ANNIVERSARY ARTICLE

A brief history of *ELT Journal*

Richard Smith

This article traces the 75-year history of ELT Journal, using this as a means to cast light on trends in ELT over the same period and to acknowledge various sources of thought and practice. In the first part (1946–1971), the focus is on how the journal contributed to the establishment of a methodological orthodoxy which was relatively unaffected by academic applied linguistics but which drew sustenance, rather, from a tradition of theorized experience and practical linguistics dating back to pre-war times. In the second part (1971–1996), the focus is on tensions between this orthodoxy and newer 'communicative' ideas—still, though, with an emphasis on practical experience as well as academic insight, while the final phase (1996–2021) is viewed as being characterized, above all, by attempts to 'decentre' away from mainly UK-based expertise and towards an opening-up of professional discourse to previously neglected voices. Viewing the history of the journal in this manner reveals continuities as well as shifts in perception of how English should be defined, whose voices 'count' in the field, and of the value or otherwise of research and theory in relation to practical concerns.

Introduction

The first issue of what we now know as (the) *ELT Journal* or *ELTJ* appeared in October 1946 under the title *English Language Teaching*, subtitled *A Periodical Devoted to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language*. It was published by the British Council, being the brainchild of A.S. Hornby (1898–1978), the Council's newly appointed 'Linguistic Adviser'. Hornby's editorial in the first issue expressed the hope that the journal would 'enable the teacher in the classroom to know what has been done and is being done to help him [*sic*] in his task, and to exchange with fellow workers his own experiences and findings' (1/1: 6, 1946).[1]

Since 1946, the journal has served as a focal point for the ELT profession, indeed it can be said to have *created* a sense of ELT as a recognizable field, to the extent that its title, abbreviated at first to 'E.L.T.' (e.g. in Lee 1967), came to be adopted in Britain to designate the whole enterprise of teaching English as a second or foreign language. Indeed, confusion increasingly arose between the name of the journal and that of the field as a whole, so '*Journal*' was added to the title *English Language Teaching* in 1973 (Peter Collier, personal communication, 2004). When this was shortened to *ELT Journal* in 1981, the term 'ELT' gained even wider currency worldwide.

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In this article, I provide an overview of the journal's history, considering in turn the three quarter centuries of its 75 years of existence and giving equal weight to each 25-year period. The account here is informed by interviews and a set of email communications with surviving editors and others involved with the journal, alongside consultation of primary and secondary textual sources (in particular, minutes of meetings in the Public Records Office, Kew; documents in the Oxford University Press (OUP) archive; and recorded interviews, print copies of the journal itself, and publications linked to the journal in the Warwick ELT Archive (http://warwick.ac.uk/elt_archive)).

Overall, I attempt to show not only how the journal has itself developed, from various perspectives including editorial stance, sources of authority, format, focus of articles, and authorship, but also how it has both reflected and had an impact upon wider historical developments in the field we now know as ELT.

The first 25 years (1946–1971)

From 1936 to 1942, A.S. Hornby edited the *Bulletin* of the Institute for Research in English Teaching (IRET) in Tokyo, which—until the establishment of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan in 1941—was the only centre worldwide for research into problems of teaching English as a second or foreign language (Smith 2005). This prior experience in Japan led Hornby to propose starting up a similar periodical in post-war Britain—this time for an international readership (Hornby 1974: 6).

