

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL BINARIES: RESEARCHING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ESOL (TO ADULTS) IN NEW ZEALAND

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Introduction

This paper is concerned with English language issues relating primarily to bilingual migrants in the tertiary educational sector in New Zealand. The central thesis is that a research alliance between the teachers of migrants and academics in Applied Linguistics and related fields could invigorate a research programme aimed at making a *real* difference in New Zealand on a variety of planes: knowledge production around language, education and migrant policy; language teacher education; the language classroom; the lives of migrants; the work of language professionals; and the impact of wider government policy on the lives of migrants.

Some research spaces

Particularly relevant to a discussion on research in these areas is the fact that *Aotearoa*¹, swiftly jettisoned by a National government, lacked the support of detailed knowledge about the language situation in New Zealand. Without the research a language policy was unlikely to eventuate and the lack of a language policy made it less likely that the research would be done (Crombie and Paltridge, 1993). Importantly, some of the wider issues often thought to be tangential to language education, may, in fact, turn out to be integral to language learning and teaching, policy and the lives of migrants, and therefore worth incorporating in language/research programmes.

Government funding and macro tertiary educational policies change constantly, affecting the life chances of the groups we work with. Language educators seem to engage in little, if any, analysis

¹ *Aotearoa* (Waite, 1992) was the title of a two part discussion document outlining the salient requirements and conditions for a languages policy in New Zealand.

of this. Governmental accusations of educational capture² have put many off. And Roger Kerr's threats to a Victoria University academic speaking out last year about changes at Victoria University (Boland, 1998) do not make the situation easier. Recent shifts deleterious to migrant education overall include:

- The move to the uncapped Universal Tertiary Tuition Allowance, enabling the provision of more places, but with a lower government subsidy (from 75% to 72.4%) in 1999 meant that student fees increased substantially. The Tuition Allowance is akin to a voucher system and enables the government to more easily reduce its commitment to publicly funded tertiary education in the future.

- The growing uniformity in the tertiary sector, generally, and a collapse of boundaries between public and private, further and higher education and university and teaching institutions. This restructuring has been in the interests of creating a hyper-competitive education market that does little to coordinate the needs of disenfranchised groups like refugees, Pacific Islands people, other migrant groups, and Maaori wanting to access language and literacy education. Current government thinking is that the market will decide and provide.

- The contracting of educational 'services' (including ESOL courses) by the new super agency Work and Income New Zealand - WINZ. These contracting arrangements have meant that language programmes which have been ongoing since 1996 are funded on a financial year rather than an academic year to fit in with WINZ budgetary allocations (sometimes these contracts are issued on a six monthly basis). This is causing difficulties with teacher contracts, security of employment and timetabling, as well as forward planning of any kind. While flexibility and an ability to meet student needs is always essential in language education, rearranging educational provision for the convenience of 'fitting in' with the financial year seems to suggest inappropriate prioritising. Again, a coordinated approach from language educators across the sector backed by a comprehensive research programme could be what is needed to work towards an integrated response by government to the education needs of unemployed migrants.

A New Zealand pakeha, qualified language teacher is teaching a group of African refugees. The class is ESOL literacy and many of these students have not learned to read and write in their own

² Government concepts of 'capture' have dominated policy documents since 1984. For example, New Zealand governments have successively regarded educational professionals (unless their opinions concurred with the government) as too self-interested to be able to advise government on educational policy. As Butterworth and Tarling (1994, p.69) write: "Administrative capture became a leitmotif of the debate on restructuring the public service as a whole." As they go on to point out, the concept underpinned the Picot Report, which advocated giving greater say in compulsory education to parents, thus providing a balance to the supposed power of the education bureaucracy and teachers.

language. The teacher admonishes a group for being late. She says, "New Zealand taxpayers are paying for this class and so you have an obligation to come on time" - with no thought of the particular problems these people might be having settling in New Zealand, nor the power differential between herself and the students³.

