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The Practice of
**English
Language
Teaching**

FIFTH EDITION

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with DVD



Contents

1 The world of English language teaching

- 1.1 Who speaks English? 1
 - 1.1.1 Varieties of English
- 1.2 Who learns English, and which variety do they learn? 4
 - 1.2.1 General English and ESP
 - 1.2.2 Business English
 - 1.2.3 Content-based language teaching (CBLT) and CLIL
- 1.3 Who teaches English? 9

2 Describing the English language

- 2.1 What we want to say 14
 - 2.1.1 Form and meaning
 - 2.1.2 Purpose
- 2.2 Appropriacy and register 17
- 2.3 Language as text and discourse 18
 - 2.3.1 Discourse organisation
 - 2.3.2 Genre
- 2.4 Grammar 21
 - 2.4.1 Choosing words for grammar
 - 2.4.2 Some important grammatical concepts
- 2.5 Lexis 25
 - 2.5.1 Word meaning
 - 2.5.2 Extending word use
 - 2.5.3 Word combinations
- 2.6 The sounds of the language 28
 - 2.6.1 Pitch
 - 2.6.2 Intonation
 - 2.6.3 Individual sounds
 - 2.6.4 Sounds and spelling
 - 2.6.5 Stress
- 2.7 Speaking and writing 34
- 2.8 Paralinguistics 36
 - 2.8.1 Vocal paralinguistic features
 - 2.8.2 Physical paralinguistic features

3 Issues in language learning

- 3.1 What research offers 41
 - 3.1.1 The mind is a computer
 - 3.1.2 Explicit and implicit knowledge
 - 3.1.3 Language is forming habits
 - 3.1.4 Language is communication
 - 3.1.5 Language is grammar; language is vocabulary
 - 3.1.6 The role of other languages (translation)
 - 3.1.7 Learning is about people
- 3.2 Making sense of it all 52

4 Popular methodology

- 4.1 Approach, method, procedure, technique 54
- 4.2 Three and a half methods 55
- 4.3 Communicative language teaching 57
 - 4.3.1 Teaching 'unplugged'
- 4.4 Task-based learning 60
- 4.5 The lexical approach 62
- 4.6 Four old humanistic methods 64
- 4.7 A procedure (presentation, practice and production) 65
- 4.8 Which method? What approach? 68
 - 4.8.1 What teachers do
 - 4.8.2 Post-method and learning culture
- 4.9 Coursebooks and other materials 71
 - 4.9.1 For and against coursebook use
 - 4.9.2 How to use coursebooks
 - 4.9.3 Using coursebooks more effectively
 - 4.9.4 Choosing coursebooks
 - 4.9.5 Designing our own materials
- 4.10 Looking forward 77