During 1946–51, Hornby was himself by far the most frequent contributor to the new journal, writing 20 (14%) out of a total of 145 articles, among which were some he had published previously in the Tokyo *Bulletin* (Smith 2005). He additionally answered readers' questions about (correct) English usage in a 'Question Box' feature also borrowed from the *Bulletin*. In all, however, 57 different authors contributed articles during this period, testifying to Hornby's commissioning skills and central role in the emerging ELT establishment. Most were fellow British Council officers or teacher educators at the Institute of Education, London, alongside a few pioneers from pre-war times and academic phoneticians. In an early sign of internationalization and localization of concern beyond the UK which was only to be truly developed much later on in the journal's history, there was also a series of commissioned articles by teachers from China, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Chile, and Sweden on the state of English teaching in their respective countries. Some writers contributed whole series of articles, and their titles give a sense of the language-focused and practical orientation of early issues overall as well as of their somewhat prescriptive ethos (e.g. 'Principles of vocabulary control' (Morris, four articles, 1947); 'The teaching of English intonation' (Kingdon, four articles, 1948); and 'Pronunciation difficulties: corrective treatment' (a sequence of no fewer than ten articles by E.L. Tibbitts in 1946–48). These complemented Hornby's own influential series of articles, in which he used ideas developed in pre-war Japan within IRET (see Smith 2005) to lay solidly 'direct', 'structural', and 'situational' methodological foundations for the emerging ELT enterprise: 'Linguistic pedagogy' (six articles, 1946–47); 'Sentence patterns and substitution

tables' (four articles, 1946–47); 'Direct method composition exercises' (two articles, 1949), and 'The situational approach in language teaching' (three articles, 1950).

By the time Hornby left the British Council and stepped down as Editor (in 1950), he had succeeded in establishing a modern-seeming linguistic and method-focused ethos for the journal quite distinct from the focus on British culture and literature favoured by some of his British Council colleagues.[2] Early issues had also imprinted the idea that expertise for the new English language teaching enterprise, including authority in defining the kind of English to be taught, was henceforth to emanate from London, not just Tokyo or Michigan. Hornby remained actively involved with the journal as a member, along with four Institute of Education lecturers, of a newly constituted Editorial Board, and he continued to personally curate 'Question Box' until 1956. From 1950 to 1953, another British Council officer, R.T. Butlin was named Editor. Butlin was less successful than Hornby at attracting contributors in this still-emerging field: there were only 35 authors of 66 separate articles in the period 1951–56 (Smith 2005). From Volume 8 (1953–54) onwards, editing began to be carried out collaboratively by the Editorial Board, with minor personnel changes over time, and with a British Council officer (Butlin, then I.E. Jago) as Editorial Secretary.

In 1958, W.R. ('Bill') Lee, who had himself been lecturing at the Institute of Education, was appointed Language Teaching Adviser at the British Council (46/1: 5, 1992). Like Hornby before him, he began to lead more from the front and was able to attract more contributions to the journal, first as Secretary to the Board and then, from 1961 as sole named Editor. In the same year, responsibility for publication was transferred to OUP, although still 'in association with the British Council'. Lee was to remain Editor for 20 years, even after he, in turn, left the British Council in 1963 to become freelance. From this point onwards, he received a stipend for the increasingly onerous editorial work involved. By all accounts, Lee was an indefatigable editor, taking on all assessment of articles, assiduously providing details of publications received, maintaining a 'Newsboard' with information about upcoming and recent events, and himself writing a large number of book reviews as well as editorials. He oversaw the publication of many practical as well as linguistically informed articles, including by overseas-based (though for the most part British) teacher trainers and teachers.

While most readers seem to have been located in Europe during the 1950s, there was clearly an attempt to broaden the reach of the journal as many colonies gained independence during the 1960s and British Council attention shifted towards them. For example, there was a whole series of articles on 'English in the Commonwealth' (1961–66), written, noticeably, by British Council officers rather than by teachers from the countries concerned. There was also some, though very limited, coverage of English as a second language for newly arriving immigrants from Commonwealth countries to Britain, but the main focus of the journal throughout its first 25 years remained resolutely on practical problems of teaching English beyond British shores, in particular in school systems—as conceived of,

however, almost entirely by a rather limited set of British contributors. The journal thus served, on a base of experience and practical analysis more than academic research, both to manufacture a sense of British ELT expertise and to support its propagation overseas.

