:

*Language education is not just a matter for the educational system, but is very deeply and clearly influenced by a variety of social, political, cultural and economic factors.*

(Spolsky, B 1978:154)

## **2. Employment Situation of Asian Workers**

### **2.1 Background**

In the period after the Second World War Britain, like many other countries in North West Europe, experienced a great increase in its immigrant labour force. This was due to the fact that there was an acute shortage of unskilled labour in key industries such as textiles, iron foundries, steel works and brick-making. There was a need to fill unskilled, unsocial or poorly paid jobs which could not be filled by the indigenous population. Britain attracted migrant workers from those countries such as the West Indies, India and Pakistan with which it had had a colonial relationship. Immigration from India and Pakistan got underway in the early 60s. According to the latest Policy Studies Institute (PSI) 1982 survey of the British black population around 60% of the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men had come by 1968. After that period the majority of African Asian immigrants came to Britain. Asian women migrated later than men although the lag between the men and the women was far greater for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis than for Indians or African Asians.

The immigrants came for a variety of reasons prompted by social and political forces, and acted as a replacement labour force in those industries and occupations where the indigenous labour supply was not large enough to meet the demand for labour, for instance in metal manufacture, textiles, arid clothing and service industries such as hospitals, transport, cleaning and public catering. The textile industry has traditionally depended on an immigrant workforce because indigenous labour was generally unwilling to work in a declining industry subject to seasonal fluctuations and where pay and conditions were poor. Immigrant labour was particularly concentrated in night-shift work where indigenous labour appeared unwilling to work at a rate low enough to enable the firms to remain competitive. (Dept of Employment 1976:51)

The immigrants of South Asian origin came to Britain from a wide variety of social, religious and economic backgrounds with different educational levels, expectations of life in Britain, experience of British institutions as well as differences in the degree of fluency in English. Not all immigrants came to Britain to fill manual jobs in industry. A significant number of South Asian immigrants were highly skilled and professionally trained people such as doctors and teachers. They had received a university education through the medium of English and came with the hope of furthering their experience and training. Yet these people also found that their opportunities were limited. British authorities were sceptical of the value of qualifications gained abroad and often refused to recognise them. In 1976, language tests were introduced for overseas-qualified doctors who wish to practise in Britain. Where qualified immigrants found work in their professional field it tended to be at the lower end of the hierarchy. In the medical profession for instance migrant doctors are mainly in junior hospital posts or senior posts in low-status specialisms. (Bosanquet 1975; 150-132)

In general then the jobs of newly-settled immigrants have not been determined by their qualifications, skills and experience but by gaps in local labour markets.

There has been little change in the employment situation of Asian workers over the last ten years. As Colin Brown reports in his survey of the British black population '*the types of industry in which black people are found are broadly similar to those in 1974*' (Brown, 1984:179) and concludes that the position of Britain's black population largely remains geographically and economically that allocated to them as immigrant workers in the 1950s and 1960s. (The term 'black' here is used to include people of West Indian and Asian origin.)

## **2.2 Levels of fluency in English and relationship to work situation**

One of the most striking findings of the 1982 survey is the relationship between employment and fluency in English among Asians. The interviewers who carried out the 1982 survey were asked to assess the informants' level of fluency during the interview. These levels are described as 'fluently' 'fairly well' and 'slightly/not at all'. The survey findings reveal that only half of the Asian men and one third of the Asian women interviewed were assessed by the interviewers as speaking English fluently; a fifth of the men and half of the women speak English 'slightly or not at all'.

Inevitably as young British Asians grow up the proportion of fluent adults will rise, but at the moment the improvement in numbers of fluent speakers is slow. Between 1974 and 1982 the size of the group with little or no English only fell from 42% to 36% and PSI analysis shows that there is no uniform relationship between length of time in Britain and fluency in English. (Brown 1984:314-315) This is due to the development of Asian communities and the availability of facilities where Asian languages are spoken which has reduced the pressure to learn English. However lack of English is seen to have serious consequences. In general it was found that Asian men and women who speak English poorly occupy a very disadvantaged position in the

labour market. They have higher rates of unemployment, lower job levels, lower wages and more frequently work shifts. They are more likely to be employed by private firms and their employment is far more concentrated in manufacturing (ibid:182). Most workers who speak English only slightly/not at all are concentrated in unskilled and semi-skilled manual work (ibid :200).

