ELT Journal 80th Anniversary Virtual Issue

Introduction by Alessia Cogo

This year marks the 80th anniversary of *ELT Journal*, a milestone that invites both celebration and reflection. Since its inception in 1946, the journal has sought to provide a forum where ideas about English language teaching can be shared and debated. Over eight decades, it has documented (and often anticipated) many of the key developments in the field, while remaining grounded in its central concern: the relationship between theory, research, and practice.

This virtual issue brings together a set of short commentaries on selected articles from the Journal's archive. These pieces have been written by former editors, long-standing contributors, and friends and readers of *ELT Journal*. Each contributor was invited to choose an article that has, in some way, influenced their thinking or practice. The result is a collection that is intentionally personal, partial, and diverse. Rather than attempting to define a canon or provide a definitive account of the journal's "most important" contributions, these commentaries offer individual perspectives on what has mattered, and continues to matter, in ELT.

Taken together, the selections highlight the richness and breadth of the journal across time. The articles discussed range from early contributions in the 1950s, with their focus on classroom realities and learner experience, through periods of intense methodological and theoretical innovation in the later decades of the twentieth century, to more recent engagements with issues such as critical pedagogy, authenticity, multilingualism, and teacher research. They reflect recurring concerns in ELT, while also illustrating how these concerns have been reframed and reinterpreted over time. To support this historical perspective, the commentaries are organised chronologically, beginning with the earliest articles and moving toward more recent contributions,

Many of the commentaries underline how remarkably well certain articles have "stood the test of time", continuing to resonate with contemporary research and practice. Others point to moments of conceptual shift or intellectual ferment, where ideas that are now widely accepted were first tentatively articulated. Still others foreground voices and perspectives that challenge dominant narratives in the field, reminding us of the importance of inclusivity, plurality, and critical reflection. What emerges is not a single story of progress, but a complex, layered, and sometimes contested history, one that reflects the evolving nature of ELT itself.

In assembling this virtual issue, I have also been mindful of earlier efforts to look back on the journal's contribution. One such example is *Currents of Change*, edited by Richard Rossner and Rod Bolitho and published in 1990, which brought together a selection of *ELT Journal* articles organised thematically, beginning with sections such as 'The role and purpose of ELT' and 'The communicative era: second decade'. Later collections, including those inspired by Norman Whitney and Tricia Hedge in the mid-1990s and Keith Morrow's *Janus Papers* (ELTJ 67/4), similarly sought to capture key developments in the field and to situate them within broader historical narratives.

The present virtual issue is, in part, inspired by these earlier collections, but it also differs from them in important ways. First, the whole virtual issue and the articles it references are freely available online for one year, enabling wider access and

engagement than was previously possible. Second, rather than being curated solely by editors around predefined themes or historical moments, the selection here has been shaped by a wider community of ELT professionals. By inviting contributors to nominate articles that have been meaningful to them, we have opened up the possibility of a broader, more varied perspective on the Journal's impact.

At the same time, this approach inevitably results in a collection that is subjective and selective. It does not aim to provide an objective evaluation of the Journal's most influential publications, nor does it attempt to map key moments in the development of ELT in any systematic way. Instead, it offers something different: a set of informed, reflective, and sometimes deeply personal engagements with the Journal's archive. In doing so, it reminds us that the significance of a publication lies not only in its citation count or historical positioning, but also in the ways it is taken up, interpreted, and lived by its readers.

As we look back on eighty years of *ELT Journal*, this virtual issue celebrates not only the articles themselves, but also the community that has sustained and shaped the journal over time—authors, readers, teachers, researchers, and editors alike. It is through ongoing dialogue within this community that the journal continues to evolve, remaining responsive to new challenges while retaining its commitment to informed, critical, and practice-oriented inquiry.

Cartledge H.A. 1959. 'Verse speaking in the English class'. *ELT Journal*, XIII(2): 67–72. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XIII.2.67

Commentary by Guy Cook

This journal has been going since 1946. Yet asked to reflect upon its successful history, commentators generally focus on only three decades: the 1970s/80s/90s. This is partly because these commentators are old (like me), and naturally see their youthful years as the most exciting, or perhaps because (arguably) those decades were indeed exceptional for ELT. Yet for whatever reason, a lot of good writing gets sidelined.

So I have gone back to the journal's earlier years. The tone and language are different from ours, but the ideas are not as we might expect. Far from conforming to stereotypes of that era as narrow, authoritarian, and imperialist, they are more often thoughtful, optimistic, well intentioned, and steadily focused upon students and their needs, as well as on pedagogy and the English language itself. A browse through the 40s/50s/60s will reward any contemporary reader seeking to escape the constraints of current orthodoxies.