5 Being learners

- 5.1 The age factor 80
 - 5.1.1 Young learners

- 5.1.2 Teenagers
- 5.1.3 Adults
- 5.2 Learner differences 86**
 - 5.2.1 Learner styles
- 5.3 Motivation 89**
 - 5.3.1 Understanding the nature of motivation
 - 5.3.2 What affects motivation?
 - 5.3.3 What teachers can do about student motivation
- 5.4 Levels 94**
 - 5.4.1 From beginner to advanced
 - 5.4.2 The CEFR levels
 - 5.4.3 Other frameworks of language proficiency
- 5.5 Learner autonomy 97**
 - 5.5.1 Learner training /strategy training
 - 5.5.2 Autonomy tasks
 - 5.5.3 Open learning, self-access centres and student 'helpers'
 - 5.5.4 Provoking student choice
 - 5.5.5 Outside the classroom
 - 5.5.6 Homework
 - 5.5.7 All in the mind
- 6 Being teachers**
 - 6.1 Qualities of a good teacher 113**
 - 6.1.1 The magic of rapport
 - 6.1.2 Inside the classroom
 - 6.2 Roles that teachers 'play' 116**
 - 6.2.1 Talking to students
 - 6.2.2 The teacher as a teaching 'aid'
 - 6.3 What teachers do next 120**
 - 6.3.1 Teachers on their own
 - 6.3.2 Teachers with others
 - 6.3.3 Different ways of observing and being observed
 - 6.3.4 The big wide world
- 7 Class size and different abilities**
 - 7.1 Class size: two extremes 136**
 - 7.1.1 Large classes
 - 7.1.2 Teaching one-to-one
 - 7.2 Managing mixed ability 143**
 - 7.2.1 Working with different content
 - 7.2.2 Different student actions
 - 7.2.3 What the teacher does
 - 7.2.4 Special educational needs (SENs)
 - 7.2.5 Realistic mixed-ability teaching
- 8 Feedback, mistakes and correction**
 - 8.1 Giving supportive feedback 154**
 - 8.2 Students make mistakes 155**
 - 8.3 Correction decisions 156**
 - 8.3.1 What to correct
 - 8.3.2 When to correct
 - 8.3.3 Who corrects and who should be corrected?
 - 8.3.4 What to do about correction
 - 8.4 Correcting spoken English 158**
 - 8.4.1 Online (on-the-spot) correction
 - 8.4.2 Offline (after-the-event) correction
 - 8.5 Giving feedback for writing 161**
 - 8.5.1 Giving feedback in process writing
 - 8.5.2 Using correction symbols
 - 8.5.3 Alternatives to correction symbols
 - 8.5.4 Letting the students in
 - 8.5.5 What happens next
 - 8.5.6 Burning the midnight oil
- 9 Managing for success**
 - 9.1 Why problems occur 168**
 - 9.2 Creating successful classrooms 170**
 - 9.2.1 Behaviour norms
 - 9.2.2 Teaching for success
 - 9.3 Dealing with problems 173**
- 10 Seating and grouping students**
 - 10.1 Whole-class teaching 177**
 - 10.1.1 Seating whole-group classes
 - 10.2 Students on their own 180**
 - 10.3 Pairs and groups 181**
 - 10.3.1 Pairwork
 - 10.3.2 Groupwork
 - 10.3.3 Ringing the changes
 - 10.4 Organising pairwork and groupwork 183**
 - 10.4.1 Making it work
 - 10.4.2 Creating pairs and groups
 - 10.4.3 Procedures for pairwork and groupwork
 - 10.4.4 Troubleshooting

- 11.1 What is on offer? 192
 - 11.1.1 Internet connectivity
- 11.2 Technology issues 196
 - 11.2.1 Digital divides
 - 11.2.2 Digital literacy
 - 11.2.3 Who does what?
 - 11.2.4 Six questions
- 11.3 Using classroom resources 201
- 11.4 Blended learning, flipped classrooms and beyond 204
 - 11.4.1 Blended learning
 - 11.4.2 The flipped classroom
 - 11.4.3 SOLEs
- 11.5 Learning online 206

12 Planning

- 12.1 Planning paradoxes 210
- 12.2 Thinking about lessons 211
- 12.3 Designing lessons 214
- 12.4 Making a formal plan 216
 - 12.4.1 Background elements
 - 12.4.2 Describing procedure and materials
- 12.5 Planning a sequence of lessons 221
 - 12.5.1 Projects and threads
- 12.6 Planning CLIL lessons 225

13 Teaching language construction

- 13.1 Studying structure and use 228
 - 13.1.1 Language study in lesson sequences
 - 13.1.2 Choosing study activities
 - 13.1.3 Known or unknown language
- 13.2 Explain and practise 231
 - 13.2.1 Explaining things
 - 13.2.2 Practice (accurate reproduction)
- 13.3 Meet, need and practise 235
- 13.4 Discover and practise 235
- 13.5 Research and practise 237
- 13.6 Review and recycle 238

14 Teaching grammar

- 14.1 Introducing grammar 239
- 14.2 Discovering grammar 246
- 14.3 Practising grammar 248
- 14.4 Grammar games 253

15 Teaching vocabulary

- 15.1 Introducing vocabulary 258
- 15.2 Practising vocabulary 264
- 15.3 Vocabulary games 269
- 15.4 Using dictionaries 271
 - 15.4.1 When students use dictionaries
 - 15.4.2 Dictionary activities
- 15.5 Keeping vocabulary notebooks and cards 275