There is little in the nature of the work to help people improve their English and no pressure to do so. Neither the employee nor the employer has an incentive to change things. Similarly the existence of shift teams that are relatively homogeneous in terms of an ethnic minority language are a major block to the advancement of those workers. They impede both occupational mobility and English fluency.

### **2.3 Effect on social position**

In maintaining the low level of English fluency this process prevents the employee from being able to move beyond this type of work. In this way the language problem and the job problem maintain one another. It is this process that Jupp et al refer to as a '*hidden process*' which serves to create '*the negative cycle of social class and ethnicity*' (Jupp et al 1982:235). The immigrant's social class membership is determined by his/her current position in the labour market rather than by educational achievements or social position from the society of origin. This low social position may be reinforced by negative stereotypes formed by the white majority group. Utterances made by white factory supervisors such as 'they'll understand when they want', 'they don't want to mix; they're rude' merely reinforce negative attitudes and assumptions about immigrant workers. As Gumperz et al explain

*It is the two factors, the assumptions of poor language use and of weak communicative power on the one hand and the low status of job position on the other which, in interaction with each other, make up the socially created identity of incompetence or lesser competence and unco-operative behaviour and attitudes. This identity of the South Asian worker as less competent or in other ways inadequate is then used to warrant the maintenance of the lower status of this group. These factors operate to reinforce each other. So, through actual practices of speaking in social encounters, the lower status identity of the immigrant worker is reproduced.*

(Gumperz 1982:240)

### **2.4 Implications for industry**

The employment of immigrant workers has inevitably led to changes in the workplace. What was once a mono-cultural workplace with workers speaking the same language and sharing the same value systems is now multi-cultural. This means that traditional customs and practices will be challenged and communication systems may break down. Supervisory systems are put under a great strain when there is no background of shared values and knowledge of the system. If interpreters are used to cope with communication breakdowns then the supervisor may experience a loss of status and feeling of alienation. Personnel departments find their selection procedures are inadequate or they lack knowledge about the educational system from which immigrants come. Ethnic friction may arise through clashes of interest on benefits and welfare, for example in participation at social events or failure to represent ethnic minority workers in the company newspaper. Informal learning systems break down as people do not discuss work methods or offer informal advice to one another, when they do it is frequently along ethnic lines, thus reinforcing the different sense of identity and experience which members of different ethnic groups have as workers. The indigenous worker also is subjected to cultural and linguistic pressures and may feel alienated in such an environment. One of the major problems to management that can arise out of this situation is that links between management and shopfloor worker may cease to operate effectively. Management cannot talk

directly to all its employees and very narrow lines of communication develop which are not fully controlled by management. The net result of these changes in the workplace is that the communication structure of the company fails to operate efficiently and the workforce may be split along linguistic and cultural lines.

Attempts to alleviate these communication problems have been made since the early 1970s by ILT units. During the past ten years significant steps have been made to provide communication training for multi-cultural workplaces and there has been a development from language training for ethnic minority employees to awareness training for majority group employees and finally to team building for all employees.

### **3. Three Approaches to Training**

#### **3.1 Language Training for speakers of English as a second language**

*Industrial English* by Jupp and Hodlin represents the approach to training taken in the early 1970s. It resulted from the authors' experience in working in local industry in Southall [a district of West London] and provides systematic and comprehensive details concerning the theory and practice of running in-company courses for immigrant workers.