There are many articles I could have chosen from those times, but I am limited to only one. My choice is Verse Speaking in the English Class by H.A. Cartledge, published in 1959. I was unable to find out much about the author other than what is evident from his publications: he was a polymath itinerant scholar and teacher who wrote on a wide range of topics and also edited novels and translations. This particular article has an admirably unpretentious clarity and —strikingly to my mind —-an unexpected focus on the realities of the classroom and student wishes and needs. There is a warm humanity so often lacking in writing today. It is also about a very important topic: the teaching of poetry.

Once seen as an end in itself, and an untranslatable insight into the soul of the language being learned, poetry fell from favour in ELT in the decades following this article, victim to a focus on duller and more transactional language uses. Though it underwent a mild classroom revival from the 1990s it was often treated not as poetry—moving, mysterious, musical—but as social commentary, or just one in a range of quotidian discourse types. Here in this article, however, there is joy in poetry for its own sake: as sound, as beauty, as pleasure. A lesson from the hopeful 1950s for the grim 2020s.

Widdowson, H. 1972. 'The teaching of English as communication'. *ELT Journal*, XXVII(1): 15–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXVII.1.15

Commentary by Peter Grundy

In 1973, Henry Widdowson, an assistant lecturer in the Department of Linguistics at Edinburgh, submitted his PhD thesis. A year earlier, readers of 'The Teaching of English as Communication' had been introduced to the distinction between the meaning 'which language items have as elements of the language system' ('signification') and 'how language operates in communication' ('value') which Widdowson elaborates in greater detail in his thesis. This crucial distinction has increasingly informed language teaching, so that now when we encounter *language* and *languaging* or 'language as entity' and 'language as action' in the CEFR, we know to whom this profession-changing insight is owed. Sadly, I can't say that I read Widdowson's article in 1972.

I think it was in 1977 that I was lucky enough to have a summer job at Pilgrims, a new language school that was the talk of the town, where learners rather than textbooks were the principal resource. In 1978, I was introduced to pragmatics on the Cambridge M.Phil. programme. Four or five years later, 'The Teaching of English as Communication' helped me to understand the connection between these two formative experiences.

Reading Widdowson's article 54 years after it appeared, we're struck by its brevity and by the absence of citation and references, properties which at the time weren't particularly unusual. We sense the influence of Austin's work on speech acts and Dell Hymes' paper 'On Communicative Competence' which Widdowson read in 1971. Hymes argues that Chomsky's position that native speakers of a language share a common syntactic competence doesn't acknowledge the varying degrees of communicative competence that individual language users and even whole groups exhibit.

In the 1970's, anyone lucky enough to come across a discipline-changing paper such as 'On Communicative Competence' typically shared their understanding in seminars and in informal discussion. In that predigital Eden, academics enjoyed a brief republic of ideas before what we now call 'intellectual property' turned knowledge into individually owned academic capital.

'The Teaching of English as Communication' is among the most important articles inspired by that period of intellectual ferment. Widdowson's tentative conclusion that 'a shift in orientation from the formal to the communicative properties of language might lead us some way towards' solving the problem of ineffective second language instruction marks the dawn of enlightenment in English language teaching. And as if in

recognition, in the year following its publication, the 'journal' in which it appeared, *English Language Teaching*, became the *English Language Teaching Journal*.

Acknowledgement
The author thanks Henry Widdowson for his help and acknowledges that the remaining shortcomings are his own.

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Commentary by Alan Maley

This article describes an experiment to determine whether instructed language learning or exposure to a language is more effective. The study compared 'the effects of instruction and one component of exposure, residence in the country where the target language is spoken' (p. 258). The results indicated that English proficiency was related to number of years of English study, although 'Years spent in an English-speaking country also correlated significantly with English proficiency' (p.260). It seems to show that 'formal instruction is a more efficient way of learning English for adults than trying to learn it 'in the streets'.' (p. 260).

I chose this article for two reasons. Firstly because it was published in 1978, right in the middle of an extraordinary ferment of new ideas, theories and methods. And in the same year as my own book with Alan Duff on Drama Techniques was published (Maley and Duff, 1978), which was indirectly inspired by this ferment. Wilkins' Notional Syllabuses had appeared in 1976, Curran's Counselling Learning in 1976, Gattegno's Silent Way in 1972, Suggestopoedia in 1978 (for accounts of these see Richards and Rogers, 2001 and, Stevick, 1980).

Secondly, on the face of it, this article seems to confirm a rather conservative view of language learning, i.e. that classroom learning is more efficient than mere exposure, in contrast with Krashen's own iconoclastic ideas which he must have been developing at the very time this article appeared (Krashen 1981, Krashen and Terrell, 1983). The first three of his Monitor Model hypotheses seem to be at odds with his findings in this article. The Input hypothesis advocates exposure to large samples of language at i+1 difficulty (just a little above the learner's current level). The Acquisition/Learning hypothesis claims that language is acquired through unconscious acquisition not conscious learning. And the Monitor hypothesis claims that only unconscious acquisition can develop deep learning, relegating conscious learning to a monitoring, not a creative-generative, role.