16 Teaching pronunciation

- 16.1 What is good pronunciation? 277
- 16.2 Pronunciation problems 278
- 16.3 Phonemic symbols: to use or not to use? 280
- 16.4 When to teach pronunciation 281
- 16.5 Pronunciation and the individual student 282
- 16.6 Pronunciation sequences 283
 - 16.6.1 Working with sounds
 - 16.6.2 Working with stress
 - 16.6.3 Working with intonation and stress
 - 16.6.4 Sounds and spelling
 - 16.6.5 Connected speech and fluency

17 Teaching language skills

- 17.1 Skills together 297
 - 17.1.1 Input and output
 - 17.1.2 Integrating skills
 - 17.1.3 Language skills, language construction
 - 17.1.4 Integrating skill and language work
 - 17.1.5 Top-down and bottom-up
- 17.2 Receptive skills 302
 - 17.2.1 A procedure for teaching receptive skills
 - 17.2.2 The language issue
 - 17.2.3 Comprehension tasks
- 17.3 Productive skills 307
 - 17.3.1 A procedure for teaching productive skills
 - 17.3.2 Structuring discourse
 - 17.3.3 Interacting with an audience
 - 17.3.4 Dealing with difficulty
 - 17.3.5 What to do about language
- 17.4 Projects 311
 - 17.4.1 Managing projects

18 Reading

- 18.1 Intensive reading 314
 - 18.1.1 The vocabulary question
 - 18.1.2 Analytical reading (text mining)
- 18.2 Reading aloud 318
- 18.3 Extensive reading 319
- 18.4 Reading sequences 321

19 Listening

- 19.1 Skills and strategies 336
 - 19.1.1 Top-down listening
 - 19.1.2 Bottom-up listening
- 19.2 Extensive listening 339
- 19.3 Live listening/recorded listening 340
 - 19.3.1 Live listening
 - 19.3.2 Pre-recorded audio
- 19.4 Using film and video 343
 - 19.4.1 Viewing and listening techniques
- 19.5 Listening (and film) sequences 345
- 19.6 The sound of music 357

20 Writing

- 20.1 Literacies 360
 - 20.1.1 Handwriting
 - 20.1.2 Spelling
 - 20.1.3 Layout and punctuation
 - 20.1.4 Text construction
- 20.2 Approaches to student writing 363
 - 20.2.1 Process and product
 - 20.2.2 Genre
- 20.3 Creative writing 366
- 20.4 Writing as a collaborative activity 367
- 20.5 Building the writing habit 367
- 20.6 Writing-for-learning, writing-for-writing 369
- 20.7 The roles of the teacher 369
- 20.8 Writing sequences 370
- 20.9 Dictation activities 379
- 20.10 Portfolios and journals 381

21 Speaking

- 21.1 Spoken language 384
- 21.2 Students and speaking 385
 - 21.2.1 Reluctant students
- 21.3 Speaking repetition 387
- 21.4 Speaking activity types 388
 - 21.4.1 Acting from scripts
 - 21.4.2 Communication games
 - 21.4.3 Discussion
 - 21.4.4 Prepared talks and presentations
 - 21.4.5 Questionnaires
 - 21.4.6 Simulation and role-play
 - 21.4.7 Storytelling
- 21.5 Speaking sequences 393
- 21.6 Making recordings 404
 - 21.6.1 Getting everyone involved

22 Testing and evaluation

- 22.1 Summative and formative assessment 408
- 22.2 Qualities of a good test 409
 - 22.2.1 Washback
- 22.3 Types of test 410
- 22.4 Test item types 412
 - 22.4.1 Some typical test item types
 - 22.4.2 Skill-focused tests
 - 22.4.3 Young learner test item types
- 22.5 Writing and marking tests 417
 - 22.5.1 Writing tests
 - 22.5.2 Marking tests
- 22.6 Teaching for tests 421



The Global Scale of English is a standardised, granular scale from 10 to 90, which measures English language proficiency.