The type of language training course described in *Industrial English* is essentially an oral English course for industrial workers with fairly elementary language problems. The course usually lasts twelve weeks and trainees are given a one-hour class daily. Training takes place during working hours but at a time when the main production processes are coming to an end. As far as possible, trainees are selected from different sections of the factory to minimise the effect on production. The content of the course is worked out jointly between the company and the ILT staff who spend time in the company observing the various processes, learning specific vocabulary, talking to supervisors about the typical shop-floor communications and gaining an understanding of the industry. The main subjects covered in the course are:

- a. Basic social conversation
- b. Following instructions
- c. Numbers, letters, dates, weights
- d. Making requests, taking messages
- e. Explaining job processes
- f. Understanding regulations, company procedures
- g. Health and safety
- h. Describing and reporting machine faults

While the course is intended to provide English language instruction it also provides a useful opportunity to pass on simple information on subjects such as health and safety and industrial relations, and in this way is complementary to any factory induction course the trainees have had.

An ILT course has three distinctive features which may be both its strengths and weaknesses. Firstly, training is provided at the workplace during working hours. Secondly, all training is preceded by an investigation of language requirements in the workplace and thirdly, all ILT programmes involve the participation of native English speakers in the workplace.

#### **3.2 The course at the workplace**

The fact that each training programme is held in the workplace means that each course can be tailor-made

to fit the practical needs of that location. It also means that it is the workplace itself rather than the class that provides the communicative context for learning. Language learnt can be put to immediate use.

However in some factories there are very few facilities for training. Lack of suitable accommodation has meant that training has had to take place in the canteen in between meal times, in an empty office or even in a medical room. This can be demotivating to trainees since it is not only uncomfortable but it also serves to reinforce the trainees' lower status in the organisation. If the basic need for physical comfort in the classroom is neglected then the learners' motivation weakens. (Maslow 1970 in Brown 1980:113)

While the workplace provides the course designer and trainer with a wealth of functional/communicative situations on which to base materials it does not necessarily provide the trainee with the opportunity for language practice.

As we have seen in the previous section Asian workers are concentrated in manufacturing industries. Within these industries they generally work in production or in related areas such as packing – rarely in service or maintenance or at a supervisory level. The nature of the work means that the employee either works on an individual basis on a machine or as part of a team in a flow line situation. The work environment is generally noisy and communication is largely between fellow workers, although it may occasionally be with supervisors, shop stewards and members of management. This type of work can be carried out with minimal English fluency, for communication skills are seldom recognised as an important part of a job at operative level. (Jupp and Hodlin 1975:14) On the occasions that the immigrant employee does communicate with an English supervisor it is frequently over an important issue such as pay or requests for time off. Such situations are stressful and demand a high degree of competence in the language. The interaction is not at peer group level and often means that white management, supervisors and shop stewards are communicating downwards to the minority group operative.

### **3.3 Investigation of language requirements**

One of the basic principles of an ILT course is that the learner's needs should be central to all the choices a teacher makes. Therefore the most important pre-requisite for any ILT course is the survey of communication needs in the workplace.

*It has been continually emphasised that in order to make the learner's needs central to his plan, and decisions, a teacher must involve himself fully in the learner's situation. It is essential for the teacher to investigate and experience the social reality of a place of work before he can make choices about what language functions a learner in that situation needs and what linguistic skills these involve.*

(Jupp and Hodlin 1975:38)

The suggested plan of investigation takes the following form: (i) a general tour of the entire factory site; (ii) discussions with relevant managers and supervisors; (iii) English assessment interviews with all non-English speakers, or a representative sample, or those considered by management to have language/communication problems; (iv) close observation and understanding of departments from which students will be drawn; (v) tape recording of instructions and job descriptions for a number of representative jobs done by potential trainees. (ibid:39)

Such a survey is highly desirable and can provide the trainer with many valuable insights concerning the workplace and the nature of any language-communication problems. It can ensure that the materials used are relevant to the learner's work situation and can be applied immediately the trainee leaves the training room. In this way the learner can see the purpose of the course and as Rogers says, *'Significant learning*

*takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the student as having relevance for his own purposes.'*  
(Rogers 1969:158)

The English language assessment interviews ensure that a relatively homogeneous group – in terms of initial knowledge of English and language needs – is selected. It also gives the trainer the opportunity of gaining an initial understanding of the individual linguistic and communicative weaknesses. However there is a danger that in concentrating on the overall communication needs of the company one can overlook the individual trainees' personal needs. A course that focusses on enabling the trainee to communicate more effectively in his/her place of work may satisfy the employer who pays for the course, but may not satisfy the employee – especially if that employee is doing a job that requires little English.