Of course, mere exposure through residence in an English-speaking country is unlikely to lead to learning. But it is possible that this was a liminal moment, when Krashen's

more controversial ideas were coalescing against a continuing, underlying current of more traditional ideas.

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Commentary by Michael Swan

This article reported an experiment concerning second-language testing and instruction. The authors investigated an important question for language teachers: what matters most for successful language use, correctness or intelligibility? Greek teachers of English generally considered errors serious if these broke rules that had already been taught and could affect examination results. Native English speakers were typically troubled by mistakes that affected communication. British EFL teachers paid some attention to both correctness and intelligibility. While this was not surprising to experienced language teachers, Hughes and Lascaratou's findings, in the best scientific tradition, put common knowledge on a solid empirical basis.

Published almost half a century ago, the paper constituted a clear statement of issues confronting language educators today. Attitudes have changed, but the principles underlying the establishment of teaching and testing programmes are as widely debated as ever. Views on homework correction, end-of-term marking, national syllabi, the design of examinations, or the very purpose of language education vary widely between countries, contexts and traditions.

Like many valuable ELTJ articles, this paper looked both backwards and forwards. Conducted with a single-language cohort, it contributed to existing studies of cross-language influence. But it also fed into current concerns. What kind of language teaching is appropriate for whom? What level of correctness or intelligibility is needed for particular purposes? How should we do classroom-based research? How applicable are research findings to specific situations? Indeed, is formal language instruction necessary anyway to provide an everyday working knowledge of a language?

Professional journals can become inward-looking, sometimes turning into a debating forum for a limited group of specialists. ELTJ is not of this kind. The journal and its successive editors have as a matter of principle combined inward and outward

orientations, enabling theorists and practitioners to communicate effectively and learn from each other.

I chose Hughes and Lascaratou 1982 as my contribution to this collection for three reasons. It spoke to my own concerns with cross-language influence and the theory-practice interface. It was, and remains, significant for our profession as a whole – it is one of the finest papers I have read on these topics. And 2026 is not only the 80th anniversary of the founding of a remarkable journal; it is another very important anniversary for us. Around half a century ago, ELTJ was substantially reshaped and modernised with the appointment in 1981 of a gifted new editor, Richard Rossner. Rossner chose this article for publication in his first year of editorship. Do read it.

Li Xiaoju, 1984. 'In defence of the communicative approach'. *ELT Journal*, 38(1):2–13, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/38.1.2

Commentary by Richard Rossner

Promoting, selecting and using given approaches to language education has long preoccupied applied linguists, teacher educators and teachers. Unlike other school subjects, learning languages is unusual, in that students can already communicate effectively in one or more languages before beginning school. This has made methodological debates in ELT especially lively, and *ELT Journal* has been a key forum for them throughout its 80-year history. Indeed, the first issue opened with A. S. Hornby's article launching a series on "linguistic pedagogy".

The 'communicative approach' proposed by Henry Widdowson in a 1972 article stimulated wide interest and vigorous debate. Five other articles halfway through *ELT Journal's* long life illustrate the debate well. They are worth revisiting because they exemplify the long-standing tensions between 'theory' and 'practice', tensions which still continue as other approaches are proposed.

Li Xiaoju's article echoed the tensions even in its title. Reporting on an innovative project in China, Li advocated prioritising language use over linguistic form, offering a clear and heartfelt rationale for moving beyond traditional methods.

In contrast, Michael Swan's two 1985 articles offered a robust critique, arguing that communicative methodology had hardened into "dogma". He questioned distinctions such as "meaning" versus "use", challenged assumptions about how far communicative competence needs to be taught, and warned that such principles risked confusing teachers rather than helping them. Swan's criticisms, in turn, provoked an uncompromising response from Widdowson in "Against dogma" (1985), accusing Swan of pandering to anti-intellectual sentiment and misrepresenting the communicative position.

Peter Medgyes' (1986) rather different perspective described the challenges that non-native-English-speaking teachers faced in implementing communicative methods. His humorous and sympathetic account concluded with a plea for more experts willing to "work halfway between the zealot … and the weary"-a call for bridging the gap between theoretical advocacy and classroom realities.

And so the debate continued, for example in Kumaravadivelu (1993), Holliday (1994) Thornbury (2016), and it continues still: how can, how should theorists such as applied linguistics work productively with the weary teachers in the front line when there is

rarely direct interaction between them? More collaborative classroom-based research involving both parties would be a good beginning.