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The world of English language teaching

TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) is not one single profession. There are many different ways to teach English and places where it is taught – from the general English of many school classrooms around the world, to the more specialised worlds of business English or English for academic purposes (EAP). And the language itself is not one ‘thing’ either; constantly evolving and being used in more and more diverse situations, it challenges English language teachers (and course designers) to make decisions about what kind of English to teach and, of course, how to do it.

1.1 Who speaks English?

It is likely that there was a time (in the early Middle Ages) when English was spoken almost exclusively by English people living in what is now England. Even then, however, there will have been outsiders who wanted to learn the language so that they could communicate with native speakers. At that time, English already constituted an amalgam of many different language strands, but the developing language didn’t stay where it had started. It migrated through conquest and trade to other countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent, parts of Africa and Asia and many other corners of the globe. And it didn’t stop there. It has morphed and spread to other countries and populations, too, until it has become one of the world’s main languages of international communication and commerce.

Discussions about who speaks English have been heavily influenced by the work of Braj Kachru who, more than three decades ago, proposed a ‘three circles’ view of English in the world, where the ‘inner circle’ comprised countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia, etc. These were countries where English was the national language (and the mother tongue of most of its users). Kachru suggested there were about 320–380 million English speakers of this kind (Kachru 1985). In the ‘outer circle’ Kachru included 150–300 million speakers from countries such as India and Singapore, where there was a long history of English use, and where local varieties of the language have developed. Finally, Kachru proposed an ‘expanding circle’, where English is a dominant *foreign* language. This expanding circle included countries as diverse as China, Sweden, Turkey and Argentina.

The numbers in Kachru’s 1985 model have to be seen as informed ‘guesstimates’ rather than exact figures, partly because of the unreliability of data gathering. But one thing we can say for sure is that they are (unsurprisingly) way out of date. Two years before his ‘three circles’ article, for example, Kachru himself had written ‘One might hazard a linguistic guess

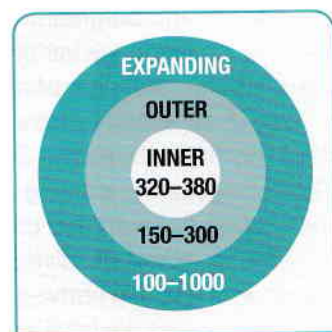


Figure 1 Kachru’s three circles (figures in millions)

here. If the spread of English continues at the current rate, by the year 2000 its non-native speakers will outnumber its native speakers' (1983: 3).

Kachru's 'linguistic guess' was absolutely right, but on a much greater scale than he might have supposed. Estimates vary, but the ratio of native speakers to non-native speakers is anywhere between 1:2 (Rajagopalan 2004) and 1:5 (Graddol 2008), and this gap is widening all the time. In terms of numbers, therefore, something like a quarter of the world's population speaks English as part of their multilingual identity, and native speakers are in a proportionately ever-decreasing minority. Of course, when we are discussing English 'speakers', we first have to decide what 'speaking English' means. If we were to include everyone who is learning English at beginner levels (as well as those who are competent speakers), we would get a very different figure from the total of people who speak English at upper-intermediate level – the B1 or B2 level (Common European Framework of Reference) or 51–67 (Global Scale of English). We will discuss these ways of describing student levels in 5.4.

English sometimes seems as if it is everywhere, though in reality, of course, it is not; Graddol (2008: 207) quotes one estimated forecast of three billion 'functional users' of English by 2040, but this still leaves about 60 percent of the world's population having poor or no English skills. Moreover, the English that is spoken around the world is not necessarily always the same kind of English, as we shall see – and that has implications for language teaching.

1.1.1

Varieties of English

There is more than one version of English, of course. In the south of England, many people speak 'standard southern English' (SSE), the variety of British English which appears in many coursebooks and exams for learners of English. But if you travel north, you will find English that is clearly not standard southern English; similarly, in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, many people speak other different varieties of the same language. There are, of course, plenty of similarities of grammar, lexis and pronunciation and, in most cases, a mutual intelligibility, but there are also significant differences in terms of language construction and pragmatic use. And in England itself, different regional areas have clearly identifiable language varieties.