Qualified ESOL teachers may be able to teach the 'conditional', vocabulary in context, they may be very proficient at making their own worksheets and know their individual students well, they may have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the latest resources and work tirelessly to provide 'quality learning experiences' for their students. Can they, though, call upon a political understanding of what is happening in New Zealand/global society and the structured powerlessness of many of the people they teach to inform their work in the classroom? Very little of this kind of analysis is evident in teacher education courses, and even less is demanded under the rubric of on-going professional development for language teachers.

Research needs to address issues in teacher education beyond 'teaching the language'. Although there is some lip service paid to this sentiment, it is questionable as to whether language, and particularly, ESOL teachers really have the critical political, historical and cultural knowledge to work effectively with very marginalised groups. The Diploma in Language Teaching to Adults/TESOL taught in the School of Languages at Auckland Institute of Technology makes an effort to introduce critical aspects of applied linguistics and language teaching throughout the course. In addition, one of the eight modules in the one year full-time Diploma, entitled "Focus on the Context" attempts to engage trainee language teachers in some of the wider issues of teaching language. The module covers areas such as: international flows of people and language, language planning and policy, refugee education issues, the internationalisation of education, funding and wider tertiary education policy impacting on language teaching, immigration policy, and cross cultural teaching and communication. Sustained investigations in the area could probably integrate such diverse strands more effectively through an entire language teaching programme.

These are just a couple of the instances where more public and academic comment and debate, informed by a rigorous, critical and politicised⁴ research base across the tertiary

³ Personal observations in an Auckland language teaching institution.

⁴ The concept of politicising a research agenda tends not to be popular in New Zealand. Butterworth and Tarling (1994), lamenting the fact that the universities did not use the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy to better effect in directing opinions about tertiary education at the time, noted that:

Greater involvement would have been mutually beneficial. But New Zealand public culture had tended to discourage both individuals and institutions from too open an engagement with critical issues. There is a generalised distaste for the political, which is commonly in New Zealand translated as partisan (Butterworth and Tarling, 1994, p.117).

language/migrant sector in New Zealand would be of assistance in: influencing policy at all levels; improving the teaching and learning of ESOL and English literacy; fostering Community and International languages, and Maaori; enhancing the lived experiences of those outside the middle-class pakeha norm and helping New Zealand find a *decent* place for itself in the world ⁵.

'Our' disciplines

The question is: how successfully are we pursuing this task in New Zealand? Pennycook's (1994) criticism of the core projects of Applied Linguistics and Linguistics internationally is a salutary one and may serve to throw some light on the situation here. Pennycook (1994, p.107) notes that "...ultimately the most significant effect of the colonial spread of English may have been not so much the Anglicist insistence on education in English but rather the Anglicist-inspired study of English". The discursivity built up in the disciplines has revolved principally, he contends, around conservative notions of standardisation and prescription; and, on the more 'liberal, pluralist' side, descriptions of English varieties. These concentrations and preoccupations have meant the exclusion of issues concerning the cultural, social and political impact of English. Another side to the conundrum is that the international expansion of English, and therefore the enterprise of English Language Teaching, tends to be seen in the disciplines as well as amongst teachers as uniformly 'natural, neutral and beneficial' (Pennycook, 1994, p.11). Pennycook notes that this is despite clear evidence that the requirement for English, both in English first language countries and English second language countries, stands in the path of a well-rounded education (good English, rather than other types of knowledge, becomes the leitmotif of success), and limits people's life chances by restricting employment opportunities and controlling political processes. Auerbach (1993, p.544) has observed, for example, that "...immigrants and refugees in adult ESL classes ... often have the worst jobs, if any and the poorest housing conditions". And Pattanayak (1969, cited in Pennycook, 1994, p.15), commenting on the Indian situation, says: "English serves as the distinguishing factor for those in executive authority, no matter how low the level is, and acts as a convenient shield against the effective participation of the mass of the people in the governmental process". Unlike critical education⁶ and literacy studies⁷, Applied Linguistics and Linguistics have not developed (with a few exceptions) a critical, emancipatory and politically active generation of knowledge. Even the closely re-

⁵Note Tim Hazeldine's (1998) notion of decency encompassing the idea of care and provision for everyone in the community.