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Commentary by Scott Thornbury

I can't count the number of times I've used this article on training sessions, especially at Diploma level. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that it was for training purposes that the writer's 'top ten' principles for teaching reading were originally compiled. Williams' stated aim was 'to encourage teachers to re-examine their existing beliefs about the nature of the reading process, text choice, text-based activities and classroom management procedures' (p. 42). The article succeeds on all counts. Moreover, apart from being comprehensive, evidence-based and practical, it has the (singular) virtue of being refreshingly short – just four pages!

Re-reading it forty years on, I'm also impressed how it has stood the test of time. I would guess that there's not a principle here that a contemporary researcher into reading would take issue with. I'm especially drawn to #3*: Growth in language ability is an essential part of the development of reading ability*. This principle has been validated by subsequent research into vocabulary size, which has demonstrated that, without an extensive vocabulary, fluent reading of unsimplified texts is a struggle (see Nation & Gu 2007). This suggests that we might be advised to spend less time teaching reading skills and more time developing word knowledge.

And what about this: *1. In the absence of interesting texts, very little is possible?* Who, I wonder, is best positioned to decide what is 'interesting'? Not the coursebook writer nor even the teacher – but surely the students themselves. Given the bountiful textual resources now available online, this would argue for encouraging (and training)

learners to search out – and share – texts that deal with topics that they actually *want* to read about.

Finally, I'm eternally grateful to Williams for introducing to me the distinction, first promulgated by Johns and Davies (1983), between *texts as linguistic objects* (TALO) and *texts as vehicles for information* (TAVI), and that any one text can serve both purposes, but that to treat texts solely as sources of language-focused study 'contributes very little to the development of learners' *reading skills*' (p. 45). In short, this returns us to Williams' second principle, i.e. *The primary activity of a reading lesson should be learners reading texts.* Why? Because 'learners learn to read by reading: there is no other way' (p. 43).

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Commentary by Rod Bolitho

In the eighties, the field of English Language Teaching was undergoing changes, many of them quite fundamental. The Communicative Approach was gaining traction at the expense of grammar-translation and of audiolingual and audiovisual methods, and there was a surge in interest in humanistic approaches to teaching, especially in the private sector. In both the UK and the USA, universities were offering postgraduate courses in Applied Linguistics, usually with a strong theoretical component. Many teachers chose to attend these courses as a route to professional advancement, but it was often left to them to make the connection between theory and practice. Early in the article, Esther Ramani picks up on this:

> "in most teacher-training (…) programmes, theory and practice are kept apart"

This was the wider context in which she wrote this article.

Although she was a university lecturer, she had formed a teacher development group in Bangalore (now Bengaluru), mainly for women, many of whom were working mothers. The group met regularly both for training and for discussions, and Esther herself facilitated many of the sessions such as the one she described in the article.

What made this article stand out was the challenges it describes: to teachers to find ways of conceptualising their practice in principled and theoretical terms, and to academics to find an alternative to 'top-down' approaches to theory by instead starting from teachers' lived experience to enable them to approach theoretical issues from a position of professional strength. At a time when some teachers were questioning or even rejecting theory-led approaches to teaching, the article provided a bridge from practice to theory and a way in which teachers could begin to see its relevance to what happened on a daily basis in their classrooms.

In the session Esther described, the shared viewing of a lesson was accompanied and followed by eight carefully crafted stages in which she led the group towards an understanding that everything they had seen happening in the lesson was in some way underpinned by beliefs or principles espoused either consciously, or unconsciously by the teacher. Approaching theory in this way requires a teacher educator or trainer to rethink their way of working with a group of teachers, involving them and their experience at every stage. It had a profound impact on my own approach to working with both in-service and pre-service teachers, and its wider influence can be seen directly or indirectly in areas such as practitioner research, reflective practice and teacher learning, all of which are now present in teacher education programmes.

Rampton, B. 1990. 'Displacing the 'native speaker': expertise, affiliation, and inheritance'. *ELT Journal*, 44(2): 97-101. https://doi.org/10.1093/eltj/44.2.97

Commentary by Jason Anderson

Sixteen years before the term 'native-speakerism' was coined, ten years before the emergence of English as a Lingua Franca, and even seven years before Firth and Wagner (1997) sparked off what later became the sociocultural turn in second language acquisition research, Ben Rampton published this article in ELT Journal. He not only anticipated the emergence of key questions that have gone on to define applied linguistics in the early twenty-first century, but also offered carefully considered, socially just and apposite answers that remain useful today: all in just 4 pages!