With industrial English it is assumed that learners are instrumentally motivated – that is they wish to learn English for practical reasons such as improving job prospects. The whole syllabus for teaching items is based on the learner's communicative needs in an industrial workplace and relates to the immigrant's immediate job situation. The benefits of language training are also described in terms relating to the trainee's place of work rather than to the individual trainee – e.g. training benefits have been described in terms of work effectiveness; efficiency of production; and improvement in industrial relations, quality control and areas of safety, health and hygiene (Jupp 1979:38). While these improvements have considerable appeal to the employer it is debatable how concerned an unskilled worker will be to learn a language in order to improve the company's quality control or production. Indeed, the PSI survey shows that less than one tenth of Asian workers said they experienced difficulties at work because of language problems (Brown 1964:515). This suggests that there is a mismatch between the employee's needs and the company's needs and that immigrant employees are not necessarily instrumentally motivated.

The pre-course assessment interview does not take the learner's attitudes and feelings into account. All the questions concern the learner's job and s/he is not given the opportunity to say whether or not s/he has any interest in learning- English. So information concerning the immigrant's attitudes and perceptions is not considered in any detail. Yet it is this information which is vital to the success of any language learning programme. If the second language learner group and the target language group have positive attitudes towards each other then second language learning is more likely to occur than if they have negative attitudes (Schumann 1978). A study of Asian immigrant workers in Slough (Levine and Naylor 1975) has shown that Asian workers perceive a barrier existing between English people and themselves. The same study has also shown that cultural adaptation by migrant workers depends on the socio-economic opportunities available to them. If jobs, income and housing are available and social contacts with the dominant society are possible, then assimilation will occur. But if neither economic nor social opportunities are available to the immigrant then interaction with the dominant societal group will be minimal. Clearly unskilled immigrant workers who perceive a barrier between themselves and the dominant societal group are less likely to succeed in language learning. This has very serious implications for ILT.

### **3.4 Participation of native English speakers**

One of the great advantages of running a course on company premises is that the learner is able to practise, reinforce and extend the language learnt in his/her immediate surroundings. This obviously contributes to the learner's motivation. Therefore supervisory staff are encouraged to provide the reinforcement and practice of language learnt during the lessons. This is of vital importance if the training is to have long lasting effects. Formal training sessions are also mounted to give supervisory staff some understanding of communication difficulties and cultural factors relating to the immigrant workers in their department. As



Saville-Troike points out there is a broad range of shared knowledge that speakers must have in order to communicate appropriately. This includes linguistic knowledge, interaction skills as well as cultural knowledge (Saville Troike 1982:25). Jupp and Hodlin stress the importance of gaining the co-operation and the involvement of supervisory staff. They suggest that the trainer may be working in an initially unco-operative environment:

*There may be initial reluctance to become involved, but most people will respond if the teacher perseveres.*

(Jupp and Hodlin 1975:64-65)

However supervisors and chargehands hold an influential position since they can affect the whole atmosphere of the shopfloor. They control the work rota and position of workers in the department as well as the maintenance of certain practices – such as the use of interpreters. Whatever the supervisor's attitude to immigrants in his/her department it will be voiced by other non-Asians in the department. Without the support and co-operation of supervisory staff the language training programme is operating in a vacuum and more likely to fail. The participants of an ILT programme need constant support and encouragement from their supervisors and chargehands. Without that help the language classes can have only limited success – for no language course is going to turn anyone into a totally fluent user of English.

### **3.5 Problems with running language training programmes**

I have already mentioned some of the constraints that can affect the success of an industrial language training programme, e.g. inadequate classroom conditions, lack of supervisory support and student motivation. Others include availability of time, selection of trainees and management expectations.