⁶ See for example: Giroux, 1988a; Illich, 1972; Apple, 1986

⁷ See for example: Street, 1984; Lankshear (with Lawler), 1987; Gee, 1996; Levine, 1986.

lated fields of first and second language literacy have rarely come together⁸, possibly because they are premised on such different philosophical foundations. Canagarajah (1997) has argued through Phillipson (1992), for example, that bidialectal and bilingual students represent two facets of the global hegemony of English. His study comparing the English literacy learning of African American and Lankan Tamil students is an attempt "...to bridge the scholarship on bidialectal and bilingual minority students in the educational domain" (Canagarajah, 1997, p.16).

Pennycook (1994) connects the current disciplinary limitations in Applied Linguistics with the early construction of the discipline as a science. In particular, he believes this explains its underpinning positivism and inability to deal with the very human and culturally constructed areas it needs to address. Hopefully, in the late nineties people do understand the partiality of their research and approaches to teaching. Nevertheless, it does seem that the footprints of the 'discipline as science' have continued to lurk, and may be at the heart of the reason why the New Zealand research effort has been so apolitical and relatively ineffective in bringing policy changes at a national level⁹. The effects of the normalising and reforming impulses of neoliberalism (now well-entrenched in New Zealand) may also be responsible for the fact that politicised and politicising knowledge about migrants, culture and language has not been at the forefront of research agendas. Peters (1996), for example, draws on Foucault's notion of bio-power (the connection between individual conduct and institutional/ governmental structures and practice) to conclude that:

Bio-power...exists in a less obviously statist form under neoliberalism (than fascism, for example), a form that is essentially commodified, decentralised, and demassified - a form, moreover, that is still actively accomplished, in large part, through the social and human sciences that have become indispensable for present neoliberal forms of government (Peters, 1996, pp.124-125).

Given this insight, language educators may need to interrogate their own practices by putting more energy into understanding how their own teaching and professional practices improve (or do not improve) the life chances of their students. Gwendoline Cleland

⁸ It is worth noting that as a result of the literacy reports for Australia, released in September 1997, Joseph Lo Bianco has recommended a national language and literacy policy (as opposed to the current Australian national languages policy). He writes: (there) "...is ample justification for a comprehensive and targeted policy for adult literacy in Australia. However it must be a policy that incorporates a strong focus on English as a second language teaching and that does not privilege the work-training domain over community, family and neighbourhood settings" (Lo Bianco, 1997, p.1).

⁹ Alison Hoffman's (1998) article puts forward a strong argument for greater involvement of applied linguists in the policy cycle. This author would wish to augment Hoffman's argument by a call for language teachers *and* academics to be involved.

(1998) hinted at a need for this kind of professional renewal in her report on the 1998 Annual TESOL Convention held in Seattle. In reporting on Professor Bank's address she noted that he had discussed three key areas: changes to American society (including increased linguistic and cultural diversity and the gap between rich and poor), the issue of simultaneously accommodating the problematical binary of unity and diversity, and the question of how to provide for multicultural citizenship. She reported:

He also constantly stressed the fact that we cannot separate ourselves off from these problems saying they belong to new immigrants or the government, or someone else - not us. We are all inextricably bound up in each other's lives. The whole tenor of his (Professor Banks') address could equally well apply to our New Zealand situation (Cleland, 1998, pp.11-12).