The second 25 years (1971–1996)

The number of articles per issue increased in the 1970s, partly because of the very close relationship that was established during this decade between the journal and IATEFL, with many articles having started life as IATEFL conference presentations. As such, they also tended to be quite short and practical, and were largely unencumbered by footnotes or references. The main reason for this linkage was Lee himself—he had personally founded (I)ATEFL in 1967 and was to remain its Chairman until 1984. Due to his dual leadership role, and to the special relationship between *ELTJ* and IATEFL which has persisted ever since (see Rixon and Smith 2017), the need has never arisen very strongly for IATEFL to found its own journal, though it has always had a newsletter/magazine (now known as *Voices*). Across the Atlantic within TESOL, Inc., on the other hand, *TESOL Quarterly* had been started up in 1967 with a properly constituted Editorial Advisory Board and review procedures. In comparison, there was a shared and increasing perception during the 1970s among British applied linguists and within OUP itself that the editorial processes, appearance and relative exclusion of up-to-date theory in *ELTJ* were a problem requiring resolution (Murison-Bowie, Widdowson interviews). A generational divide had opened up by this time, then, between proponents of the orthodoxy established in the immediate post-war era and advocates of newer 'communicative' ideas. Compared not only with the ferment of ideas in contemporary British applied linguistics but also with burgeoning creativity in the UK EAP, ESP, and language school sectors, the journal had come increasingly, in the eyes of a new generation of applied linguists and UK-based ELT professionals, to look staid and out of touch with contemporary thinking.

In spring 1980, the first issue of a new academic journal, *Applied Linguistics*, had been brought out by OUP with the intention that practice could be informed by current theory and research (Widdowson, interview). In October 1981 (36/1), a number of significant changes were additionally made to *ELTJ*, partly in pursuit of the corresponding idea that practice could make greater reference to contemporary theory (ibid.). These changes together heralded a new era for *ELTJ*, involving a broader base, an increased openness to applied linguistics and a wider range of other influences, a new appearance, and a professionalization of editorial processes in general.

The first big change involved the establishment of a Board of Management, whose goal was to oversee the revamping and professionalization of the journal. A new Editor—Richard Rossner—was appointed to succeed Lee and was given free rein to appoint an Editorial Advisory Panel (see Rixon and Smith (2017: 107) for more on this transition). After many years of sole control by Lee, articles would henceforth be peer-reviewed, and journal contents and strategy would

be discussed regularly within the Panel and periodically with the Board. Further, design-based indications of a fresh start included a move to a larger page size and introduction of the wide left-hand margin containing only headings and sub-headings which still characterizes main articles and gives *ELTJ* its distinctive, particularly reader-friendly appearance.

The long-running 'Question Box' feature was dropped in 1981, but a replacement 'Language close up' section was brought back in in July 1982 for short contributions which were explicitly—in distinction from Question Box advice—'not offered as authoritative statements' (40/1: 59, 1986). This section was discontinued a few years later, and, although there have been several attempts to revive a language focus (e.g. 'Language conundrums' with Michael Swan (until 1995), 'Text messages' (eds. Jill and Charles Hadfield, 2005 onwards) and 'Changing English' (ed. David Baker, 2015 onwards)), the kind of article on particular aspects of English usage that so characterized the journal's first, more didactic and accuracy-focused 35 years is now very rare indeed.

At a time (the 1980s) when the quantity of new ELT and applied linguistic publications was mushrooming, a separate Reviews Editor, Rod Bolitho, was soon (with effect from 38/2, 1984) appointed from within the Editorial Advisory Panel. Before then even, another innovation had been the 'Survey review'—a commissioned comparative review of a number of publications under a particular heading, starting with 'Grammar books for teachers of English as a foreign language' (36/1: 52–56, 1981). Bringing together practice (in the form of learning/teaching materials) and theorization in a very tangible way, survey reviews have continued to be one of the journal's major features.