Variation of a similar kind is found on a far bigger scale in the USA, of course. We might identify General American (GA) as a kind of US equivalent of standard southern English (Celce-Murcia 2014a: 69) – one which, like its British counterpart, is also used in teaching and examining all over the world. But anyone who has ever been to North America (or who has watched US and Canadian movies) must be aware of the many and varied regional and ethnically diverse Englishes which are present all over the North American continent. And so, even in native-speaker countries, many language varieties coexist.

As we have said, teachers, exam boards and materials writers generally opt for one of two 'inner circle' varieties – GA or SSE – but these varieties, too, show differences of grammar (*Did you see him yet?* | *Have you seen him yet?*), vocabulary (*elevator/lift*, *pants/trousers*), pronunciation (*advertisement* vs *advertisement*; /ɒ/ vs /ɔː/ for *law*) and spelling (*analyze/analyse*, *color/colour*). In most cases, though, these varieties are remarkably similar and almost always mutually understandable.

Outside the 'inner circle' versions of English, the situation is equally fascinating. First of all, there are recognisable and well-established 'outer circle' varieties such as Indian or Singaporean English. Secondly, where English is becoming a language of inter-country communication in, for example, South East Asia (Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, etc.), it is

arguable that a recognisable new form of Asian English may be emerging. And finally, we need to be aware of the enormous number of speakers of English who speak it as a second or additional language (see 1.1 above), whether they themselves are Argentinian or Japanese, Italian or Mexican. The chances are that these people will not be speaking English with 'natives', but instead with second-language English speakers from other countries. This, incidentally, is now the reality in many large urban areas in 'inner circle' countries – such as London, New York, Toronto or Melbourne, for example – where a significant number of inhabitants may not have English as a home language and may be speaking to other English speakers who use a variety of different Englishes.

One kind of English which receives a great deal of attention – and which reflects the reality we have been discussing – is called English as a lingua franca (ELF). This is another and more widely-used name for what is sometimes called English as an international language (EIL). ELF is English used as 'a means of communication between people who come from different language backgrounds ... not a language variety in the traditional sense of the term' (Jenkins 2012: 487). It can be observed 'over the internet, on Facebook, as well as in an office in Beijing, a university in Amsterdam, a market stall in Marrakesh, a bar in Milan, and a hostel in São Paulo' (Cogo 2012: 98). One of the most noticeable features of this phenomenon is that ELF speakers seem to be very 'accommodating', jointly ensuring that communication is successful in a way that might horrify native-speaker examiners who demand accuracy based on native-speaker norms. Indeed, there seems to be a disconnect between the way English is frequently examined and taught (teachers – and coursebooks – tend to insist on accuracy based on native-speaker norms), and the way in which English is used by the majority of its speakers. 'Native-speaker reference books,' writes David Graddol, 'may be developing as better guides to native-speaker usage, but are less useful as models for learners' (Graddol 2008: 115).

When Barbara Seidlhofer studied ELF conversations, she found a number of 'deviations' from native-speaker norms. Typical features of ELF speech included 1) frequent failure to use the third person singular of the present simple (e.g. *She look very sad*), 2) the use of the relative pronouns *who* and *which* interchangeably (*a book who, a person which*), 3) adoption of all-purpose questions tags such as *isn't it? Or no?* (where native speakers typically used more grammatically-based options such as *He could have been more careful, couldn't he?*), and 4) the pluralising of nouns which are considered uncountable in some native-speaker varieties (*furnitures, advices*) (Seidlhofer 2004: 220). Elsewhere, Jennifer Jenkins noticed that most ELF speakers do not differentiate between strong and weak forms (of words such as *to*, which can be pronounced /tu:/ or /tə/) and that they substitute voiced and voiceless /ð/ and /θ/ with /t/, /s/ and /d/ (*think* becomes *sink* or *tink*). This may be because /ð/ and /θ/ 'do not occur in the majority of the world's languages' (Jenkins 1998: 122).

How should we approach this reality? Jennifer Jenkins herself suggests that teachers should not 'correct items that are emerging as systematic and frequent in ELF communication', and that we should 'avoid idiomatic language'. In pronunciation teaching, she advocates that we 'focus on the core items and leave the non-core to the learners' choice' (Jenkins 2004: 40). This latter suggestion has been taken up by Robin Walker in his book on teaching the pronunciation of ELF (Walker 2010).