Availability of time is a crucial factor. The course duration is determined by the maximum time that most companies can cope with in terms of paid release; so the average length of a course is usually 40-60 hours which is very short in terms of an elementary language class. The course can only aim to provide the learner with the minimum English s/he needs to function effectively in the priority situations selected. This may be very frustrating for both trainees and work colleagues who have been led to have higher expectations.

It can also prove problematic arranging a class time which is suitable for different groups of shift workers. The trainer needs the complete co-operation of supervisory staff to ensure that participants are released for attendance. Sometimes the trainer has no choice in the selection of trainees – they have been nominated by management. If the group is not homogeneous in terms of language levels the trainer may have difficulties in achieving any measure of success in the limited time available.

Another very serious problem can be the unrealistic expectations of management. Considerable pressure may be imposed on trainer and trainees in a workplace where management expects very quick results. This pressure may have an adverse effect on the class. When the learner's progress is restricted and workers acquire only limited English during the course negative stereotypes concerning Asian employees may be reinforced – e.g. 'They don't want to learn.'

### **3.6 Cross-cultural communication courses for native and non-native speakers of English**

While language training for immigrant employees was seen to be one solution to inter-ethnic communication difficulties, in the late 1970s another type of training programme was developed. This training is known as Cross-cultural Communication Awareness Training and aims to develop the individual's understanding of how people communicate and awareness of potential problems in communication across cultures. Training is given to both native speakers of English as well as to speakers of English as a second

language. It has been greatly influenced by the work of J. Gumperz and F. Erickson.

### **3.7 Features of inter-ethnic interaction**

Gumperz has highlighted the differences between English spoken by people of Asian origin and English spoken by native speakers (Gumperz and Roberts 1980). In detailed analyses of inter-ethnic conversations Gumperz has shown that a good command of the linguistic system does not necessarily mean that second language speakers will use the same conventions as the native speaker to establish context, maintain thematic cohesion or control their contribution to the conversation, as so many of the linguistic conventions that Indian speakers of English use to convey information differ from the conventions used by native English speakers (Gumperz and Kaltman .1982). When such differences in communicative style are not accepted misunderstandings arise, and wrong inferences are drawn which can build up into stereotyped attitudes about other people. For instance management's attitudes to Asian workers have been expressed in this way: *'They won't come out and say what they want. A lot of them have got chips on their shoulders. They're over-sensitive. They don't really understand the system of procedures. Unless they get a categorical 'no' they go on pushing. They ask for the man at the top.'* (Gumperz and Roberts 1980:114)

In his analyses of real interaction between Indian and British people Gumperz has identified certain systematic features of English spoken by Indian people which recur in the speech of Indian people particularly when they are under stress. For example, when an Indian worker has to discuss his work performance with his manager or make an unexpected request. The features which Gumperz has identified are listed under two headings: i)What can confuse or irritate English people when communicating with Indian English-speakers and ii)What can confuse or irritate Asian people when communicating with English English-speakers.

#### **i) What can confuse or irritate English people:**

1. Inappropriately high or low pitched voice, e.g.-raising voice in 'no' to contradict.
2. Wrong stress, e.g. not showing clearly the difference between last week's and this week's payslip.
3. Wrong use of turn-taking, e.g. persistently interrupting in the middle of the English speaker's utterance.
4. Misleading use of Yes/No, e.g. saying 'yes' but not meaning that you agree.
5. Lack of cohesive features in discourse so that Asian speaker appears boring or confused, e.g. wrong pronoun references, misleading intonation patterns.
6. Underlexicalisation which can lead to ambiguity, e.g. not making clear who is doing a particular job or whether the job has been done, or is still being done.
7. Overlexicalisation which can lead to confusion and lack of focus e.g. completely redundant words.