In his article, Rampton proposes that we reject two terms, "native-speaker" and "mother tongue" as problematic. Most readers of ELT Journal will be aware of the substantial subsequent critique directed towards the first of these terms, less so the latter, although scholarship on multilingualism and translanguaging has recently begun to pick apart related notions (e.g., Li & Garcia, 2022). What remains innovative in Rampton's article is his recognition of the relationship between these terms. As he notes, "they spuriously emphasise the biological at the expense of the social" and "… mix up language as an instrument of communication with language as a symbol of social identification" (p. 98). He proposes a useful, alternative indicator of language ability: "expert" user, emphasising in the process that language ability is not about birth right, nationality or inheritance, nor even (simply) "proficiency". His preferred term, "expertise" recognises this awareness as something social, learnt (not simply acquired), contextually dependent and "never omniscient" (p. 99). From a personal perspective, Rampton's conceptualisation of expertise has been a key influence on my own theorisation of the construct, as a more useful indicator of teacher ability than "effectiveness" (e.g., Anderson, 2023).

As an opinion piece written by an author who was an emerging academic at the time, but has since gone on to become a leading sociolinguist, Rampton's article serves as an important example of how ELT Journal is able to provide opportunities for ELT/TESOL community members to contribute in important ways to the theoretical understandings that underpin, inform and influence what we do, both in the classroom and beyond it – further evidence, if it were required, of the importance and impact of ELT Journal, on this, its 80th anniversary.

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Commentary by Richard Smith

When I first read this article, it struck me as a 'different kind' of article, and as a breath of fresh air. I still think so 34 years later. Those were days of change – when articles in ELTJ were beginning to challenge dogmas such as English-only teaching or the supposed superiority of 'native speaker' teachers, and when 'whose English?' to teach or 'whose culture?' to focus on were beginning to be questioned (critical articles from the same volume that made a particular impression on me at the time were those by Phillipson and Prodomrou (ELTJ 46/1) and Medgyes and Harbord (46/4)). Looking back, 1992 can be seen as a year of 'critical turn', even if most authors in the 1992 volume (26 out of 32, i.e. 80+%) continued to be UK- or US-based.

One thing that was original – and that still seems fresh and relevant – about this particular article was the way it foregrounded the voices of a group of Global South teachers and of an issue that concerns most teachers in the world but which is still generally ignored in northern professional discourse, that is, coping with large classes (and addressing heterogeneity within them, for example with regard to ability levels). The article signals an alternative to dominant discourse, then, but not in an oppositional or over-theoretical way – indeed, the tone is constructive and quite down to earth, as – perhaps – a prototypical ELTJ article 'should' be. It is research-based but the research is teacher-initiated and rests largely on what is described as a 'disciplined effort to research our past teaching experience through talk' (p. 257).

The article is pleasurably meandering as it follows the twists and turns of the group's discussions (and occasional lesson observations), making me wonder if it would be acceptable to present-day reviewers, who may favour the confines of more 'conventional' academic research protocols. The article is modestly but confidently subversive of dominant norms in other ways too – rather than depending on any particular body of northern or, indeed, post-colonial academic knowledge, the authors assert the awareness they have developed of there being a 'vast repository of classroom experience which, when shared with other teachers, can lead to a body of theoretical insights and practical procedures' (p. 262). Empowered, and empowering, indeed!

Kumaravadivelu, B. 1993. 'Maximizing learning potential in the communicative classroom'. *ELT Journal* 47(1): 12-21. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/47.1.12

Commentary by Jeremy Harmer

It is almost impossible to choose, from ELT Journal's cornucopia of delights, just one article that has influenced me or which I find, as a methodologist, especially memorable. Maybe I should have singled out Throp's insightful exploration of different cultural expectations in EAP classrooms (1991) or Sherman's equally revealing interactions in an Italian context (1992). I am a big fan of Wong & Waring's article on teacher feedback too (2009), and so on. But what I have ended up with is an article by Kumaravadivelu which was important for me, at the time, and still is. It drives home a few fundamental truths about teaching and, more importantly, learning. The first of these is that what teachers think they are asking students to do and what students think the teachers are asking them to do can be remarkably different. Secondly, he points out that "language learning is a developmental process," and "……it is largely a subconscious activity: that is, it is more incidental than intentional" (98). Unlike tighter traditional procedures and methodologies, task-based pedagogy gives both teachers and students flexibility and this allowed variation provokes lots of unintended but sometimes serendipitous offshoots and outcomes.

It turns out that all of these articles sit in the same liminal space: how teachers understand and misunderstand each other and why it is so important for trainees and practitioners to understand this. In Kumaravadivelu's article he sketches out the background to his research, discusses teacher and student roles and describes the study: two teachers working with Japanese, Brazilian and Malaysian students as they scan small ads (back then) for finding an inexpensive wedding dress and finding an apartment. The exchanges are audio-recorded and transcribed from which he selects illuminating extracts. Of these ten mini-transcriptions (describing cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional and attitudinal misunderstandings) it is the tenth which is the most eye-opening and, at its conclusion, if read the right way, laugh-out-loud funny. With absolutely no disrespect to the teachers and students taking part – after all they are us and we should be grateful for their participation – this is an article that everyone should read, internalise, and think about.

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Commentary by Shelagh Rixon

This article was written at a time when ELT materials, and the textbook in particular were not the subject of the serious study that they are accorded today. However, its careful as well as spirited analysis of what materials can do have made it influential in the development of what is now a well-respected field. Materials creation has of course expanded beyond the textbook packages discussed in the article but the concerns addressed remain current.

The article reports on an early example of research into an educational innovation in ELT, a topic which has become frequently visited in the years since its publication. Most researchers in this area will have (or should have) cited it as an influential precursor.

It is also a landmark because of its enduring relevance as a focus for discussion and debate in professional development situations. As a teacher trainer and as a materials consultant I have used it unapologetically as a golden classic right until the present day with both practising writers and with teachers in professional or academic training developing their skills as materials creators of materials.

The article is provocative, robustly discussing the negative perceptions current at the time of published materials as deskilling influences, reducing decision-making by teachers and impediments to true interaction in class. These views are countered in the article by accounts of research which takes both learners' and teachers' perspectives into account. The message emerges that good materials embody good methodological and linguistic choices for teachers and act as a reference point for learners. Thus, they provide an essential map for everyone concerned of what is likely to occur in the tricky social encounter called a lesson.

The second part of the article looks at educational reform in ELT and the role that materials creation can play in it. Some may see the creation of new teaching materials as a largely symbolic process with frequent disjunctions between philosophy and implementation. Writers may have been uninvolved in the original thinking behind the reform and teachers will not necessarily be informed or on board with the intentions of the materials, let alone of the reform. Hutchinson and Torres, however, describe what seems to have been a successful project with a chain of coordinated effort amongst syllabus designers, materials writers and teacher educators . The message is that "the good textbook, properly used, can provide an excellent vehicle for effective and long-lasting change".

Nesi, H.1995. 'A modern bestiary: a contrastive study of the figurative meanings of animal terms', *ELT Journal*, 49(3): 272–278, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/49.3.272

Commentary by Keith Morrow

This article was submitted in 1994, when I had just been appointed editor of this Journal. I remember the impact it had on me personally as well as professionally. I had studied French and German at school and university but I realised, as I read the article, that I had no idea what figurative connotations different animals had in these languages. More importantly, I realised that until I had read the article, I didn't know that I didn't know them. I had a 'eureka' moment that has stayed with me.

In addition, this article helped me to clarify my thoughts about what sort of articles I wanted to publish in the Journal.

- It was interesting. The article is about a topic of interest and significance. It is not simply the report of a piece of research carried out to give the author practice in conducting research.
- It is written in clear, accessible language. It is not overlong, and not over-referenced.

- It clearly indicates its limitations, identifies existing work in related areas, and sets out areas for further research / development.

The article reflects, and contributes to, some enduring topics of interest in language teaching and learning.

- Cross-cultural communication: the use of English as an International Language and the role of cultural references and norms within this.
- A focus on lexis: in the 1990s the lexical approach was being explored. This article identified an aspect of lexis which had been largely overlooked in language teaching.
- Language knowledge: knowing about the distinction between 'denotation' and 'connotation' is important for learners - especially nowadays when simple online dictionaries often imply a one-to-one relationship between a word in one language and a word in another.
- Language awareness: the engagement of learners in 'noticing' features of the target language is an important tool in language learning. Here this is given a neat twist, by starting from awareness of how this feature works in different L1s and then learning how it works in the shared L2.
- Methodology: the use of simple classroom research techniques that could be applied in many other contexts.

In the middle ages, a bestiary was a collection of stories about animals (real and imagined) designed to improve the moral behaviour of the readers. This twentieth century version has a less lofty aim - but it can still teach us a lot.

Widdowson, H. G. 1996. 'Authenticity and autonomy in ELT'. *ELT Journal, 50*(1): 67-68. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/50.1.67

Commentary by Sarah Mercer

I trained as a teacher in the early 1990s when CLT was popular and "authenticity" was considered essential for good practice. Yet, I intuitively knew this was flawed. I had studied French and German and remember the huge pleasure and boost to my motivation when I successfully read (and understood!) a graded reader on my own in German. In my teacher education, I was being told that this experience was not authentic. Widdowson's article explains why: authenticity is typically ideologically constructed around the notion of the 'native speaker', negating learners' (and teachers') personal and pedagogical authenticity and their autonomy.

I have chosen this article because I feel the concept of authenticity is as pertinent now as it was 30 years ago (see, e.g., Will et al., 2023). Widdowson highlights two types of authenticity to reflect on.

Authenticity of materials and tasks: As Widdowson observed, texts, materials, or even tasks are not inherently authentic, but how people engage with them generate states of authenticity – features of use versus features of text (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014). As such, texts created explicitly for learners (e.g., graded readers) can indeed be authentic in their audience, reception, and use. Learners benefit from tasks that are meaningful and authentic to them.

Naturally, authenticity of artefacts also raises interesting questions in the age of generative AI. While AI-generated texts can 'look' authentic, they may lack

communicative purpose and context. This brings us back to Widdowson's suggestion that authenticity lies not in the source of a text, but in the kind of engagement it enables. Authentic engagement focuses on how we work with AI-generated artefacts, rather than traits inherent to the text or artefact.

Authenticity of person: Widdowson (1996, p. 67) recognised that learners "need to be induced to invest the language with their own personalities and purposes". Learners should be able to bring their authentic selves to their language classes and make language their own. Inclusive classrooms mean that every learner and teacher feels accepted and welcomed for their own authenticity and identities.

Widdowson's authenticity of person proposes that learners can be encouraged to take ownership of both their learning and also the language – an authenticity perspective connecting to discussions about ELF, World Englishes, translanguaging, multilingualism, and criticality about 'standard' forms of language in teaching and testing (cf. Anderson, 2017).

Thirty years on, we still need a critical, socially constructed view of authenticity in ELT to protect and nurture learner/teacher agency and identities, and widen what counts as appropriate English, languages, and learning materials.

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Commentary by Rama Mathew

As someone who has been working in the area of evaluation and teacher research, I had found this article illuminative as it suggested an approach that brought together materials evaluation and action research in a meaningful way. Now, after three decades, I realise it evokes a similar response. In fact, Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) had addressed this issue by distinguishing two types of materials evaluation, one as a 'workplan' where the suitability of materials for a given purpose is assessed and the other as the materials are 'being used in the classroom'. The task-based book 'talked' to the teacher to help them to take a critical approach to their work in the classroom. It made a significant departure from the theory-then-practice to a process-oriented approach to evaluation.

Subsequently, Rod Ellis (1997) put forward several compelling arguments in relation to materials evaluation. First, it was that there is an urgent need to carry out an empirical evaluation of language teaching materials as they are being used in the classroom as opposed to an *a priori* predictive evaluation. He added a further dimension to the notion

of materials evaluation: doing a 'micro' (and not macro) evaluation of a particular 'task' because it is more manageable. Tasks, well defined in terms of their objectives, inputs, procedures, outcomes and so forth, allowed a systematic investigation of which aspects worked, which ones didn't and why. This was understandable as Ellis was a 'task-man'. Although it was clear that the teacher had to carry out classroom-based evaluations of how well tasks worked, in my view, the most enduring dimension in the article is the focus on reflective practice/action research that contributes to teacher professional development. He cites Clarke (1994, p.23): teachers need "…to insist on an interpretation of events and ideas that includes…a validation of their own experiences in the classroom". Therefore it is the teacher (and the learner) with their own beliefs, values and experience who interpret the success of tasks as they come alive in the classroom.

This seemingly simple and yet powerful stance has stood the test of time. It has given rise to numerous action research projects the world over in the last 30 years. My own thinking and work with teachers on action research projects has been substantially influenced by Ellis's work. I strongly recommend that the ELTJ reader (re)read this incredibly well-written article.

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Commentary by Sávio Siqueira

Since my undergraduate years studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil), while also beginning my teaching practicum in a local language institute, I have always been an avid reader of ELTJ. Those were the days when I eagerly expected to have in my hands the ubiquitous dark-blue booklets every three months, ready to explore papers and debates that certainly shaped not only my teaching but several stages of my career.

The practicality of the articles published in ELTJ has always caught my attention and illuminated many of my reflections on how to become a better teacher of English. One article that helped me greatly, especially during my PhD studies, was *Transforming lives* by Ramin Akbari. As someone who comes from Paulo Freire's homeland, and proudly one of the first applied linguists in Brazil to propose and investigate a closer dialogue between English as an International Language (EIL) and critical pedagogy (CP), it was particularly striking to come across an article by an author exploring this topic, citing Paulo Freire, from a place as geographically distant as Iran. Apart from the article's inspiring content, discovering that Akbari had articulated ideas I had long defended in my own educational context left me not only surprised but very pleased. It truly made a difference in my work.

From a more practical perspective, it was his article that in many ways led me to deepen my investigations into the 'bland' content of ELT materials, textbooks in particular, which, like him, I had always considered to be "anesthetized and sanitized in order to become politically and socially harmless for an international audience" (Akbari, 2008: 281). This observation later resonated with what Prodromou referred to as "the plastic world of textbooks." In other words, two ELTJ articles, published twenty years apart, converged to inspire the work of a young Brazilian teacher and researcher.

As ELTJ celebrates its 80th anniversary, I return to one concise and powerful idea from Akbari's article, one that, to me, captures the spirit of this milestone and the journal's enduring contribution to the field: "language teachers can play a more active social role by including themes from the wider society in their classes" (p. 278). This line continues to resonate because it encapsulates what I have always valued in ELTJ: its commitment to bridging pedagogy, practice, and broader social questions, and its capacity to inspire teachers across contexts, generations, and geographies.

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Commentary by Graham Hall

"Unpackaging the past: 'CLT' through *ELTJ* keywords" is the opening article in 'The Janus Papers', the final *ELTJ* issue overseen by longstanding editor Keith Morrow. The *Journal* had not previously published Special Issues. Thus, this paper was at the very start of what has become an important part of *ELTJ*'s contribution to the field. Subsequent Special Issues have ranged from 'The teaching of English to young learners' (Vol: 68/3) to 'Decolonizing ELT' (Vol 77/3), and from 'The role of Teacher Associations' within the profession (Vol. 70/2) to 'Comprehensive Sexual Education in ELT' (Vol 75/2).

However, whilst some *ELTJ* Special Issues have responded to urgent developments in ELT (e.g., 'Generative A.I. and ELT' (Vol. 78/4) and 'Teaching in post-conflict or crisis-affected contexts' (forthcoming; 80/2)), *The Janus Papers* brought together articles that explicitly looked back at a particular area of ELT, explored their impact and speculated about the future (the clue, of course, is in the Issue's title!).

This article unpicks the development of language teaching methods focusing on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It challenges the histories (or 'myths') ELT professionals often tell about the development of language teaching - for example, that there has been a sequence of methods, each more successful than the last (the 'progressive' narrative); or, contrastingly, that particular methods are 'products of their times', each emerging in part as a response to or 'revolution' against what came before, then in turn being replaced in professional thinking and practice.

By exploring how CLT was described in *ELTJ* during the 1970s and 1980s, Hunter and Smith show that understandings of the approach changed significantly over time; there was no single or 'unitary' view of CLT over this period. Moreover, they demonstrate that the apparent emergence of CLT was less a 'revolution' than a packaging up of ideas that were already present and practised by many in the field (suggesting, perhaps, that there is nothing new under the sun in ELT?!).

But why does this matter? Firstly, as Smith and Hunter contend, bundling up different emphases and practices within a single methodological label ('CLT'), and positioning this within a historical 'sequence of methods', over-simplifies and misrepresents how people working in the many and varied contexts for ELT have taught (in the past) and teach (now). It prioritizes notions of the 'new' and 'change', neglecting diversity and overlooking continuities. And it arguably prioritizes the voices of those who formulate labels and/or terminology (often academics) over teachers' lived classroom practices. Consequently,

the article argues for 'demethodizing' the past, unbundling the labels to re-examine and potentially recover the professional ideas and practices that we lose if we ignore or misunderstand the past.

Smith, R. and Bowers, R. 2012. 'A.S. Hornby and 50 years of the Hornby Trust', *ELT Journal* 66(1): 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr085

Commentary by Cristina Whitecross

Many years ago, as a trainee teacher in Argentina, I came across a few copies of this journal, which had been founded in 1946 by A.S. Hornby. 'This is what I want to read, this is what I need to read', I thought. Little did I know that my first job as a trainee editor at Oxford University Press would be to work alongside my ex-teacher at Essex University, Professor Peter Strevens, to help edit In Honour of A. S. Hornby, a festschrift for ASH's 80th birthday (Strevens, ed. 1978).

Hornby was especially concerned to reach 'non-native' teachers of English as a second language. In The Teaching of Structural Words and Sentence Patterns he 'gives the teacher detailed instructions for practical ways of presenting in class a great many of the basic points about English. ASH's contributions have been to make plain the English language to the teacher, so that the teacher in turn can make it plain to the learner' (Strevens, ed. 1978).

Hornby is better known as the author of what is now called the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a pedagogically useful dictionary that became so popular that it allowed the proceeds to be used to set up the 'A.S. Hornby Educational Trust'.

As Brown (1978) wrote in his forward for the festschrift, 'To understand ASH as a person it is necessary to know two facts. The system of taxation in the United Kingdom is such that an author who derives his royalties from sales overseas although his books may be published in the United Kingdom, need pay no tax provided he lives overseas, at least as far away as the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. ASH has resolutely refused to live outside England despite the great cost of this decision in taxes paid. But secondly, as the slightly bewildered recipient of, in his view, a somewhat excessive return of worldly goods (he thinks he has been "lucky") he has for many years made arrangements through an Educational Trust to "put some of it back where it came from". By far the greater part of his royalties has been spent bringing teachers of English from the developing countries back to the United Kingdom, with the administrative help of the British Council, so that they can pursue further studies and return to their countries and teach other teachers' (p.x).

Hornby was an exceptional person and an important philanthropist. In the first part of this article, Richard Smith explains why Hornby was respected worldwide; in the second, Roger Bowers describes the work of the Hornby Educational Trust. In both respects, his impact and legacy are still felt today.

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