As had been intended, the journal opened up to a wider range of ideas from applied linguistics as well as to private-sector achievements, with a particular focus on communicative language teaching (see Hunter's extensive (2009) analysis of articles from the Rossner period). There was, then, not only a correction in the direction of new theory but also something of a renewed emphasis on British experience and expertise (with a focus on teaching adult learners), following a period (the 1970s) when—via the strong link with IATEFL—Lee had been starting to attract a greater number of authors from overseas.

During Rossner's five years as Editor, many of the emerging 'big names' in British applied linguistics and communicative ELT contributed to the journal, providing it again—as in its earliest years—with an air both of authoritativeness and of being at the cutting-edge, although to the accompaniment now of a more dialogic, less prescriptive feel, with lively correspondence, article exchanges (e.g. Swan vs Widdowson during 1985 on the relevance of CLT) and occasional 'Talking Shop' interviews contributing to this impression. The title of Rossner and Bolitho's (1990) compilation of 1982–1988 articles, *Currents of Change in English Language Teaching*, sums up well the sense that transformations were under way, both in *ELT Journal* (as it was now called) and, methodologically, in the field it represented.

Norman Whitney became Editor in 1987 and remained in post for a further five years. As a freelance materials writer, Whitney was well-connected with the ELT commercial sector and, like Rossner, was not an academic, though both had strong academic interests. Alongside Henry Widdowson on the Board of Management, from the mid-1980s until her retirement in 2009 (and even beyond then, as Consultant to the Editors), Cristina Whitecross at OUP was a particularly influential and supportive figure behind the scenes. She, too, performed a crossover role between academic and commercial sectors, being the main editor of OUP's applied linguistics book series and journal and at the same time responsible for coursebooks, teacher resource books, and *ELTJ*.

A constant preoccupation for Whitney was to ensure articles were readable and not too specialist—an increasing number of over-academic articles were being submitted, perhaps in reflection of the contemporary increase in academic applied linguistics and TESOL studies (interview). He also recalls (ibid.) having had to repel an increasing number of articles which were uncritically attempting to advertise private-sector enterprise, usually relating to particular 'humanistic' methods. Clearly, building bridges between theory and practice was not an easy matter, nor has it become less difficult in ensuing years, but it is something all editors since Rossner have consciously attempted to achieve for the journal.

Aside from editing a special issue which drew attention to under- or misrepresentation of women as a problem in ELT generally (43/3, 1989), Whitney was instrumental in bringing a greater number of women into the Editorial Advisory Panel—by 1990 (44/1: front matter), six women and two men were included, in a big turnaround even from the early 1980s. In 1992, Tricia Hedge became the first woman to edit the journal, working for three years in this role, with Keith Morrow replacing Bolitho as Reviews Editor. The 'Key concepts in ELT' feature, first proposed by Widdowson, was introduced in the January 1993 issue, with the first two being written by Hedge herself, on 'Learner training' and 'Learner strategies'. Guy Cook, Alan Waters, Graham Hall, and Richard Smith have been the subsequent named editors of this widely read, now biannual feature.

After Hedge stepped down as Editor in 1995, she and Whitney co-edited a selection of articles from the period 1988–1995 (Hedge and Whitney 1996) which was timed to coincide with *ELTJ*'s 50th anniversary. The first part of this (on 'Power') demonstrated, as one reviewer mentioned, 'the maturation of ELT under their leadership, as they broached sensitive matters of political, cultural, and social contexts that were rarely considered by the [...] founders of their influential journal' (Baugh 1999: 501). It also reflected the mounting concern with critical, political issues which was to become even more apparent during the journal's third 25-year period.