#### **ii) What can confuse or irritate Asian people:**

1. Tone of voice. High pitch or stress on particular words can sound emotional and impolite. E.g. when an English speaker wants to explain or emphasise a point.
2. Unacceptable use of turn-taking, e.g. interrupting, in the middle of a sentence before the Asian speaker has made his point.
3. Apparent not listening, e.g. in longer chunks of discourse the English speaker may switch off or change the subject.
4. Use of charged words, e.g. silly, fool.
5. Inexplicit undertakings which Asian may interpret as definite commitment, e.g. I'll see what I can do.

6. Apologetic or polite and repetitive uses of English, e.g. when an English speaker explains his refusal to grant a request and lists numbers of reasons for the refusal. (ibid; 7-8)

These features are crucial elements in the breakdown of communications between English and Indian people and highlight the interpersonal difficulties caused by different linguistic conventions that both groups have in interaction with one another. From such analyses it is clear that even a fluent Indian speaker of English is likely to encounter communication difficulties. For a basic mastery of linguistic forms of English is not enough to make communication effective:

*Communication difficulties cannot be largely attributed to problems of accent or lack of knowledge of the structure of English. They stem from different conventions in the use of English. People from different cultural backgrounds may speak a variety of English characterised by certain conventions. It is when attitude and meaning are conveyed through one set of conventions and interpreted through another that breakdowns in communication may occur.*

(ibid:1)

Studies by Erickson have highlighted how differences in ethnicity, race and communication style can affect inter-ethnic encounters (Erickson: 1975). Erickson was interested in the type of interaction where one person 'a gatekeeper' has the power to evaluate another's competence, motivation and personality and decide whether or not that person will have access to certain opportunities or resources such as a job or a training course. In a study of such 'gatekeeping' encounters between counsellors and students Erickson found that when counsellor and student were able to establish a feeling of solidarity and shared style of communication the interaction proceeded more smoothly and there were fewer 'uncomfortable' moments. This sense of sharing depends on ethnicity. When interviewer and interviewee are from the same ethnic group they may feel more friendly towards each other and the counsellor may be more inclined to give the student special help. They may also share the same communication style. Communication styles differ among ethnic groups and vary in terms of gesticulation, eye contact, speech rhythm, kinesic rhythm and listening behaviour (i.e. how listeners show that they are paying attention and are understanding what is being said). Erickson noted that both student and counsellor relied heavily on implicit cues and that there was more likelihood that these cues would be overlooked or misread when student and counsellor come from different ethnic backgrounds and had different communication styles. He concluded that:

*ethnicity can influence gatekeeping through a display of commonality and the obligations of solidarity evoked by that display and through a shared communication style.*

(ibid:56)

This kind of data can be useful for training as it demonstrates the effect ethnic differences in communicative style may have and how these differences can create contexts in which indirect discrimination takes place. (Jupp, Roberts and Cook - Gumperz, 1982:249)

### **3.8 Training materials and methodology**

The three main stages in training are as follows: (i) to increase participant awareness about language and culture, (ii) to contrast the different practice of language behaviour and (iii) to relate these two points to participants' own experience and problems. Gumperz and Roberts stress the importance of providing training for mixed groups (Asian and English) and of creating the right environment so that participants are relaxed and motivated enough to discuss language, attitude and behaviour as fully and openly as possible. (Furnborough et al 1982: 252-253) Training works on the principle that individuals cannot be taught to communicate effectively, it is something they have to learn to do for themselves. The training sessions are

based around prepared role play tapes which provide the stimulus for discussion on the contrastive ways in which Indian English and English English convey attitude and meaning.

A typical role play tape is 'Crosstalk' which was made in 1979 by Gumperz, Jupp and Roberts. In this film there are three scenes which can be used for analysis: the bank scene, the advice centre scene and the job interview. To explain the methodology I shall focus on the bank scene. This scene shows two customers asking the clerk for a Giro deposit form. One customer is of English origin, and the other is of Asian origin. Although the language the two speakers use is almost the same their tone of voice and stress are different, so the film illustrates what happens when these differences are misinterpreted. The basic method is to play through the Indian English version, stop and ask general questions, and then play the English English version and ask similar questions, for instance;

What impression does A make by talking that way?

What is he trying to achieve?