Language Research in the Postmodern Condition¹⁰

The grand narrative of English and English teaching that Pennycook refers to as 'natural, neutral and beneficial' (Pennycook, 1994, p.11) is firmly based in a positivist, Enlightenment view of the world and disciplinarity. One universal view which, under scrutiny turns out to be essentially male, middle class, English speaking and, of course, Western. Even critical analyses related, for example, to Habermas's (1987) community of consensus, do not serve the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of the micro-societies and communities which make up our world. These views are fundamentally challenged when one takes other cultural norms and traditions into account. As Christopher Brumfit (1997, p.23) notes: "The interests of a 'universal subject', a human being sharing attributes with all other human beings, conflict with the interests of an individual uniquely grounded within a particular culture". Fairclough's (1997) suggestion for a way to deal with the issue of difference, in particular (both cultural and linguistic), and the need to infuse our research with genuine educational and social goals, is a postmodern/poststructural turn to our investigations.

In 1990, Pennycook outlined the current epistemological crisis for traditional linguistics and applied linguistics and ventured a characterisation of a Critical Applied Linguistics. His essential argument was to tentatively employ a principled postmodernism, that is a postmodernism which "...retains a notion of the political and ethical" (Pennycook, 1990, p.17) while refusing exclusion and working towards a different (perhaps rediscovered) way of imagining and conceptualising the world.

¹⁰ The term was coined by Jean Francois Lyotard in his 1984 publication (translated) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

Fairclough (1997) builds on this sentiment of political action in looking at the role of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). For example, he notes that CDA must act "... as a bridge between socio-political movements and the academy, giving wider public presence to the perspectives and knowledges of these movements, while bringing theoretical resources to them" (1997, p.13). He goes on to say: "The broader political objective here is a renewal of an emancipatory politics which gives space to difference" (1997, p.13), noting that this is the frame within which he believes CDA should engage with poststructuralist and postmodern critique of language, thus allowing for the tying together of diverse theoretical positions "...anchored in different socio-political experiences and struggles" (1997, p.16).

Christopher Brumfit, in advocating a weak form of postmodernism, to avoid the "self-defined irrelevance" of a strong form, argues that Applied Linguistics urgently requires: "a recognition of difference within a context of similarity, of alternative views that never completely identify with others" (Brumfit, 1997, p.27). However, he continues to privilege linguistic theory as the ongoing project of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics over political, ethical and social action which he sees will be addressed when and where necessary.

The weight given to purely linguistic and other types of knowledge, and theoretical versus practical approaches in language research for "New Times" (Hall and Martin, 1989) can be a question of shifting proportions and integrations rather than a crude either/or approach. This synthesis may be a way of developing the comprehensive and inclusive policy frameworks that Peters and Marshall (1996) note are important for moving on from critique towards a reality discursively shaped by a critical social policy, in this case, a critical language policy and praxis.

A move in this direction may well be achieved through the development of a consciousness around two principles:

1. A genuine politicised research collaboration between the practical and the theoretical, between teachers of ESL to bilingual adult learners and language academics.
2. A reconceptualisation of the language teacher as a politicised teacher/scholar able to engage in research following her own interests and questions and relevant to her and her students' lived experiences of teaching and learning.

Language academics and collaboration

Judyth Sachs during her Presidential Address to the 1997 Australian Association of Research in Education Conference considered the field and future of educational research in the ever-changing, uncertain and ambiguous university institution. She observed that

there was scope for "...new ways of operating and of seeing anew what has previously been taken for granted" (Sachs, 1997, p.6) with a particular emphasis on the need for collaboration between academics and teachers. Sachs (1997) is referring to primary and secondary teachers but her argument applies equally well to academics and language/literacy teachers of adults. She writes of the need for:

... a reciprocity between both parties in order to look at and understand the material constraints and conditions under which both are working. A recognition of the differences and continuities in the work practices between academics and their school-based colleagues will facilitate a clear articulation of expectations and possibilities.... (and an ability) to work in new ways with the profession through the idea of collaborative and practitioner research and... the idea of activist research (Sachs, 1997, pp. 6-7)

