

# FELT Newsletter

*The Journal of the Forum for English Language Teachers in Ireland*

## ***In this Issue...***

- **Teaching Unprepared** *by Jane Airey*
- **Words, Words, Words...** *a Review by Bróna Murphy*
- **Why the Irish Speak English, and How** *by Prof. Terence Dolan*
- **TEFL in Ireland - Reflecting a Profession** *by Anne O'Keefe*
- **ELT Courses & Materials – A Case in their Defence** *by Sue Hackett*

You were an ELT materials writer...  
How unfortunate.



*An Associate of*



***Also in this issue...***

- **MEI-RELSA Action Research Competition**
- **ELTAC Conference Details**
- **News from ACELS**
- **FELT Editorial**
- **A Book Review**

# The Language Teacher's Voice

by Alan Maley

## *A Book Review by Catherine Cornette*

This practical handbook has been written by and for teachers. It grew from a practical need and serves the purpose of helping teachers, and all professional speakers, to achieve adequate use of their voice. It consists of 4 chapters, which should result in an improved vocal use among teachers as well as their students. The primary aim of the book is not to prevent voice disorders, but to optimise oral presentations and, as such, to facilitate successful transmission of information.

**Chapter 1** focuses on the awareness of one's own voice. A thorough awareness is indeed a basic condition for behavioural changes in the use of this fine and delicate instrument.

**Chapter 2** discusses some basic aspects of a good voice; i.e. an adequate muscular tension of the articulators and an accurate breathing technique. The author gives advice for a better relaxation of muscular tension and better use of the breathing apparatus.

**Chapter 3** places the use of one's voice in a wider perspective. Good breathing and voic-

ing techniques have a beneficial influence on the general psychological and physical well being.

**Chapter 4** gives practical information concerning the maintenance of a healthy and fit vocal apparatus. One's voice is susceptible to ageing processes and to environmental influences like air pollution, alcohol, smoke, ... these may have a deteriorating or pernicious influence on the vocal cords. Several protective measures are discussed.

**T**he relatively small size of this work, and the practical information it contains, makes it very useful indeed. No heavy theoretical treatise, this, but exercises and suggestions clarified by simple drawings. The language used is simple and therefore very accessible to non-natives. It is a useful instrument for at least three different reasons. First, a better presentation leads to a more efficient communication of any course. Second, an adequate use of the voice prevents pathologies due to vocal disuse or vocal abuse. And finally, it can lead to improved speech behaviour among students of language teachers by means of modelling. Therefore the intended audience is not restricted to teachers alone, but includes students.

A list of references and useful books is available to the reader who wants to know more about how to improve the use of his or her voice.

---

## Submission Guidelines & How to Contact FELT

Submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome and badly needed. Please send anything at all...

\* By E-mail to: felt@ireland.com

\* By Post to: FELT Ireland,  
c/o 102 Meadow Park, Churchtown,  
Dublin 14, Ireland.

We accept the following, among numerous other things, for our newsletter: theoretical articles, practical reports, jokes, brain-teasers, news, opinions, letters to the Editor, class-plans, cartoons, advertisements, questions, answers, book-reviews, reports on life teaching abroad, amusing stories about your students or trainees and so on... pretty much anything, really.

Please do not send e-mail submissions as Microsoft Word Documents (.doc) as they may carry macro-viruses; the Text-Only (.txt) format is the safest. If you

are using Word, press F12 and select 'Text-Only' as the file type. Macintosh formats are fine too! Nonetheless, please use your virus checker anyway.

The letters, advertisements, articles and views that are expressed in the FELT Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Executive Committee of FELT - nor do they constitute any endorsement or recommendation. We make every effort to ensure all information presented is accurate and correct and we welcome any corrections - however, we are human so we'd like to apologise in advance for any errors or inaccuracies that might creep in. Contents are generally copyright of the Authors, except where expressly stated.

No part of the FELT Newsletter may be reproduced in any way without the permission of both the relevant Author(s) and the Editor of the FELT Newsletter.

# Why the Irish Speak English, and How

*Professor Terence P. Dolan*  
University College Dublin

Two languages dominate any discussion of the Language of Ireland — Irish and English. Although a variety of English, known as Hiberno-English, is nowadays the national Standard Language of Ireland, the Irish language was the principal language of most of the population until well into the nineteenth century. In many ways, the history of the interplay between the two languages reflects the external history of the country. English has won the battle for dominance, but only to a certain extent, and from a certain point of view. The title '*Hiberno-English*', with its two components, clearly describes the relationship between the two tongues. What we speak in Ireland is Irishized English, which will be further explained and exemplified in the course of this article.

**F**irstly, we shall look at why the Irish speak English. English has been used in Ireland since the twelfth century. The Anglo-Normans began arriving in Ireland from about 1167 onwards, bringing with them the Norman-French and English languages. This meant that there were three languages current in Ireland from that time — Irish, Norman-French, and English. In addition, Latin was used by senior clerics. Norman-French was spoken by the commanders of the invading forces, who had been sent to Ireland by Henry II to conduct (allegedly) a moral mission to reform the Irish. The King had been authorised to do so by the only English Pope, Nicholas Breakspear, who had taken the name Hadrian IV.

In England, Norman-French was in use for diplomatic correspondence up to the reign of Henry IV (1399-1413). In Ireland, use of this language declined much earlier, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, but not before it had contributed a number of words to the lexicon of Irish (*e.g.*, *dinnéar*, from Norman-French *diner*, *buidéal*, from *botel*, and so forth).

English continued in use, but such was the power of the Irish language that the authorities in England began to worry about the resurgence of Irish cultural and linguistic influence, especially in that part of the country, to the north and south of Dublin, which had become known as The Pale. To counteract this trend, a son of Edward III, Lionel, Duke of Clarence was sent over to preside at an assembly in Kilkenny. This parliament issued the famous '*Statute of Kilkenny*', written in Norman-French (more as a gesture, than as an indication that Norman-French was still generally understood). This document prohibited the ruling class and their retainers from becoming more Irish than the Irish themselves. It was directed at the settlers. Hurling was banned, as was entertainment of Irish minstrels, and other notably Irish pastimes.

---

*Where the rules of the Statute of Kilkenny failed, sheer practicality ensured the eventual success of the English Language in Ireland.*

---

For us, the main interest is the ban it placed on the use of the Irish language and the adoption of Irish names by the English. People breaking this rule would have their lands and property seized. This would not be returned until the '*culprits*' had re-learned English.

**T**his Statute was ineffectual, and the Irish language continued to make inroads into The Pale. Change only came about with the adoption of a new scheme for governing and administering Ireland — the Plantations. This resulted in

speakers of English being '*planted*' at various places far beyond the Pale. The immediate effect was that for the first time Irish people away from the main population-centres, especially Dublin, had to face and mix with users of the English language. Those who employed them spoke English, and they had consequently to learn English, just to receive instructions. Where the rules of the Statute of Kilkenny failed, sheer practicality ensured the eventual success of the English Language in Ireland.

**T**he English Language benefited from the symbolical prestige attached to its being used by the people who had the power. In addition, Irish people began to emigrate to England in greater and greater numbers from the end of the sixteenth century. They all had to learn English as quickly as possible. Understandably, they had to learn it through the lexicon, grammar, syntax, pronunciation, and idiom of their vernacular language, Irish, which is substantially different from English – for example, in its verbal forms, which have no equivalent of '*have*' in English, and in its prepositional range. Thus an Irish person then, and now, will say '*He's been dead with years*', corresponding to British English '*He has been dead for years*', with the Irish preposition '*le*' (= with) being translated and incorporated into the English sentence, making it typically Hiberno-English.

Use of the English language became further established from the late seventeenth century in Ireland. The Penal Laws (1695) ensured that Irish people were denied formal education, and the informal education provided by the Hedge Schools played its part in the formation of modern Hiberno-English. English continued to flourish here throughout the eighteenth century. The great Seminary at Maynooth was established in 1795. Priests graduating from this college addressed their congregations in English whenever they could. From the 1780's the Penal Laws had been eased, thus helping to eradicate the polarisation, on political and religious lines, of those who spoke English and those who spoke Irish.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century the rise of English was unstoppable. The Act for the Legislative Union of Ireland with Great Britain (1800) strengthened the need for aspirant politicians to learn and use English efficiently for putting the Irish case in Westminster. When they came back to Ireland to address their own people they spoke in English and further enhanced its prestige. Many other events helped this process. A system of Primary Education was introduced in 1831, and the medium for instruction was English. Children were punished for using the Irish Language.

---

*The English Language benefited from the symbolical prestige attached to its being used by the people who had the power.*

---

A decade later, the Famine had a catastrophic effect on the poorest, Irish-speaking members of the population. Since then, in spite of the efforts of The Gaelic League and many Government enactments in education — in spite, too, of the brilliant work of many writers in Irish — the position of the Irish Language has become weaker and weaker. However, it also has another life, so to speak, in Hiberno-English, as instanced already with the example of '*He's been dead with years*'.

**T**he vocabulary of Hiberno-English to this day includes many words which are no longer in general use in British English. The use of these distinctive words is declining, most noticeably in the face of influence from Global English over the past decade. Many of the words cited here are used only by the older age-group. '*Delph*' is still used for crockery, '*shore*' for a sewer or an open drain, '*mitch*' for playing truant, '*bring*' for take, '*galluses*' for braces, and so forth. Interestingly though, some words which were last in general use in British English centuries ago are still current in Ireland, even among the younger generation. A good example of this is the noun '*bowsie*', meaning a disreputable drunkard,

a lout, a quarrelsome alcoholic, which is still in use by all ages, as my own research and writers such as Roddy Doyle testify (see Dolan, *Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, s.v. 'bowsie').

In addition to words classified as 'obsolete' or 'dialectal' Hiberno-English includes many words taken from Irish, for example, a fool is called 'an ommadhawn' (Irish *amadán*), or a left-handed person is called 'a kithogue' (Irish *ciotóg*). Often the Irish diminutive suffix '-ín' is attached to a word, for instance, 'girleen' (a little girl).

The verbal system of Hiberno-English is substantially enriched by the influence of Irish. For example, 'I'm after having my dinner' (Irish 'Tá mé tar éis mo dhinnéar aithe'), which means 'I've just had my dinner'. Another instance of Irish influence is to be found in such expressions as 'I do be here every day' (Irish 'Bím anseo gach lá'), which reflects the richness of the verbal forms of Irish which can express the habitualness of an action or state (see Dolan, *Dictionary of Hiberno-English*, s.v. 'do, do be'). There are many other examples of an Irish substratum in Hiberno-English verbal forms. Irish syntax, too, is to be found in such expressions as 'She came in and I writing a letter', where the "and + pronoun" formation, which is regarded as a solecism by the terms of formal English Grammar, is legitimate by reference to Irish Grammar.

The pronunciation of Hiberno-English also reflects the sounds of Irish. For instance, the use of the epenthetic vowel in such words as 'wurrum' (English 'worm'), or the rendering of 'ten' as 'tin' or of 'cemetery' as if it were 'symmetry'.

These are just a few of the very many distinctive words, verbs, and sounds of Hiberno-English. Some years ago, in 1983, Tom Paulin called for the compilation of a Dictionary of the Irish Use of English in his landmark Field Day Pamphlet *A New Look at the Language Question*. I was already conducting research and collecting material for such a project. The major part of this research involved my colleague John Loftus and myself interviewing speakers through-

out the country and recording their speech. We did not use any mechanical recording device, for fear of making our older speakers nervous. John Loftus recorded their speech phonetically, and the pronunciation and stress-pattern of all the words entered in the Dictionary are recorded following the system of the International Phonetic Association.

The entries include the head-word, a guide to its pronunciation, alternative forms of the head-word, its grammatical function, the meaning (s), its etymology (with cross-references to Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Dinneen's *Irish-English Dictionary*, etc.), examples from interviewed speakers, citations from literature (from Swift, up to James Joyce, and on to modern writers such as Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney, Maeve Binchy, Frank McCourt, Edna O'Brien, and Roddy Doyle) and, where appropriate, explanatory notes (e.g., on the distinctive use of the relative pronoun).

Hiberno-English is a singularly rich member of the family of Englishes and owes much of its vivacity and inventiveness to the underlying influence of the Irish Language and also to the turbulent history of the Irish and the English.

## References

- Dolan, T. P. (1999) 'Writing in Ireland', Chapter 8, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, Wallace, D. (ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dolan, T. P. (1998) *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

## © 2001 Professor Terence P. Dolan



Professor T. P. Dolan teaches in the English Department of the National University of Ireland – Dublin. He has published, lectured, and broadcast extensively on the Irish Use of English. He was formerly Director of the International James Joyce Summer School in Dublin.

Before coming to Dublin he was Hastings Senior Scholar of The Queen's College, Oxford.

# ELT Courses & Materials

## – a case in their defence

by Sue Hackett

### Introduction

Recently, at the 2001 IATEFL Conference in Brighton, Dogme ELT, a group headed by Scott Thornbury, presented a spirited case for a return to the '*essential conditions of language learning*' (Thornbury, S.: 2001) and the dismissal of globally published materials. Their proposal centrally involved a concerted move in ELT to the concept of 'material-less' lessons, in which, they asserted, we could as professionals rediscover our skills as teachers, rather than simply as deliverers of others' materials, thus, getting back to the fundamentals of teaching and somehow purify ourselves by being true to '*a pedagogy of bare essentials*' (*ibid.*).

Intentionally or otherwise, the ensuing debate focused on the rights and wrongs of using ELT materials and at its most idealistic, advocated discarding materials altogether and entering the classroom '*with no pre-set agenda*' but rather through interaction and negotiation with the learners, guiding and facilitating lessons, which, by their very unprepared nature, would be dynamic, contingent and enthusing.

**B**ut why have materials, globally published or otherwise, developed such a bad name for themselves? Why have materials become the focus of blame for lessons which go badly or which apparently fail to achieve what they were designed to do?

Materials selection and design is generally understood to be something that we all should develop skills in as ELT professionals. Even if the materials we produce, or select, are solely for the use of our own learners in our own classrooms, we are

likely to be able to give an opinion at the end of the lesson as to whether the materials have done what we intended them to do or not, *i.e.* whether they have been an effective tool in engaging interest and ultimately effecting learning. And this response to your lesson will, in many cases, be based on many factors including an indefinable '*gut feeling*' that the learners were interested by the topic, that the level allowed them to manage the material and, also, presented challenge, and finally that by the end of the process, there was some evidence that an aspect of language, skill or competence had been acquired or further developed, *i.e.* some learning had taken place.

---

*Why have materials become the focus of blame for lessons which go badly, or which apparently fail to achieve what they were designed to do?*

---

The Dogme ELT IATEFL presentation cited an example of a teacher who, having listened to the proposal went out and burned all her materials! The argument that materials are somehow subversive, and that there is a greater good to be gained by committing yourself as a teacher to the principle of material-less lessons, is based on the premise that this will allow real communication and understanding to take place without materials presenting an obstacle to the learning process. This is perhaps worth some further investigation.

Whatever your response is to this type of proposal, there can be no doubt that materials – whether 'lick and stick' photocopies hastily grasped as an anchor or stopgap, or materials which have been painstakingly produced to meet the identified needs, expectations and interests of the group of learners – are a fact of the ELT classroom and cannot and perhaps should not be cast out in response to ideological puritanism.

**T**o assert that materials are in themselves a bad thing is perhaps a rather superficial response to a much more complex and multi-faceted issue in which

that of teacher and learner empowerment regarding course and materials design is maybe one of the core facets. With this in mind, it is ourselves, as the teachers, who need to know what exactly we and our learners want/need, and, through training, provision of resources and opportunity, to develop our own skills in this area. In this way we can avoid developing a feeling of victimisation or disillusionment if, in identifying our learners' needs, we realise that they are not accommodated by the available published materials, and that in the majority of contexts, published courses and materials will not be sufficient *in toto*. And therefore it is within your control to make decisions, adapt and develop resources which will form the core of what your learners need/want.

**A**pproaches to materials selection, design and evaluation are a key part of any teacher training course. From a pre-service certificate which will concentrate on introducing new teachers to the range and variety of materials available which will offer some guidelines regarding selection, as well as some basics on how to design and produce your own materials, to other advanced in-service courses which will explore in more detail, not only the basic characteristics of a material, but also the aspects which differentiate a good piece of material to that of one which is mediocre at best, it is a generally accepted principle that materials in themselves are a primary learning tool. It therefore follows that we, as ELT professionals, need to be informed as to the principles and processes of materials selection and design which allow for effective learning to take place.

---

*there can be no doubt that materials are a fact of the ELT classroom and cannot, and perhaps should not, be cast out in response to ideological puritanism.*

---

Before starting off on the course design and materials writing process, however, we must consider some of the key precepts.

## *Designing Your Course*

### **1. Know your learners**

**Personal information:** *Who are they, e.g. age, nationality, gender etc?*

**Level:** *What do they already know? What is their starting point?*

**Strategies:** *What is their cultural and educational background? What strategies have they developed in their previous education?*

**Learner style:** *What kind of learners are they? What are their preferred styles of learning?*

**Motivation:** *Why are they learning English? How do they intend to use it?*

**Interests and assumed knowledge:** *What subjects / issues will engage their interest? What subjects / issues can they be assumed to be knowledgeable about?*

**Objectives:** *What are their aims / goals in learning English?*

### **2. Analyse the context**

**Time:** *How long have they been learning English? How long have you got with them to help assist/ further progress this process?*

**Environment:** *How can the environment be used constructively to support the learners and supply meaningful materials?*

**Dynamics:** *How can the peer relationships within the learner group be developed to support each individual's learning?*

### **3. Plan your course**

**Objectives:** *Do they meet your learners' needs? Do your learners understand them? Are they achievable in the time available?*

**Topics:** *Will they engage the learners' interest? Do they contain potential for controversy and variety of opinion? What topics are taboo and should be avoided?*

**Methodology(ies):** *What methodology(ies) will you use? How will you realise this/these in your course delivery?*

**Course design:** *How will you stage the course? What areas in your design will receive primary emphasis and why?*

**Outcomes:** *What outcomes are you aiming for at the end of the course? Do they meet the learners' expectations / needs? How will you evaluate whether and to what extent they have been achieved?*

#### 4. Course delivery

##### Pre-delivery:

- *Are your learners clear about their course aims and objectives?*
- *Are other stakeholders clear and satisfied with the course aims and objectives?*
- *Are the necessary resources available for the successful delivery of the course?*
- *What materials will you use/produce and how will you use them to help you and your learners meet the course objectives?*
- *Where will the materials come from?*
- *How will you evaluate their effectiveness?*

##### During delivery:

- *How are the learners progressing? Is it as planned?*
- *What changes/modifications should you make (there will be some)?*
- *How are the learners responding to the process? Is the course meeting their expectations?*

##### Post-delivery:

- *How have the learners progressed? What do they think of the experience?*
- *What are the results of the learners' assessment? Is it as predicted?*
- *What did they enjoy/not enjoy from the course?*
- *What was sufficient/insufficient?*
- *How can they now continue their learning process?*
- *What changes would you make to the course next time? Why?*

#### ***Providing Your Course Materials***

The short description above aims to identify some key issues in approaching your learners and supplying a meaningful course. But what about the materials needed to realise the course objectives once identified?

The following are the working principles and beliefs as proposed by Bolitho & Jolly (Bolitho, R. & Jolly, D., 1998) and would seem to support the approach of the course design process both in designing and pro-

viding a course and materials which recognise the learner as an individual with individual characteristics and needs, and thereby giving both the teacher and learner control of their course. When this happens, the role of published materials is relocated to its proper place and no longer poses a threat, as course determination has devolved to the people involved in either providing, or being provided, with their own course. Bolitho and Jolly's beliefs and principles can be expressed as follows:

- *Materials writing is at its most effective when it is turned to the needs of a particular group of learners;*
- *Teachers understand their own learners best;*
- *All teachers should have a grounding in materials writing;*
- *All teachers 'teach themselves' and enabling teachers to produce their own effective materials can only assist this process;*
- *Trialling and evaluation are vital to the success of any materials.*

If we take these key principles as informing our practice, then we accept that moving on from identifying learner needs and articulation of these in terms of learning objectives, we need to find texts, topics, contexts that are suitable for the realisation of the objectives. Having done this, we then need to decide upon the task design and exploitation of the raw material to produce a material which is pedagogically effective in response to our aims, and produce a material.

In many cases this is probably where we stop. The material is used – if successful we may share it with colleagues, and we either discard it or store it for another time with a mental note on what went well or could be adjusted for future use. And that's that.

However, there are further steps which could be taken and which would ensure a professional material produced at the end of the process which has been trialled, piloted and finalised in the light of a range of feedback.



The proposed cycle, to follow on from the initial production described above, is:

- After having used your drafted material, record your comments – what worked / what could be further worked on;
- Circulate your material with teacher's notes to colleagues for comment;
- Redraft in the light of your use and their feedback on the material;
- Give material to colleagues for use in classroom and collect feedback on its use both from the teachers and the students;
- Redraft in the light of their feedback and finalise physical layout etc at this point;
- (Optional) re-circulate for comment with appendix citing changes made.

If the material is for inclusion in a bank to be used by other teachers, be sure that the teacher's notes are clearly cross-referenced, succinct and easy to follow.

In adding to the initial first drafting stage, with trialling, piloting and response planned into the development process, you will be able to produce materials which are professionally developed and pedagogically sound. Also by undergoing and participating in this type of process, you will inevitably develop your own materials writing skills.

### Conclusion

If we take this approach to course design and materials development and recognise as a given the constraints of what is available on the global market, the frustrations involved in feeling strait-jacketed into using inappropriate materials are greatly reduced as other courses of action are available to us. Importantly, one's skills as a teacher are further developed and the

teacher's key role as the course deliverer and manager of learning is fundamentally enhanced. In short, we regain control of our professional environment, our role is re-asserted as a central one in the learning process, and any sense of a top-down imposition of contextually unsuitable courses and materials is removed, or, at the very least, diminished. The rest is up to you!

### Bibliography

- Bolitho, R. & Jolly, D. (1988) 'A framework for materials writing'. In B. Tomlinson (ed.) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Kanburoglu Hackett, S. (2000) 'A Specific Design for Specific Needs: Writing a Custom made Textbook'. In Harvey, M. & Kanburoglu, S. (eds) *Achieving a Coherent Curriculum: Key Elements, Methods and Principles*. Bilkent University
- Thornbury, S. 'Teaching Unplugged (or 'That's Dogme with an E')' In It's for Teachers, Number 1, 2001 (iT's Magazines S.L.)

If you would like to learn more about this proposal, the ELT Dogme website address is: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dogme>

### © 2001 Sue Hackett



Sue Hackett is Project Director at the Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS). She has specific responsibility for the ELT Registration and Qualifications Recognition Project and the Test of Interactive English (TIE), as well as being involved in other aspects of ACELS' work. She has lived and worked abroad with extensive experience in curriculum design and materials development, gained as a result of managing a curriculum and textbook writing project in Turkey. She is currently working on an MBA in Education.

### You know technology has taken over your life if...

- You try to enter your password on the microwave.
- You haven't played *Patience* with real cards in years.
- You have a list of 15 phone numbers for your family of 3.
- Your reason for not staying in touch with friends is that they do not have an e-mail address.
- When you make phone calls from home, you accidentally insert a '9' to get an outside line.
- You hear most of your jokes by e-mail, not in person.
- You read this list and keep nodding and smiling.
- You wish you had received this doggerel by e-mail so you could pass it on to your "friends you send jokes to" mailing group, only pausing momentarily to wonder whether they might have actually seen it already, but you couldn't be bothered to check, so you just forward it anyway....

# News from ACELS



With the summer upon us, the team at ACELS is busy planning what we anticipate to be a full summer period with lots of activity to do with TIE, the inspection scheme and the ELT Registration and Qualifications Recognition Project. If you want to know more about these on an ongoing basis or have any queries, comments etc about ACELS and the projects we are involved in, the best place to look is our website at <http://www.iol.ie/~acels>.

Although we are a small team at ACELS, as you will see from the site there are many people working with us to help us ensure that we accomplish what we set out to do to the highest standards. To give you the current information on each of the ACELS projects...

## ***1. The Test of Interactive English (TIE)***

Since Christmas we have been busy training new TIE Examiners to add to those already trained and examining for us. The training course has now finished and we are delighted to announce that we now have a large number of 2001 certified TIE examiners who either completed the recent Examiner Training course or who took part in a 'refresher' session and carried over their training from previously. All 2001 examiners have been awarded their TIE Examiner Certificate with their examiner number.

In addition, we are also very happy to announce the recent appointment of a TIE Coordinator – Miriam Hallissey – who joins us as a member of the ACELS team. Miriam is responsible for the organisation and administration of TIE and will also be working on the development of the TIE for learners of 18+, i.e. post school age. She

brings with her a wealth of experience in ELT both from abroad and in Ireland, working with both juniors and adults.

The 2001 TIE Teacher's Guidelines are in the process of being printed and will be sent out to all schools and organisations running TIE.

As you may know, TIE is a non-profit making exam and any income which we generate from it will be channelled back into the development of further TIE related projects. With this in mind, we are hoping that we will be able to initiate a Materials Development Project towards the end of this year, and we will be giving more information about that in a later edition.

Finally, we have a new TIE e-mail address – [tie.acels@iol.ie](mailto:tie.acels@iol.ie) – and we would be happy to hear from anyone interested in knowing more about TIE.

## ***2. The ELT Registration & Qualifications Recognition Project***

This project has been continuing to receive a lot of support and interest from all sectors of the EL community. We are currently working on the proposals returned from the 9<sup>th</sup> March working groups. The groups worked on making proposals for the key standards (*i.e.* criteria) for EL teacher training courses. These have been proposed in 3 categories:

1. Course programmes
2. Quality assurance factors
3. The Teacher's Dossier (similar to a portfolio)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> National Forum also took place on May 25<sup>th</sup>, at the Teachers' Club. The meeting primarily focused on a proposed registration process for EL professionals in Ireland. The meeting participants provided substantial feedback which is currently being used to further improve and refine the proposal.

This project is primarily aimed at recognising the professional role EL teachers play in the high international reputation Ireland

has for quality ELT provision. The establishment of a system for recognition of Irish ELT qualifications will ensure that this professional recognition is formally in place, and that quality is assured through procedures and standards agreed upon and established by all sectors of the ELT community in Ireland.

Additionally, the project aims to establish a register of all ELT professionals in Ireland. This will include all those ELT teachers currently employed in recognised ELT organisations/schools in Ireland. The registration of EL teachers will have clear benefits in that it will confer professional status on EL practitioners in Ireland and abroad through a system of reciprocity with other international teacher training organisations.

The draft registration process proposed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Forum is available in detail on the project website at the address below. As ever, any feedback, comments *etc.* are gratefully received so do let us know what you think.

The ELTRQRP Bulletins – No.s 1 and 2 – are now on the ACELS website and provide news of what has been accomplished so far as well as our targets for the second phase – so click onto <http://www.iol.ie/~acels> and find out more...

### 3. *The School Inspection Scheme*

This is the main role of ACELS and is ongoing. Renewal of applications for recognition is annual, and happens by the end of

April each year. This year a new component, a curriculum framework, has been added to the documentation required and, after a series of workshops and individual consultations with us, organisations and schools have submitted their frameworks for the first time this year.

### 4. *ELT Authors' Conference (ELTAC)*

Finally, preparations for the ELT Authors' Conference are going very well with some great names and very stimulating papers lined up. The programme is on Page 12 of this FELT Newsletter and is also on our website, along with the conference registration information. At present such names as Jeremy Harmer, Michael Swan, Catherine Walter, Leo Jones, Mike McCarthy and many more are all confirmed as coming so it really looks like being a major ELT event – and a great opportunity for getting round and meeting old colleagues, publishers and putting a face to familiar names.

As ever it is always a pleasure to hear from others involved in ELT in Ireland. Our contact details are below – please do contact us if you have any comments to make, or questions to ask...

### ACELS – The Advisory Council for English Language Schools

44, Leeson Place, Dublin 2.

Tel.: (01) 676 7374 Fax: (01) 676 3321

E-mail: [acels@iol.ie](mailto:acels@iol.ie)

Web: <http://www.iol.ie/~acels>



## Test of Interactive English

*An Irish Exam for an Irish Context*

- *Ideal for learners on short courses*
- *Just 10 days' notice required*
- *Recognised by the Department of Education and Science*
- *An Evaluation of Language Ability based on the Common European framework (Council of Europe)*
- *Suitable for junior and adult learners*

FOR FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT:

Miriam Hallissey, TIE Coordinator  
ACELS, 44 Leeson Place, Dublin 2.

Tel: 676 7374

e-mail: [tie.acels@iol.ie](mailto:tie.acels@iol.ie)

Or visit our website: [www.iol.ie/~acels](http://www.iol.ie/~acels)

**Visit our stand at the ELT Authors' Conference for more information**



# ELT Authors' Conference 2001



**June 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

**University Industry Centre, UCD**

## **Thursday, 14 June (2.00 - 6.30)**

- 1.00 - 2.00 Registration  
 2.00 Michael McCarthy: "What is an advanced vocabulary and how can we teach it?"  
 3.00 Keith Morrow: "Using professional journals for professional development"  
 5.00 Vaughan Jones: "Let's Talk about Me"

## **Friday, 15 June (9.30 - 6.00)**

- 9.30 Michael McCarthy, Fiona Farr & Anne O'Keeffe: "Bringing Real Language Data in to the Classroom: Possibilities, Procedures & Problems"  
 11.30 Adrian Underhill: "Using the 'inner workbench' to enrich teaching and learning"  
 2.15 Clive Oxenden: "What's up, Prof.? (Teaching Upper-Intermediate doesn't have to be so dull)"  
 3.45 Sue Hackett & Miriam Hallissey: "Test of Interactive English"  
 5.55 Catherine Walter: "Should we be teaching reading comprehension skills? What the research says"

## **Saturday, 16 June (9.00 - 6.30)**

- 9.15 Terence Dolan: "Competing Grammars: Irish versus English in Hiberno-English"  
 10.50 ACELS & FELT: "ELT Registration & Qualifications Recognition Project" – a panel discussion  
 11.30 Patrick Gillard: "Cambridge Learner's Dictionary"  
 11.30 Peter Moor: "Task-based learning: principles, practice, progress"  
 2.15 Leo Jones: "Working in English, the new intermediate Business English course"  
 4.00 Amanda Jeffries: "Advanced learners on short courses: meeting the challenge"  
 4.00 Jeremy Harmer: "Time past, time future: language and methodology in Century XXI"  
 5.30 Michael Swan: "Theory: a good servant and a bad master"



# FELT Editorial

The summer is upon us and not a child in the house washed... there are so many things happening in Irish ELT at the moment, it is hard to know where to begin.

## **FELT/ACELS ELT Authors' Conference**

The ELT Authors' Conference is happening over the weekend of June 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> in UCD and is being co-run by FELT and ACELS. The line-up, as seen on the opposite page, is nothing short of stunning. By now, all FELT members will have received special concessionary registration forms for the conference, allowing entrance for the mere sum of IR£10. This conference represents an unparalleled opportunity to get some last minute ideas before the summer really kicks off.

## **MEI-RELSA Post-IATEFL Mini-Conference**

Another such event took place in Limerick on Friday June 8<sup>th</sup> run by MEI-RELSA. A post-IATEFL feedback session was organised by Gill Nother, the MEI-RELSA Education Officer, through the ongoing Skillnets project. Anne O'Keeffe of *Mary Immaculate College*, Fiona Farr of the *University of Limerick*, Tim Smyrk of the *Dublin School of English*, Sue Hackett of *ACELS*, Mary Shepherd of *Language & Leisure International* all gave up their Friday evening to share some of their experiences of this year's IATEFL conference with us. Wearing my *Salesian English Language Centre* hat I was asked to give an Introduction to Action Research, so that the uninitiated could enter the great MEI-RELSA Action Research Competition advertised on the back page of this FELT Newsletter. Best of luck to those of you who enter!

The evening closed with a roaring wine reception. We hope to have a report on this colourful mini-conference in the autumn FELT Newsletter.

## **Professional Development**

The ACELS run *ELT Registration & Qualifications Recognition Project* is well in to its second phase now. At the ELT Authors' Conference, there will be a discussion of the ACELS scheme and other schemes aimed at fostering the further development of ELT as a worthwhile and personally satisfying career. There are so many avenues of professional development opening up to teachers that it would be a mistake to miss this informative session. A number of the ELT Authors speaking at the conference, as well as a few locals, will be joining the panel to share their experiences of professional development with us. The ensuing debate will, no doubt, be very interesting.

FELT has tried to play its role in this process by providing a forum for academic debate and continuing professional development. The material in this FELT Newsletter is provided by people just like you - so, why not put pen to paper and make *your* mark? Details of how to make a submission appear on Page 2. There are few enough experts in the world that we can ill-afford not to share our skills, experiences and ideas with our peers. I am talking to you.

## **Margaret McGahon Retires**

A person that few EL teachers will actually know, though she has had a profound effect on all our lives over the years, has left the world of Irish EFL. I am speaking of Margaret McGahon, who for many years was the Bord Fáilte Promotions Executive representing Irish ELT. On the occasion of her retirement, it would be remiss if FELT did not pass on sincerest thanks for all her hard work and selfless dedication over the years. Those of us who have had the honour and privilege of working with her will miss her greatly (though, I'm sure she won't disappear completely). We would like to wish Margaret a long and very happy retirement.

Finally, have a great summer...

*Ciarán McCarthy*  
The Editor



# TEFL in Ireland

## – Reflecting a Profession?

*Anne O’Keeffe*

Mary Immaculate College  
University of Limerick

In response to issues raised in Gronia deVerdon Cooney’s article on TEFL qualifications in a recent FELT Newsletter (see De Verdon Cooney, 2000, p.8), I wish to reflect on the notion of TEFL as a profession in Ireland. Gronia de Verdon Cooney questioned the validity of the ubiquitous ‘TEFL Cert.’, and she raised many salient issues about TEFL teacher training as a whole. Her article comes closes without redemption:

*Let’s face it, how many of you want to be TEFL teachers when you’re 30? 40? You’re really only doing this until you can get a proper job...TEFL isn’t a profession – it’s a long term holiday! ... Qualification? Who the hell cares!*  
De Verdon Cooney, (2000, p.8)

**T**he author hits on fundamental conundrums here: can one be over 30 and hold a ‘proper job’ in TEFL in Ireland? Can one work in the area of TEFL and claim to be a professional?

This question of ‘TEFL as a profession’ is not just confined to Ireland, in another issue of FELT newsletter, Martin Eayrs ponders on the same topic in the context of Argentina (Eayrs 2000). There is also universality to the notion of TEFL as a holiday from real life and real work. How many times have you heard a graduate say ‘*I think I’ll take a year out, travel, do TEFL?*’

The professional status of teaching in general has also been open to question, indeed recent state-employed secondary school teacher strikes in Ireland have led many to point to the ‘*grand life*’ teachers have compared to real hard working professionals, who work longer days and have substantially shorter holidays. To place TEFL with-

in the scheme of things, Doble (1997, p.62) offers the following quotation from *Dirty Tricks* :

*‘ Teachers are ... at the bottom of the professional heap...and I wasn’t even a real teacher. The only remarkable thing about me was the fact that I was still doing a holiday job at the age of forty. I was... another over-educated, under-motivated loser who had missed his chance and drifted into the Sargasso Sea of EFL work.’*

Dibden, M. *Dirty Tricks*,  
cited in Doble (1997, p.62)

The parallel between the latter and the sentiments in De Verdon Cooney (2000, p.8) is striking.

---

*How many times have you heard a graduate say ‘I think I’ll take a year out, travel, do TEFL’ ?*

---

For those of us who have, for better or worse, sought to make TEFL our ‘proper job’ and ‘profession’, it is important to reflect on what merits such nomenclature. Firstly there is a need to explore what constitutes a ‘profession’. A distinction needs to be made between doing something in a *professional* way and being a socially-defined *professional*. The latter comes from within and the other is external or socially attributed. A mechanic may be highly professional, yet my dictionary tells me that he or she is a person skilled in maintaining or operating machinery, motors, *etc.* (Collins Concise Dictionary 1989), while a lawyer is ‘a member of the legal profession’ (*ibid*).

**T**his points to a jobs hierarchy which is socially-defined, a club of doctors, lawyers, accountants and so on, though teachers don’t readily fit the schema. Eayrs (2000, p.11) makes an interesting point about the deconstruction of the old professional order within the knowledge economy. Within Ireland, teaching was traditionally seen as a *vocation*, with a highly pastoral role, and within the parish view of the world, having a teacher in the family was almost as good as having a nun or a priest.

**F**arr (2001), drawing on a corpus of teacher training feedback sessions, found evidence of this culturally-rooted notion of teaching running in the family - like red hair or big ears. One of her informants, while defending his poor performance in his teaching practice lesson (which is under review when the recording was made) takes a bemused stance, explaining that teaching was in his blood (Farr refers to it as the *'teaching gene'*):

Trainee: ... I had always a feeling about teaching but it it has been **in I have two aunts teachers and+**  
 Trainer: Umhum.  
 Trainee: **+my sister and my brother have taught as well so+**  
 Trainer: Umhum.  
 Trainee: **+it's definitely somewhere in the family**

Farr (2001)

Let us leave aside the socially-defined professions, and turn to *professionalism* which is a more reflexively-defined attribute of a cohort doing the same type of work and endeavouring collaboratively to do it to the highest standards, something, I would argue, which is achieved and defined from within. Doble (1997) provides some useful criteria to determine professionalism in teaching: (1) *commitment*; (2) *adequate body of knowledge*; (3) *autonomy* and (4) *status and prestige*.

### *Commitment*

Here Doble refers to the level of commitment on the part of a teacher to his/her profession. In the area of TEFL, he notes that the tendency is to *'wander'* into the area. His research, which involved interviewing teachers of EFL, revealed that teachers frequently talked about drifting into teaching English. Having tried other occupations, they were enticed by the possibility of travel. This lack of commitment is in contrast to that normally associated with other established professions. It is probably fair to speculate that in the past most people wandered into TEFL. However, the Irish economy is such that graduates have little need to wander into any job nowadays. In any case, how one enters a

career is by no means an indicator of one's subsequent commitment to it. Indeed, it has to be said that within recent years in Ireland, it is not possible to wander into TEFL, since one needs a minimum of a degree plus a 70 hour TEFL qualification, as laid down by the Department of Education and Science.

**W**ith a *'wander-in-off-the-street'* bar in place, is there enough to tempt graduates to stay in TEFL, and so become part of a *'profession'* over time? This is where it is difficult to argue for TEFL as a profession - there are very few fulltime, permanent and pensionable posts in TEFL in Ireland, and that includes the public sector (*e.g.* universities). Pay and conditions are subject, for the most part, to market forces. In the absence of tenure, pensions are obviously not offered.

---

*This is where it is difficult to argue for TEFL as a profession - there are very few fulltime, permanent and pensionable posts in TEFL in Ireland...*

---

Indeed, most teachers probably do not hold written contracts, and there is no dedicated teachers' union to mediate in teacher-management disputes and so on. It could be argued that market forces have, in the last few years or so, improved pay and conditions to some degree, but that's all very well when the forces are with you, but it is the *'profession'* that suffers when demand for teachers drops. So herein lies an imperative if TEFL in Ireland wants greater professionalism - greater *commitment*, not from teachers, but from language school owners, universities or whoever the employer may be. Such a commitment would entail making available more permanent posts and more fixed term contracts.

### *Adequate Body of Knowledge*

All professions have a body of knowledge that takes many years to acquire and apply to classroom practice (Doble 1997, p.62). To say that to be a professional one must have a critical body of knowledge is not to

threaten teachers of EFL in Ireland. The Advisory Council for English Language Schools (ACELS), as referred to above, has created an entry bar: to teach in Ireland one must have a degree plus a TEFL qualification which is of at least 70 hours. At present, ACELS is leading a large overhaul of standards in teacher qualifications; it is working towards standardising what is meant by 'TEFL Qualification', in partnership with stakeholders in the area. In this respect, TEFL in Ireland is in a very healthy state.

---

*This does point to a certain lack of esteem for TEFL within academia, which might be linked to the 'walk-in-off -the-street' TEFL teacher myth.*

---

However, though TEFL is available at both undergraduate or postgraduate level in many Irish universities, one cannot take TEFL as an undergraduate major at any Irish university. This does point to a certain lack of esteem for TEFL within academia, which might be linked to the 'walk-in-off -the-street' TEFL teacher myth.

### **Autonomy**

Most professionals are autonomous and are able to act independently. However, according to Doble, TEFL 'sold its soul to the business ethic' (Doble 1997, p.63) a long time ago. He continues that autonomy is only weighted on the basis of whether the teachers' independent actions affect school profits. Here one could argue that autonomy within most professions is bound by some limitation, for example, institutional ethos, professional ethic and so on. I would also say that most Directors of Study would see *teacher autonomy* as a valuable characteristic.

### **Status and Prestige**

This refers to how teachers are viewed from outside, that is to say, how they are viewed within their society. Doble notes that EFL teachers suffer from bad press in many countries. Archive searches of the *Irish*

*Times*, the 'paper of record', using the key words such as 'teachers + English' and 'TEFL' yielded nothing, while key words 'foreign + student', 'Spanish student' and 'language school' produced a handful of articles, but no story relating to teachers of EFL was found.

Let us pursue another route - not looking at ourselves from outside, but from within.

**W**hat markers are there of collaborative 'action' in pursuit of better practice and procedures, that is to say - efforts at 'professionalisation' of TEFL in Ireland? Earlier I referred to the ongoing ACELS-led project to set up an ELT qualifications register (the ELT Registration and Qualifications Recognition Project - ELTRQRP), this project has to date involved three public meetings, where all stakeholders (that is, teachers, teacher trainers, school owners and so on) were invited to attend, as well as smaller group meetings for core groups and a steering committee. It has solicited the opinions of EFL teachers in Ireland as to what they see as good practice in relation to teacher training, TEFL qualifications and so on. These data were disseminated in their report *Good Practice Consultation and Review: Report on Phase 1 of the ELT Registration & Qualifications Recognition Project*<sup>1</sup>.

---

*...professionalism is about seeing yourself as a professional and feeling you belong to a group of professionals.*

---

One of the greatest by-products of this process has been a very simple one - they have brought people together from around the country, creating a forum for TEFL teachers in Ireland, but also simply allowing them to meet others in the field and feel a sense of *cohort*.

Another interesting development for TEFL in Ireland has been the *marriage* of the Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) and the Recognised English Language Schools



Association (RELSA). The coming together of these organisations in 2000 might not have been seen as offering much to Pat and Mary Soap EFL teachers, however, to its credit, MEI-RELSA has, in a very short time, shown strong commitment to teacher development in Ireland. Most significant is their appointing of an Education and Training Officer whose role is to facilitate teacher development. They have received *Skillnets* funding (an EU/Irish Government funding scheme) for the piloting and eventual mainstreaming of a mentoring system, specifically geared towards novice teachers and also for teachers who find themselves teaching in areas, such as Business English, for which they have no prior training. Other interesting MEI-RELSA projects include an action research competition, and they are also running skills workshops around Ireland (personal communication Gill Nother, May 2000).

**I**n conclusion, I think there is evidence of a growing sense of professionalism in TEFL in Ireland. If this is to be nurtured, much depends on the degree to which teachers in schools are involved and supported, and, even more, on the extent to which they feel they belong to part of a group. Reflexively-defined professionalism is about seeing yourself as a professional and feeling you belong to a group of professionals. I would stress, therefore, the crucial need for the development of stronger teacher networks. As mentioned, ACELS and MEI-RELSA are playing their part in the '*professionalisation*' of TEFL in Ireland, however, strengthening and enlargement of a teachers' organisation is vital, so that teachers bring *themselves* together in pursuit of professionalism.

---

*...strengthening and enlargement of a teachers' organisation is vital, so that teachers bring themselves together in pursuit of professionalism.*

---

The *FELT Newsletter*, for example, offers a forum for EFL teachers and teacher trainers in this country, and the more it can encour-

age Irish *professionals* to engage with it and to contribute to it, the more it will add to a sense of professional cohort. I look forward to reading more on this topic in the coming issues.

## References

- ACELS, 2000. *Good Practice Consultation and Review: Report on Phase 1 of the ELT Registration & Qualifications Recognition Project*, Dublin: ACELS.
- Collins Concise Dictionary*, (1989) London: Collins.
- De Verdon Cooney, G. (2000) 'Legal, Decent, Honest... and Qualified? - A Look at TEFL Qualifications', *FELT Newsletter*, 2(1), 8.
- Doble, T. (1997) 'They neither prosper nor perish - the EFL profession reviewed', in P. Grundy (eds) *IATEFL 1997 Brighton Conference Selections*.
- Eayrs, M. (2000) 'ELT: A profession or just a rag-bag name?' *FELT Newsletter*, 2(2), 10-14.
- Farr, F. (2001) 'Relational Language in a Teacher Training Episode: giving criticism while saving face', paper read at a colloquium on: *Relational Language across Varieties of Spoken English*, at the American Association for Applied Linguistics 2001 conference, St. Louis, Missouri, March 2001.

---

© 2001 Anne O'Keeffe



Anne O'Keeffe is a lecturer in TEFL/EFL, at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Her research centres around language corpora and how they can be used to explore socio-cultural nuance encoded in the language we speak. In 1998, she was awarded the

RTÉ Doctoral Scholarship for her ongoing Ph.D. research into the discourse of radio phone in. Along with colleagues in the University of Limerick, she is building a corpus of Irish English (L-CIE), which links in with inter-varietal research between MIC, UL and the University of Nottingham.

# Words, Words, Words...

*An advanced vocabulary and how to teach it:  
a review of a recent talk by Prof. Michael McCarthy  
at the University of Limerick*

*by Brona Murphy*

*"It is the experience of most language teachers that the single biggest component of any language course is vocabulary. No matter how well the student learns grammar...without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication just cannot happen in any meaningful way", wrote Prof. Michael McCarthy (1990: intro). Given importance of vocabulary, it is hardly surprising that EFL teachers are often unsure, especially for advanced levels what exactly constitutes an appropriate vocabulary; how many lexical items do your students need to know to be considered "advanced" and more importantly, how much do they need to know about each of those words.*

**T**hese are the questions Prof. Michael McCarthy from the University of Nottingham posed and answered during a recent visit to the University of Limerick, in a talk appropriately entitled "Words Words Words - What is an advanced vocabulary and how to teach it?" In his quest to find answers to his questions, Prof. McCarthy linked his extensive and intensive knowledge and experience of Corpus Linguistics to highlight the efficiency that using corpora brings while dealing with vocabulary and the insight it allows teachers into how to teach vocabulary at an advanced level.

*An Advanced vocabulary is knowing its  
breath of knowledge*

In order to examine what exactly defines an advanced vocabulary, it is, firstly, necessary to establish the breath of knowledge required at this level. How do you do that, you may ask? Without the use of modern

technology especially the computer, it would be next to impossible to guess and estimate the number and type of words that constitute an advanced or any other level. This was quite evident given the estimates made by members of the MA and BA T.E.F.L. student body present at this talk whose guesses regarding the number of items in an advanced vocabulary ranged from 5000 to 100,000. However, Prof. McCarthy has used corpora to establish an approximate number.

---

*... how many lexical items do your students need to know to be considered "advanced" and more importantly, how much do they need to know about each of those words?*

---

He says that we can identify advanced vocabulary by looking at and examining frequency bands. He states that according to corpus based findings, 2000 words define the point at which "words stop becoming frequent and start becoming rare". From his own research, he has noticed that there is a nucleus of very frequent words that repeatedly appear and "all the others are rare". With regard to spoken corpora, Prof. McCarthy stated that the cut-off point for advanced vocabulary seems to happen after about 1800 words whereas in written corpora, it seems to be after approximately 2500 words. McCarthy chooses a halfway point between both spoken and written corpora to give a rough idea of the minimal "survival level" of vocabulary needed for day-to-day use; he stated that much more than a "survival level" would obviously be expected from an advanced student.

**C**orpus findings show that for an advanced student to be able to read 90% of any typical, non-specialist text without recourse to a dictionary, he/she would need approximately 6,000 words and for he/she to read 95% of any typical, non-specialist text, the student would need to be equipped with around

10,000 words. With these figures in mind, the Prof. McCarthy has already conquered one part of his answer to the question “*what is an advanced vocabulary?*”

### ***Frequency Bands: Difficulties***

However, even though the frequency bands give extensive data to work with, they are not without their problems. The first difficulty raised by exclusively adopting a corpus/frequency approach is that some words, which do not appear in the relevant frequency bands but as rarer words, are often already known because of the fact that words are learnt in semantic sets. Prof McCarthy cites the word “*Belgium*” as not being frequent in the corpus at the minimal “survival level” of 2000 words but it is still taught because it is part of a closed lexical set of European countries.

**T**he second problem McCarthy mentions is that some words do not actually appear until we reach very low frequency levels. “*Scarf*”, for example, does not appear in the first 10,000 words but that does not mean that it should not be taught in class. This shows that the classification between the statistics the computer presents and the way we learn a language is different to the way our mental lexicon is organised—our “*mental dictionary*” is not a list of words based on patterns and frequencies, it is a list of associations; we store words in sets; they are triggered and they connect with each other.

The third and final problem, according to Prof. McCarthy, is that some sets in the same frequency bands have gaps. In the frequency band of 6,000-10,000 words, for example, clasp, cling, clutch, grip, grasp appear but to our amazement “grab” is not there. Even though our mental lexicon would have liked grab to appear, as it seems to fit in appropriately with the others as part of the set, it is not there. And no matter how much our mental dictionaries tell us it should be there, the reality is that as the computer has not found the word, it will not show it in this band.

### ***What words do I Teach?***

Besides these minor difficulties, corpora have an amazing influence on vocabulary teaching. Having identified 6,000-10,000 as perhaps being the breath of knowledge of an advanced learner, Prof. McCarthy asks the question many EFL teachers ask: How does one decide *which* words to teach? McCarthy answers this question with a view to teaching vocabulary using texts. He states that when deciding which words to teach and how many words to teach, the EFL teacher must bear the three following points in mind: firstly, EFL teachers must be aware of the comprehension target.

This basically means that in order to use the text effectively and efficiently for different reading activities *i.e.* skimming and scanning, the EFL teacher must discover how many words are needed for his/her students to understand 90% of the text. This target will, in a way, simplify the task for the teacher and will focus him/her on the lexical items needed and worthy of being taught.

---

***Having identified the breath of knowledge of an advanced learner, Prof. McCarthy asks the question many EFL teachers ask: How does one decide which words to teach?***

---

The second target the EFL teacher is required to address, according to Prof. McCarthy, is the syllabus target. As syllabi outside of Europe often have a set of vocabulary that teachers have to abide by, they are therefore more restricted and must carefully choose the lexis.

**F**inally, Prof. McCarthy stated that the third target EFL teachers need to keep in mind is that of the specialised needs of EFL students. A student of law, for example, will need to be equipped with the necessary and appropriate vocabulary for the legal profession in addition to the number of words that categorise him as being an advanced student.

Having identified what an advanced vocabulary is and the number of items an advanced learner needs, it is necessary to examine what exactly an advanced learner needs to know about a particular word and what the EFL teacher needs to be aware of in order to give his/her advanced students effective and extensive knowledge appropriate for the level they are at.

### ***Advanced Vocabulary is Depth of Knowledge***

Firstly, Prof McCarthy indicates the fact that advanced students must know the broad meaning of the word as well as its sub-senses. He highlights and commends the efficient use the computer brings in discovering the general/literal as well as the more idiomatic meanings. Besides highlighting the meaning at this level, the computer is very effective at telling us about the register of a word.

McCarthy explains that what the computer does is that it presents the words in context from a variety of sources ranging from books to newspapers and beyond and from these contexts, it is possible to reach many conclusions regarding when they are used, how they are used, whether they are negative or positive *etc.* As the computer draws from both written and spoken corpora, the linguist is presented with an extensive amount of data to work with.

### ***Collocation***

Prof. McCarthy mentions the probabilistic relationship of collocation as being an important factor when teaching vocabulary at an advanced level. As native speakers, our knowledge of collocation *i.e.* “*the way words combine to form marriage bond*”, as expressed by Prof. McCarthy is implicit and thus language learners’ attention needs to be very much “*switched on*” to the delicate but no less important factor.

Prof. McCarthy stated that the computer plays a efficient role in identifying collocations. He explains that the computer selects lines which may represent lines taken from books or newspapers; these lines are known as concordance lines and as the computer

brings them all together, all instances of a particular word are collated to be examined and explored. The computer identifies the patterns, which are referred to as patterns of recurrence.

### ***Colligation***

Another important factor McCarthy mentions is that of colligation-like collocation, it is another example of a probabilistic relationship. Colligation is the way words form grammar relations with each other and these relations often vary *e.g.* conform to/conform with. Sometimes, relations can occur - like the above mentioned - with various prepositions and both are acceptable but one may be more frequently used by speakers and writers alike. In this case, “*to conform to*” has 14 instances as opposed to one instance of “*to conform with*” in the corpus.

---



---

***...idioms are tokens of culturally belonging and because they are rare and sensitive to speech and writing, they should be taught.***

---



---

### ***Semantic Prosody***

Advanced vocabulary has a lot to do with probabilities and likelihood of occurrence; however, words often conjure an emotional situation, which is sometimes difficult to pinpoint. When teaching vocabulary at an advanced level, it is essential to cover this area, which is linguistically known as semantic prosody.

### ***Idioms***

The final factor addressed by Prof. McCarthy is that of idiomatic usages. He stated that he felt that EFL teachers should teach idioms at an advanced level because although they are low frequency items in a corpus, they are salient due to the fact that they are opaque. According to Prof. McCarthy, salience is an important learning incentive and should be given the attention it is worthy of. As idioms are tokens of culturally belonging and because they are rare

and sensitive to speech and writing, they *should* be taught. Prof. McCarthy added that idioms are infrequent in both speech and writing, but they are not as polysemous as single words. He suggested that because of the nature of idioms they may perhaps be better taught for receptive use only.

### Conclusion

To conclude, a world of new technology in a new millennium and a new age has brought technical advances and as we have seen from the great insight Corpus Linguistics and the use of the computer has brought, teaching, as a result, has been improved and modernised. From the use of the computer we can identify advanced vocabulary by looking at frequency bands. We can identify the factors advanced students need to know in order to actually be called advanced students and finally, as a direct result, we as EFL teachers can benefit from the amount of insight that is derived from corpora and due to this knowledge. Both EFL teachers and students alike benefit from powerful effective vocabulary programs designed as a result of this new fresh

knowledge. Also such insights are aiding materials writers to make more informed decisions on items to include in EFL vocabulary and course books.

Long live technology and its ever-effective positive impact on language teaching!

### Reference:

McCarthy, M. (1990) *Vocabulary*. Oxford University Press.

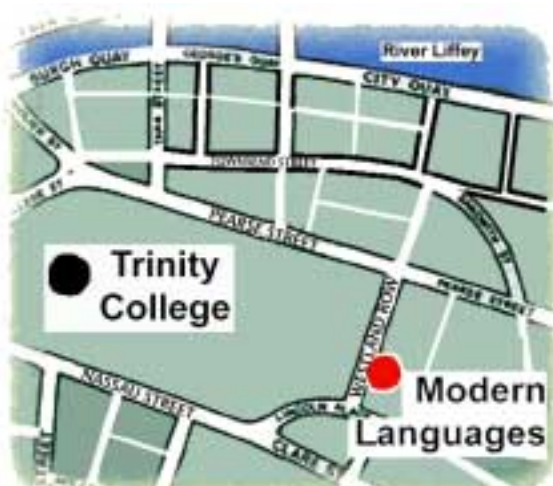
### © 2001 Bróna Murphy



Bróna Murphy is currently completing an MA in TEFL at the University of Limerick, where she has also taught in the EFL Department. Bróna holds a degree (Hons.) in English and French and has spent a year working as an EFL teacher in France. She has also worked in Spain. Bróna has a keen interest in in vocabulary and vocabulary teaching, Hiberno-English and CALL, and also represents novice teachers on the MEI Skillnets steering committee.

# Modern Languages Ltd.

- IRELAND'S LEADING ELT SUPPLIER
- FULL RANGE OF BOOKS AND ELT RESOURCES ON DISPLAY
- VISIT OUR WEBSITE @ [www.modlanguages.com](http://www.modlanguages.com)
- FULL ON-LINE SHOPPING FACILITIES
- SPEEDY EFFICIENT SERVICE ON ALL ORDERS
- DISCOUNT AVAILABLE ON BULK ORDERS



39 Westland Row, Dublin 2.  
Tel: (01) 676 4285 / 676 6103  
Fax: (01) 676 2388

E-mail: [modlang@indigo.ie](mailto:modlang@indigo.ie)

Website:  
[www.modlanguages.com](http://www.modlanguages.com)

# Teaching Unprepared

by Jane Airey

You find you unexpectedly have to teach a colleague's class and you have nothing prepared. What can you do that will benefit the students with no more resources than a lively mind and some blank paper?

I have imagined the class size to be 12 but all three activities can be adapted for any number of students.

## 1. Circle stories

This is my favourite activity in this situation and it practises speaking, writing, reading and grammar.

Put the students in groups of three or four, each with a blank sheet of paper and dictate the first line of a different story to each group. With larger classes you might like to write the lines down yourself and distribute the slips of paper to save time. The group continues the story for five minutes.

**S**ay 'Stop!' and get the groups to pass on their story to the next group in a clockwise direction. The next group reads what the first group has written, makes any corrections and then continues the story. Continue like this, giving the groups slightly more time as the stories get longer. When the group eventually gets the story it started, the members should decide how to finish it.

A class of 12 conveniently makes four groups and five additions to the stories which I feel is enough. With a larger class it would be necessary to have larger groups or two sets of circulating stories.

The stories are then read out to the whole class. As everyone has contributed to all stories there should be great interest to see

how the stories progress. The stories can then be collected in by the teacher and used later for correction work.

Here are some beginnings that I have found work particularly well:

- Jane seemed like an ordinary teacher but she had a terrible secret.
- Tim woke up to see green and red flashing lights outside his bedroom window.
- Julia was driving along a dark country lane. Suddenly her car stopped.
- Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess.

As you can see I have chosen very different story types to practise - fairy stories, horror stories, science fiction.

## 2. Elaboration dictation

This is another easy but more structured way to practise writing narratives. You will need to make up a very simple story (easy to do on the spur of the moment) and then dictate it to the students. They write it down, leaving big gaps in between the sentences. Then in groups of three or four they rewrite the story using better vocabulary and tense variation.

You may need to prompt the use of adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, tense combination and connectors.

Again, this is not only practising writing but also speaking as they negotiate in their groups the best way to embellish the story. The teacher's role is to circulate, helping and ensuring that everyone is involved.

For example :

**Dictate:** It was a cold night.

**Students write:** *It was a cold, dark night and the wind was howling in the trees.*

Julia drove her car.

*Julia was driving her car along a narrow, winding country lane.*

She saw a dog.

*Suddenly a small shaggy white dog rushed out in front of her*

She crashed.

*She braked hard but the surface of the road was greasy and she skidded and crashed into a tree.*

### 3. Picture dictations

Draw a picture on a hidden piece of paper and as you do so dictate what you draw to the students, who draw what you describe. Try to recycle some language that you have done recently and also introduce the language of position. For example:

*'In the bottom left hand corner I am drawing a beautiful young girl sitting in a deck chair. Next to her, underneath an umbrella...'*

This is particularly good for students preparing for oral exams where they have to describe pictures.

The students then repeat the dictation in pairs from their own pictures, comparing the final results to see if they gave/understood the instructions correctly.

One of my most successful attempts at this was dictating an under the sea scene with lots of fish, starfish, coral *etc.*, in preparation for the song *Octopus's Garden* by *The Beatles*.

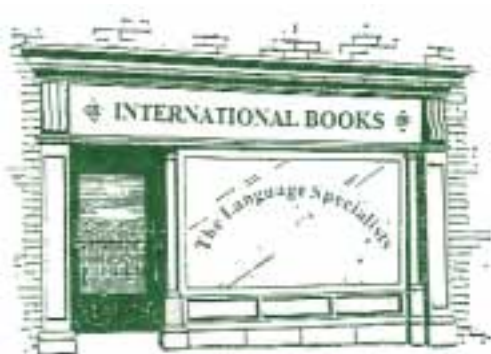
© 1996 Jane Airey &  
ENGLISH TEACHING *professional* Magazine

Jane Airey has taught English to adults and children in Spain and the UK. She is currently working at the Cambridge Academy of English, Cambridge UK.

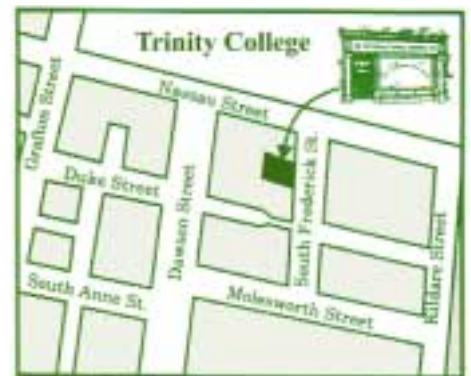
This article first appeared in ENGLISH TEACHING *professional* magazine Issue One, October 1996 and is reproduced here with sincerest thanks.



<http://www.etprofessional.com>



- Books
- Cassettes
- Videos
- CD-ROMs
- Mail-Order Service



- *English as a Foreign Language*
- *Foreign Language Books*

**International Books - The Language Specialists**

# INTERNATIONAL BOOKS

**18 South Frederick Street, Dublin 2.**

Telephone (01) 679 9375 Fax: 679 9376

E-mail: [info@interbooksirl.com](mailto:info@interbooksirl.com)

Hours of Business: Mon.-Sat. 9 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.

# Action Research Competition



## Win A Free Teacher Development Course at Pilgrims plus Flights & Accommodation

*Action Research is a strategy for reflecting on your teaching.*

*“It is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analysing it in order to make decisions about what your future practice should be.”*

(Wallace 1998)

Most teachers engage in informal action research in their day-to-day teaching. This competition offers you an opportunity to systematise it and the possibility of winning a prize.

*In your entry submission you might like to include brief descriptions of:*

(a) The topic of your research.

Try to be very focussed here, *e.g.*

Interaction between Xiao, a Chinese student, and Luca, an Italian student in my class during speaking practice activities.

(b) The data collection tools you used to research your topic.

*e.g.* verbal reports, questionnaires, interviews, observation techniques, trialling, evaluation, case studies *etc.*

(c) Your analysis of the data collected.

(d) The changes you made (or didn't make) in your classroom as a result of your research and analysis.

(e) How you shared your ideas and findings with others.

**Note:** The aim of action research is to help you to develop as a teacher. We'd like you to ensure that your action research derives from your classroom and has implications for your teaching. Sharing of ideas between teachers is integral to the action research strategy of teacher development.

Entries must be submitted by July 18<sup>th</sup>,

2001, so tailor your action research to meet this deadline, *i.e.* don't be too ambitious!

**Send your entries to:**

Gill Nother  
MEI-RELSA,  
107 South Circular Road, Dublin 8.  
**info@mei.ie**  
Fax: (01) 453 04 32

Entries must be received by:  
5p.m. on Wednesday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001

**Note:** *This Competition is open to all teachers working in MEI-RELSA schools.*

**Competition  
Proudly  
Sponsored by:**



**Pilgrims™**

Humanising Language Teaching

[www.hltmag.co.uk](http://www.hltmag.co.uk)



International Books, Dublin