How did B interpret what A said?

How can you tell that B understood or misunderstood?

How should B have replied to show that he understood or that he was having difficulties? etc.  
(ibid:109)

Transcripts are provided for course participants to follow. After a general discussion the tapes are then replayed stopping several times to examine specific points. The advantage of using audio or video tape is that it allows momentary reactions and perceptions to be frozen and analysed. When discussions take place between people of different ethnic groups the training is more effective since people can compare their interpretations and reactions to each other's ways of communication. In order to learn more about the difficulties involved in communication, participants study the particular situations they are concerned with and then role-play the situations. After such role-play discussion and feedback occur. In this way:

*Trainees can be taken through a process of analysing even subtle and complex communication breakdowns and can use this analysis to question their judgements about behaviour and attitude built up in cross-cultural contact.*

(Jupp, Roberts and Cook - Gumperz 1982:256)

### **3.9 Problems with running cross-cultural communication courses**

There are a number of problems arising from this kind of training. Firstly it can be quite threatening for participants. If the training is to be really effective it should take examples of communication breakdown that participants are familiar with and have experienced themselves. However these examples are often of a personal and confidential nature and cannot be recorded. Therefore the training focuses on prepared films and video-tapes which may not relate so directly to the participants.

There is a danger that this kind of training can merely lead to one set of generalisations being exchanged for another. It may be equally damaging for English people to make assumptions about Asians, such as 'they never get to their main point until the end of the conversation' as it is to stereotype all South Asians as being rude and demanding.

There are a number of problems relating to the materials themselves. It is difficult to get examples of good quality real discourse that can be used for training. The approach to training involves detailed analysis of conversations with more than just one Indian speaker. The speech of a Punjabi speaker of English will

illustrate the features that recur in most Indian English speech, but there is a need for tapes of Indian English speakers whose first language is Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. There is also a great need for more published material to highlight distinctive features.

It may be very difficult to obtain the commitment and co-operation of company personnel to this kind of training as it is quite different from other industrial language training courses. Yet without that commitment the training may not be successful. As Gumperz and Roberts say: '*A course of this kind can only be run where the company is fully committed to it and where representatives from both groups are confident enough to discuss language and communication in depth.*' (Gumperz and Roberts 1980:5)

A final problem with this training is the length of time available. Because of production schedules companies are reluctant to release employees for more than ten hours. This is very short in terms of training which is designed to bring about attitude and behaviour change.

### **3.10 Projects in Team Building**

Pathway Industrial Unit have recently developed a new approach to training which attempts to overcome some of the problems and difficulties that the previous two courses encountered. One of the disadvantages of earlier training courses was that the participants were often taken from different areas of the shopfloor and only established a rapport with fellow participants in the training room. Once back on the shopfloor it was often difficult to find the opportunity to practise what had been taught in the training room. Although supervisors and chargehands were invited to take part in the training courses and encouraged to provide opportunities for practice, reinforcement and extension, the motivation to do so often dropped once the language courses finished. Improvements were often short-term rather than long-term. Supervisory staff always retained their status and position in the company hierarchy, so that communication with trainees tended to remain a downward process. Trainees and supervisors were never given the opportunity to communicate at equal levels.

The improvement that occurred in terms of human relationships within the training room was not always carried over to the shop floor. The participants sometimes found themselves even more segregated than before – e.g. they had been distinguished from the rest of the line; they were 'different' because they needed training; the timing of courses often meant that participants missed the tea break with the rest of the shift, and so interaction between fellow workers was reduced. Although understanding and awareness of communication problems may be raised in the training room it does not mean that communication difficulties will cease to occur.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between the training room and the shopfloor Pathway Industrial Unit have developed a new approach to communication training which they call Team Building. The overall aim of the training is to achieve long-term improvements in each line's general performance. However more specific objectives include (i) developing a sense of shared responsibility among all team members for what the team produces, based on an awareness of the value of each person's contribution, and (ii) developing an ability to work together towards agreed objectives (Pathway 1983). The chargehand's involvement is vital since it is the chargehand who has trust and confidence of the team and whose leadership is based on mutual respect.

Therefore, those taking part in the project include the production line with their chargehand. In order to encourage a greater team relationship with others in the company organisation such as managers, support services and other departments, each training group contains a fitter, a quality assurance observer, a service man and a Production Assistant or Training Officer.

Training is divided into modules lasting twelve hours each - usually spread over a three week period and each module focuses on one particular subject, chosen and agreed by the team – e.g. product quality. The way team relationships develop is through a series of problem-solving exercises. The problems are real ones, identified by the team, and dealing with the team's real work situation on the shopfloor. Once the team has decided on a subject they work together to identify possible causes of the problem – drawing on expertise within the group and deciding where and how to get information from outside where necessary. As the team come up with possible solutions to the problem they help each other to assess them realistically. During this process the chargehand's role is to provide leadership support and encouragement as required. The chargehand will not automatically lead the team – it will depend on whether the team request that leadership. The objective is the final session where the team present the solutions to their problem to a group of managers. To do this effectively they must have worked through the problem to the point where each individual can identify sufficiently with the team's conclusions to be able to present them convincingly.

Management's role in this training is most important. The department manager opens the project, attends open sessions as a participant and is one of the group of managers present at the final session. In this way the team are able to see that their contribution and efforts are appreciated and shopfloor workers and managers are seen to be working together as part of a larger team.

Throughout the training period the trainers meet with the chargehand and Production Assistant (or Training Officer) to discuss progress. In this way a representative of management is seen to be helping the team to work on what they consider a major difficulty and sharing responsibility for the outcome.

By involving other departments, such as the quality assurance laboratory, the Marketing Department and the servicing department the trainees are able to see themselves in a team relationship with other parts of the company's operation.

Although this kind of training does not depend on a survey of language needs before the start of the module, any difficulties that individual team members have will be identified during training and if there is a need to improve the communicative ability of certain employees then this is dealt with through training at a later stage.

### **3. 11 Problems with running team building courses**

The problems incurred with this kind of training are very similar to the problems already mentioned. For example, due to the constraints imposed by companies training time remains relatively short. There is a need for regular follow-up sessions to maintain the interest and commitment achieved during the twelve hour module.

Projects in team building can be threatening to management and the power structure of the company since they invite comments and suggestions from the shopfloor. Normally demand for change and innovation come from the top down to the shopfloor. This training reverses that process.

If the training is to be effective management must seriously consider the recommendations put forward by the teams and give the teams recognition for their ideas even if the recommendations are not adopted. Regular contact and communication between managers and their teams needs to be maintained after training. As Pathway Unit say:

*such activities will only achieve their full potential if managers recognise and implement the extra responsibility they will have to shoulder.*

(Pathway 1984: 17)

## 4. Conclusion

Despite attempts during the last ten years to provide training to overcome communication difficulties in multi-racial workplaces, the PSI survey shows that Asian workers still suffer from poor English fluency. The training approaches described in this paper are three different solutions to the same problem. They each aim to help individuals learn the skills and develop the self-confidence to communicate more effectively in the multi-racial workplace – whether it is through language training, awareness training or courses in team building.

A close examination of these three approaches highlights certain factors that must be taken into consideration when organising any language or communication training in the workplace. Firstly, time allowed for training is relatively short, due to the difficulties of releasing employees during working hours. Therefore the objectives of any training need to be within the trainees' reach. Secondly, training can only be successful if it has the full support and co-operation of the company. The recent success of the team building projects is partly due to the active involvement of all levels of management.

If language training is undertaken trainees must be provided with the opportunity to use that language outside the classroom. If awareness training is undertaken participants must be ready for self-evaluation and open discussion. If team building courses are organised then management must be prepared to recognise the recommendations put forward by the team.

However, whatever training approach is adopted the trainer needs to take into account the social context in which the Asian learner lives, the relationship he/she has with the majority group, his/her level of acculturation and motivation. For all these factors will influence the success or failure of any industrial language training programme.

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