To some, it has sounded as if ELF researchers have been proposing a kind of 'reduced' version of English, and that this should be the target of language study – and indeed, talking about concentrating on a basic core seems to give weight to these claims. But as most

researchers insist, ELF is not so much a *variety* as a *process of accommodation*, which, though it may have some recurring features, is in constant flux as its speakers interact with each other. As most students, at some stage, need certainties to cling onto, this could present problems for teachers in deciding what language to teach. And when students ask *Can you say X in English?*, the response they least wish to hear is *Perhaps ... perhaps not*, even though that would frequently be the most truthful answer! Especially when they are starting out, students will hope for a clear model, and this may include (because many learners aspire to it) a native-speaker variety of English as an 'appropriate pedagogical model' (Kuo 2006: 219).

Perhaps, as Andy Sewell suggests, 'adopting an ELF perspective on teaching does not mean that norms and standards are no longer required, but that these are mutable concepts and that learners need to be introduced to language variation when they are ready' (Sewell 2013: 7). Thus, teachers may well adopt any significant or functioning variety of English as the norm (in Kachru's terms, 'inner' or 'outer circle' varieties) to get things going, but will ensure that their students are exposed to more ELF-like language as time goes on. They might even have their students study ELF conversations to analyse the language used in them and try to work out how the same things might be said differently (Murray 2012).

1.2 Who learns English, and which variety do they learn?

English is studied at schools, colleges, universities and private language institutes. For children and young adults, this is usually because English is on the curriculum, or because they need to learn it in order to study at an English-medium college or university. On the other hand, where adults make a choice to study English, they may do so for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they want to travel, perhaps they want to use social media in English, perhaps they want to get involved in online gaming or perhaps they are going to live in an English-speaking country.

For many years, a distinction has been made between learning English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). ESL learners are often immigrants to an English-speaking country and need the language in order to communicate with local people. However, they also need to know how to do things in English in that country. ESL classes, therefore, may not focus exclusively on general English (see 1.2.1), but may instead concentrate on things they need to do in the society they are living in, such as filling in a form for a driving licence or describing symptoms at a doctor's surgery. The curriculum (and the topics and activities they take part in) may mirror the lives they are leading outside the classroom.

EFL students, on the other hand, often do not have the same priorities. If they are studying in their own country, they may not need to know how to fill in a US tax form or apply for a mortgage in Australian English, for example. They may wish for a less culture-specific form of the language, and less obviously situated activities and tasks.

The EFL/ESL distinction is less easy to sustain than it once was, however. In the first place, as we have seen in 1.1.1, immigrants may use their English to talk to other ESL speakers, rather than communicating with native speakers. Secondly, a lot of English takes place in cyberspace, where students may have very specific reasons for wanting to use it. Indeed, we might well think of them as internet ESL speakers because for them, the internet is an English-speaking 'country'. In a world where English is, as we have seen, so widely used, maybe everyone is an ESL student!

But, of course, if immigrants to Canada are studying English in Toronto, we are likely to offer them different learning opportunities from those we offer students in Hanoi or Rio de Janeiro because, in the end, a lot will depend on why they are learning English in the first place.

2.1 General English and ESP

General English is taught all over the world as a school subject, with no specific purpose in mind, except that language learning is thought to be good for learners, and English is a language that is worth learning. Such teaching has been the predominant model for a long time in schools, colleges and private language schools.

Typically, syllabuses for general English courses are organised in terms of the grammar and vocabulary to be taught, together with pronunciation elements and language skills work (listening, speaking, reading and writing). In general English lessons, teachers decide on what language they want to teach and then find content and activities which will help their students learn it. This is in stark contrast to syllabuses which take content (subject matter) as their starting point (see 1.2.3).

However, many people do have clearly identifiable reasons for learning English. Perhaps they want to work as nurses in a hospital in an English-speaking country, or perhaps they need to learn the English that is used by pilots and air-traffic-control employees; maybe they wish to work as lawyers, or they wish to study science and technology. In this case, they will be learning English for specific purposes (ESP). Such students have a clearly defined academic, professional, learning or vocational need, and this will influence the language they study and the syllabus they follow.

Experts have identified many different kinds of ESP, including EST (English for science and technology) and, importantly, for the increasing number of students who pursue tertiary education in the language, English for academic purposes (EAP). EAP students typically need to develop their skills in such areas as referencing, essay structuring, note-taking and making presentations, etc. (Strike and Tebbutt 2013).

How do teachers know what to teach in an ESP course? One way of doing this is to conduct a *needs analysis*. Ideally, this will involve having an understanding of the situations the students are in or are likely to be in and the language events, genres (see 2.3.2) and items this involves. So, for example, David Wood, in preparing his students for work placements, analysed the language chunks and formulaic structures (see 2.5.3) that native speakers used in the workplace. In class, his students then role-played typical workplace situations (which they themselves might be involved in) where these language elements could be used (Wood 2009). In other words, what happened in the workplace determined what the teacher offered the students in their speaking lessons.

In a different context, Henry Emery suggests that if we want to teach aviation English (for pilots and air-traffic controllers), we need to know the kinds of exchanges our students will be involved in. This would ideally involve teachers or course designers sitting in aeroplane cockpits or air-traffic-control towers watching, listening to (and recording) the kind of language that they need if they are to operate efficiently (and safely!) in their professional domain (Emery 2008). But however we gather our data, what is important is that we identify the type of English our students need and the situations they need it in. In the case of air-traffic control, this may involve highly idiosyncratic technical language such as:

Pastair 345 cleared straight in ILS approach runway 28, descend to altitude 3000 feet QNH 1011, report established on the localizer.

However, aviation professionals will also need to know how to use plain and clear English, demonstrated in utterances such as *There is metal debris on the runway* or *We are having problems with the hydraulic systems*. Furthermore, in exchanges between cockpits and towers 'it is essential ... that pronunciation doesn't impede the effective transmissions of messages' (Emery 2008).

Designers of ESP courses, then, try to pin down (through various forms of needs analysis) exactly what the students will need to do in and with the language, and this will determine the content and syllabus of the course.

Good course designers find out, where they can, not only what others say is needed, but also what the students themselves say their needs and wants are because 'learners do want and appreciate the opportunity to express their views about their course and wish to exercise some degree of control over the way the course proceeds' (Davies 2006). However, for David Mann this is problematic because any group of students is 'a bunch of diverse individuals with mutually contradictory notions of what [is] best for them' (Mann 2014: 70). We might go further and suggest that what students need and what they want are not necessarily the same thing at all.

The main thing to remember is that where we can identify what our students really need, and include, too, what they want, we will have clearer aims and objectives for our lessons than we sometimes do for more general contexts.

1.2.2 Business English

The teaching and learning of business English (BE) is now commonplace, partly due, of course, to the role of English as a lingua franca (see 1.1.1) and its predominance in international commerce. However, as with all ESP, there are a number of issues which BE teachers and materials designers have to confront. Where, for example, do the lessons take place, and what stage of their business lives have the students reached? Some BE lessons take place at secondary school, whilst others are designed for university students of business. Some BE study takes place in-company, when teachers go to the offices where their students are working. Lessons here may involve business role-playing so that the students can put what happens in the lesson straight into practice in the workplace (see Wood above).

Clearly, the content of BE lessons will depend on whether the students are studying for some future life of business or whether they are currently in work in a business environment. If the latter, we may conduct a detailed needs analysis to find out what happens in the student's office and what that student needs to do (as we saw above). We can then tailor our lessons to those needs. Even when students are not yet in a workplace (but are intending to work in a business environment), we can find out what that environment is like, as Stephen Evans did in Hong Kong. Evans had business people keep detailed 'week-in-the-life' diaries, complete surveys and agree to be interviewed (Evans 2013). This allowed him to build a picture of the ways in which people in the environments he investigated wrote emails, read and wrote reports, took part in formal and informal meetings or conducted phone conversations. With this information, he could then design tasks to develop his university-level students' ability to use English effectively in the workplace. Interestingly, Evans found that the