The third 25 years (1996–2021)

After Bill Lee, the longest-serving editor was Keith Morrow, from 1995 to 2012. For the same period of time, Philip Prowse was Reviews editor, virtually doubling the number of reviews overall and commissioning no fewer than 27 survey reviews. This was a time when many previous certainties were overturned, with a relatively large number of articles

being published which were critical of over-privileging 'native speaker' (NS) teachers' linguistic, cultural, and methodological norms. As Morrow pointed out in the 50th anniversary issue (50/1: 1, 1996), whereas 'In 1946 it would perhaps have seemed absurd to entertain debate about the ownership of English[,] in 1996, the question of models, of varieties, of the status of English as a world language and all the implications and complications that flow from this, is at the heart of much professional discussion.' Among such 'implications and complications', the following were to become particularly prominent: assertions of 'non-native speaker' (NNS) teachers' capabilities; critiques of the cultural inappropriateness of approaches such as CLT and of UK-published coursebooks; and criticisms of monolingual models in ELT (see also Hall 2012 and Maley 2012). There has been a parallel self-questioning, by editors and advisory panels, of the role and identity of the journal, too.

Correspondingly, a wider variety of voices began to be heard, both in the journal itself and within the Editorial Panel. During the first decade of the new century, in particular, NNS authorship of articles as well as reviews (ibid.) seems to have risen to an average of around 33–50%, up from consistently under a third during 1995–2000. At the beginning of Morrow's editorship, when articles were submitted on paper and sent out for review by post, it was seen as too expensive and cumbersome (although desirable) to have a more international Editorial Advisory Panel (interview), but from 2001 onwards, with all members of the Panel now having email accounts, contributors were able to submit electronically (55/1: 2). An expansion of the Panel and a greater degree of internationalization then ensued, to the extent that, by 2012, there were no fewer than 17 Editorial Panel members (11 of them women, and 12 based outside the UK), in countries ranging from Argentina to the USA (66/4: front matter).

Many of Morrow's further innovations seemed intended to open up dialogue and debate, beginning with 'Comment', featuring a short opinion piece, with response via correspondence being explicitly invited. From 2001 (55/1) onwards, a 'Readers respond' feature was also introduced for responses of up to 1,250 words long. First introduced in 1997 (51/2), another innovation, 'Point and counterpoint', continues to this day to feature a position paper, a response, and a final riposte by the first author.

Starting in 2003, an *ELTJ Debate* at the annual IATEFL conference was another initiative which drew explicit attention to the journal as a site for questioning of assumptions. The debate—which has become a much-anticipated event at the heart of the conference—strengthened the relationship with IATEFL: indeed, the journal is now explicitly 'published in association with IATEFL' rather than, as previously, with the British Council, sustaining—as Maley (2012: 562) notes—the journal's claim to international coverage at the same time as maintaining IATEFL's own prestige.

A final new feature addressed the contemporary growth of the internet—'Website reviews', launched in 55/2 (April 2001) and edited by Diana Eastment until 2010 (64/1). Its successor is 'Technology for the language teacher' (edited by Nicky Hockly, from 2011 (65/3) onwards).

Although by 2006 Morrow was able to write that the journal had never been as popular in terms of number of submissions, he also wondered if the journal was seen as 'something to publish in rather than something to read' (60/1: 1, 2006). A major regret was that, even though he deliberately gave many talks at teacher conferences on writing for the journal and some diversification did occur, so many submissions from diverse backgrounds had turned out to be unsuitable for publication. The most common reasons for rejection seemed to be either that the article was too theoretical, with insufficient link to practice, or that it was too practical, with insufficient theorization and/or relevance to other contexts (interview).

Morrow retired as Editor in 2012, ending with a special issue featuring overviews in various areas of contemporary concern titled 'The Janus Papers' (66/4), which characteristically looked to the future as well as back. Graham Hall was then Editor for five years, with Alessia Cogo as Reviews Editor. Hall's own attempts to engage new readers and writers involved, partly, taking forward the notion of special issues in two specific, formerly neglected areas—young learners (68/3) and, in honour of IATEFL's 50th anniversary, English language teacher associations (70/2). In order to engage more readers, he also instituted the 'Editor's Choice' article in each issue, which would be made freely available, together with a video by the author(s), and could be shared via social media. A decision had been taken even earlier to make Key Concept pieces free to download.

Another feature of Hall's period of editorship was a rise in articles based on practitioner research—viewed as an effective means of addressing the theory–research divide—while Cogo, as Reviews Editor, introduced a new 'Review Forum' feature, where two reviewers review the same book from different perspectives. She also commissioned occasional reviews of books about ELT in languages other than English.

An overall 'critical' perspective extended to careful editing of language. For example, Hall consistently advised authors to recognize the problematic nature of terms such as 'NS' and 'NNS' or the need to consider varieties other than British English (interview). Work to achieve diversity within the panel and among authors continued under Hall and has been a priority, also, of the present editor.

After five years, Hall stepped down and from the beginning of 2018 Alessia Cogo took his place, with Amos Paran being appointed as Reviews Editor. As ELT professionals whose formative years had been spent in Italy and Israel, respectively, their appointment served to consolidate and symbolize the changes that had gone on in the field and in the journal away from NS-centrism and an excessive emphasis on UK concerns.

Continuing the focus she had previously adopted as Reviews Editor on 'getting perspectives from different contexts into the journal' (interview), and in order to provide a kind of counterbalance to over-theoretical perspectives, Cogo instituted a new feature called 'The view from here', which she hoped would encourage practitioners to write reflectively about their own context and experience and about important issues for them. The first piece was a timely article, written by a Chinese teacher,

Haifeng Pu, on implementing online ELT in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic (74/3: 345–48).

Overall, as we have seen, the third 25-year period has seen a shift away from relatively universalist assumptions regarding the nature of English and of desirable English teaching practice. Alongside a critical turn towards more 'decentred' perspectives in the *contents* of articles, there have been the beginnings of a decentring process, in practice too, towards an opening-up of *ELTJ* discourse to previously neglected voices.

Conclusion

True to A.S. Hornby's original intentions, *ELTJ* continues to attempt to 'link the everyday concerns of practitioners with insights gained from relevant academic disciplines' (74/3: front matter, 2020). Whereas in Hornby's time, both ELT and applied linguistics were in their infancy as fields of knowledge generation, both have since expanded their reach enormously. Especially since the 1980s, *ELTJ* has developed a unique identity as a journal which attempts to build bridges between the two fields, however incommensurate they may sometimes seem. In this role, the journal has both witnessed change and contributed much to shaping the overall field of ELT. My analysis here has revealed continuity as well as change, and I hope that this brief overview of the journal's three 25-year 'generations' to date might encourage others to delve deeper into the developing discourse of *ELTJ* and of ELT over time (cf. Moirand 1988; Hunter 2009). Finally, if one role of history is to facilitate current reappraisal, I hope this account might have provoked some reflection on how English should be defined, whose voices 'count' in the field, and how theory and research can most appropriately be combined with practical concerns.

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Notes

1 Volume and issue number, page number(s) and publication year are provided within the text for *ELTJ* articles referred to as primary sources rather than details being included in the list of references.

2 It seems probable that the first culture- and literature-focused editorial in the first issue was written by a British Council higher-up rather than by Hornby, being quite different in emphasis and tone from articles subsequently published in the journal (though see King (4/1: 1–11; 4/2: 29–36, 1949). The second, shorter editorial on 'Linguistic research' was more clearly written by Hornby himself, establishing his own priority focus—reflecting IRET's pre-war emphasis—on needs to teach and research English as a *language*, in relatively instrumental fashion (hence, too, the journal's title), rather than as a means for purveying British Culture.

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The author

Richard Smith is a Reader in the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, where he teaches BA, MA, and PhD students. He founded and co-convenes the AILA Research Network on History of Language Learning and Teaching (http://hollt.net) and is responsible for the development since 2002 of the Warwick ELT Archive, a unique collection of published and unpublished materials relating to the history of ELT. He has also been working with teachers in Latin America and South Asia to develop ideas for teaching English in public school systems, based on principles of learner autonomy and exploratory action research.

Email: R.C.Smith@warwick.ac.uk