Sachs (1997) notes the distinction of researching for the profession and researching with the profession, a useful differentiation for Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching. She observes that researching *with* the profession requires a real sense of collaboration: it enables teachers to understand and improve practice as well as to understand the theoretical base for their knowledge. She also points out that it is an "... opportunity for academics to better know and understand teachers' knowledge" (Sachs, 1997, p.7). Collaborative research runs the risks, though, of falling into traditional apprentice/master moulds as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990, p.3) note:

Co-operative research provides valuable insights into the interrelationships of theory and practice, but like more traditional interpretative research, often constructs and predetermines teachers' roles in the research process, thereby framing and mediating teachers' perspectives through researchers' perspectives.

Pennycook (1994) picks up the challenge in our own context:

A key problem with the way in which teachers are constructed by the Discourse of EIL is that (we) are seen as classroom technicians (cf. Giroux, 1988b; Apple, 1986), using the latest and most scientific methods to convey the much sought-after neutral medium of communication: English. With the gradual consolidation of applied linguistics, furthermore, there has been a constant move towards educational expertise being defined in the hands of the predominantly male Western applied linguistic academy rather than in the hands of the largely female teaching practitioners, many of whom work on both the domestic and the international periphery.... In order to pursue critical pedagogies of English, then, we need a reconceptualisation of the role of teachers and applied linguists that does away with the theory/practice divide and views teachers/applied lin-

guists as politically engaged critical educators (Pennycook, 1994, p.303).

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) maintain, teachers can bring a particularly *emic*¹¹ perspective to problems which is simply unavailable to the outside observer. In addition, teachers will ask different questions and find different ways of investigating them. This wider contribution to the knowledge base is vital for "...both the school based teaching community and the university-based research community" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990, p.4). After all, academics teach as well, often as language teachers, and the more knowledge they have of learners, classrooms and teacher knowledge the better.

Teachers, as well as applied linguists should have the ability to influence and certainly contribute to policy and action in the field of language and migrant issues in New Zealand. Porter (1997, p.91) writes along these lines in the context of education but the implications apply as well to the language education context:

Both the better definition of ... problems and experimentation with solutions need to involve the expert knowledge of the researchers together with the experience-based knowledge of the practitioners. It is time to stop talking past each other, to listen, and to begin a genuine process of collaboration in research. Partnerships between university-based educational researchers, teachers and administrators in the field, and policy makers at various levels is a direction that we need to take if research is to be seen as relevant, to be taken seriously, and to actually make a difference.

There is, however, an increasing lack of will to work cross-institutionally in New Zealand's hyper-competitive educational market even when this would ensure a better result for the research, and, in the current financial speak, 'end-users'. The Foundation of Research, Science and Technology (FoRST) explicitly encourages collaboration in the contestable research rounds as they believe it generates more useful results¹². The notions of collaboration and contestability, except in exceptional circumstances, however, are mutually incompatible¹³. As knowledge is increasingly commodified and our jobs resemble traditional production jobs more and more (churning out research outputs and other knowledge products rather than, for example, car parts), the requirement

¹¹Emic interpretations involve the participants revealing their own understandings of situations. By incorporating emic principles it is possible to present a perspective different from the researcher's own ontological framework.

¹² Research seminar with Emma Speight from FoRST, AIT, 25 June 1998

¹³This is despite what Roger Kerr has to say on the subject. Note his speech to the NZIM Chief Executive Officer's Breakfast, 12 November 1997 entitled "Competition and Co-operation" inferring that the two could exist side by side.

that knowledge is tradable becomes more important than whether it makes a difference to people's lives (Lyotard, 1984). Getting the research contracts takes priority over the kind of knowledge generated and its applications (in order to strengthen institutional and personal performance records).

This trend is something that needs to be resisted at all levels, and to do this university researchers must find ways of being more inclusive and participatory in their practices, while teachers need to see their labour and knowledge from a wider perspective. If teachers are to work closely with academics, engage in research in their own right, influence policy and thereby 'make a difference', it is not enough to get the qualification and never pick up a book or journal again.

Language teachers

An activist and politicised research base in New Zealand requires teachers of adult migrants to go further. Being kind and teaching people what to take to a Kiwi's home if they are invited for a barbecue is inadequate if language teaching is a vocation which involves improving the lot of adult migrants in New Zealand, and expanding the linguistic and cultural horizons of New Zealanders. As Roger Simon (1992) argues (cited in Pennycook, 1994, p.320): "What is *not* needed is the pretensions of empathy, the claim to share an understanding of the positions and feelings of others, but rather the recognition of the impossibility of such claims...."

In an article in *English Teaching Professional*, Andrew Littlejohn (1998) attempted to characterise key features of a curriculum for English teaching based on an emancipatory and inclusive vision of the future. His 'futures curriculum' which gives some valuable pointers and may help to avoid the pitfalls mentioned above includes:

- *(utilising) Significant content which "...does not, on the one hand, trivialise significant issues or, on the other hand, make trivial things seem important"
- *Involving students in classroom decision making
- *Engaging student intelligence through "...hypothesising, negotiating, planning and evaluating"
- *Promoting cultural understanding through the texts and tasks deployed in the classroom
- *Critical language awareness encouraging students to ask: "Why are they saying that? What is not being said? Who benefits from what is being said?" (Littlejohn, 1998, p. 5).

Littlejohn goes on to explain the very significant responsibility that English language teachers have:

As an educational activity, language teaching bears a particular responsibility. On the one hand, we need to think about how we can help our students for the

very different demands the future will make....We need to think about the content and significance of our materials, the values and attitudes we project, the kinds of mental states we are fostering in our classrooms - how indeed, we contribute to the way that people see themselves (Littlejohn, 1998, p.5).

Littlejohn's work seems to embrace the idea of Pennycook's (1994) critical language educator, someone who, working with others has the power to influence policy and people's lives beyond the classroom. This person would actively cultivate a theoretical and politicised knowledge base to complement their teaching knowledge/skills and engage from time to time in individual investigations, teacher-to-teacher research and/or collaboration with university academics. Theirs would be a hybridised role linking professional work with the role of critical public intellectual (LaCapra, 1997). Someone capable of listening to and understanding "...our students in order to take up their concerns and positions" (Pennycook, 1994, p.319)¹⁴.

Conclusion

The absence of informed policy around adult language, migrant and cultural issues, and teaching and learning related to these things in New Zealand, may be partly attributed to the lack of a politicised and activist research agenda among language professionals in this country. Such an agenda would be more effectively formulated and informed if it drew on a genuine research alliance between language academics and teachers. This alliance would require a close and authentic collaboration employing the strengths of both groups of people, enabling one to learn from the other. In order for this to happen, it will be necessary to look past the competitiveness inherent in the government's privatisation programme for tertiary education (and maybe 'talk and write back' to this along the way). It will also be necessary for teachers to break out of the 'teacher only' mould and increasingly view themselves, along with academics in the universities, as engaged and critical language educators. Such people will continually question their own classroom/educational practices, expand their personal political, historical, linguistic and cultural horizons and work together to create a discourse of possibility and change for language, culture and migrant policies and praxis in New Zealand. An invigorated research plan which generates work that 'makes a difference' might employ a critical postmodern approach which retains concepts of 'difference', 'emancipation' and 'social democracy' as the litmus test of whether a programme has merit or not.

¹⁴ It is acknowledged that this wider role for teachers is very difficult to envisage in the current climate of short term contracts and relatively low pay. It may be that part of a comprehensive research agenda would be to argue for the importance and centrality of language educators to a healthy, well-informed social democracy of difference.

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Acronyms

AILA	Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée	ESL	English as a Second Language
AIT	Auckland Institute of Technology	ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis	ForST	Foundation of Research, Science and Technology
EIL	English as an International Language	WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand