

---

Migration and Adult Language Learning: Global Flows and Local Transpositions

Author(s): ANNE BURNS and CELIA ROBERTS

Source: *TESOL Quarterly*, September 2010, Vol. 44, No. 3, MIGRATION AND ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING (September 2010), pp. 409-419

Published by: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27896739>

## REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/27896739?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27896739?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *TESOL Quarterly*

JSTOR

---

# *Migration and Adult Language Learning: Global Flows and Local Transpositions*

---

**ANNE BURNS**

*Aston University  
Birmingham, England*

*University of New South Wales  
Sydney, Australia*

**CELIA ROBERTS**

*King's College London  
London, England*

*doi: 10.5054/tq.2010.232478*

In the 21st century, global flows politically, socially, economically, and environmentally (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Singh & Doherty, 2004) are creating widespread movements of people around the world and giving rise to increased resettlements of immigrants and refugees internationally (Roberts & Baynham, 2006). The reality in most countries worldwide is that contemporary populations are multifaceted, multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, and multi/plurilingual (Tollefson, 1991; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). And the experience of globalization has been conceptualised as space-time compression (Collins, Slembrouck, & Baynham, 2010) in which relocations and dislocations are lived out alongside persistent links with global diasporas.

In this complex and dynamic environment, the need for sensitively designed and socially and culturally responsible educational and language programs for adult immigrants, migrants, and refugees who relocate, both voluntarily and involuntarily, across the world has never been greater. Language learning for entry into the sites of (re)settlement is a primary factor in the ability to re-engage and participate as fully as possible within the political, social, educational, and environmental life of the society (Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2007; Chiswick & Miller, 1992). It provides access to major venues and locations of national and community life and affects in innumerable ways on the lives of those who resettle.

Against this background, English language learning positions itself dynamically in relation to a world language, a national language, and a language in interrelation with local and vernacular languages (Alidou,

2004; Bruthiaux, 2002; May, 2004), many of which will, in turn, themselves be made available in multiple ways for potential adoption by new immigrants. In addition to adopting the language of the country of settlement, where this is not English, immigrants, migrants and refugees may also need, or be required, to learn or to continue learning English for further access to the cultural capital of the country of settlement and to the world in general (see, e.g., Omony, 2007). Thus, in the 21st century, second language socialisation (see Duff, Wong, & Early, 2002; Norton, 2000; Zeungler & Cole, 2005) and the learning of English, or for that matter, the learning of other languages, for resettlement by adult immigrants and refugees have become undertakings intimately related and infinitely more complex than in previous times.

The body of literature that currently exists focusing on English language programs for adult immigrants and refugees is fragmented and underreported (Burns, 2006; Murray, 2005). Even less available are research and literature on the interaction of the teaching of English with the teaching of other languages to adult immigrants and refugees in multicultural settings (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007). It is also true to say that much of the research has been more practice oriented than research driven (Roberts & Baynham, 2006). The reasons for this situation are several, relating to the paucity of demographic data and research; the lack of consistent and adequate funding for such research; the fragmentation of national and international educational policies; the invisibility (Murray, 2005) of the adult immigrant learner both in national educational policy agendas, and, hence, in the agendas of academic researchers; and the conflation of language learning needs with other educational or literacy needs. Nevertheless, given the growing interest from and pressure on English language educators worldwide to research, develop, and theorize such programs, the need for a collection drawing from an international body of work is pressing.

## **THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL**

The wider structuring processes of globalization enter into the concerns of ESOL teachers and students at all points. So the overall theme of this special issue is the connection between the outside and the classroom as an inside space, between macro forces and micro experiences. Migration is a huge component of modern urban living: The language teaching professional has to pick up many of the challenges that result from the benefits to society of cheap labour and of unsocial jobs being filled by migrants. The profession also provides a safety net for those countries which take in asylum seekers and allow residence but rarely respite. These themes have implications for the role,

status, positioning, and knowledge of language teachers, as the articles in this special issue illustrate.

The classroom is a globalized social space, with students whose reasons for migration, desires and dreams, linguistic and cultural resources, and functional goals may all differ from that of other class members (Block & Cameron, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005). For some, such as the refugee groups described by de Costa (this issue), Wachob and Williams (this issue), Finn (this issue), and Ollerhead (this issue), dislocation and trauma disrupt the capacity to connect and make meanings necessary for language learning. In other classrooms, students who fled persecution, perhaps because of sexual orientation, as in Nelson's article (this issue), may sit alongside those whose imperatives for migration are for social and economic reasons. While Baynham and Simpson (this issue) describe the ways in which such diverse groups are squeezed into institutional categories of assessment, Miller (this issue) discusses how relatively marginal migrants can develop a sense of agency as business men and women running their own small businesses.

Such experiences bring "the outside into the classroom" (Baynham, 2006, p. 25). The interaction between outside and inside is of increasing interest to applied linguistics researchers. A forthcoming special issue of *Linguistics and Education* (Lytra & Møller, forthcoming) takes this theme and examines the micro-interactions of school and other classrooms to examine how knowledge and agency are negotiated. This issue of *TESOL Quarterly* focuses on migrant identities and subjectivities (e.g., de Costa, this issue) and the relative investment (Norton, 2000) in language learning within individual trajectories. The loss of linguistic and cultural capital experienced by many migrants and refugees whose expertise and knowledge does not match with the occupations on offer, as Sandwall (this issue) describes, contrasts with the transformation, as Miller (this issue) discusses, of others gaining new cultural capital. The significance of language learning in such losses and gains is hard to track, and Baynham and Simpson (this issue) speak of the *double liminality* of the classroom. Yet many of the articles in this issue discuss this social space as one of engagement and healing (Finn, this issue), a safe place where culturally and socially appropriate topics can be opened up, albeit in subtle ways (Nelson, this issue), and where a student may move from being a refugee to a reformer (de Costa, this issue).

Bringing the outside in also raises the well-worn tension between professional expertise in language learning and teaching and all the other expertise that the outside requires. So, for example, the traumatized refugees whom Finn (this issue) describes need teachers who understand trauma and are also skilled language teachers. Similarly, Sandwall (this issue) shows up the gap between teachers who are not workplace experts and work placement officers who do not have a background in assessing a

workplace for its language affordances. Despite many decades of workplace language teaching and embedded language and skills courses (see Roberts, 2005), there is still no stable framework for developing language teachers as specialists in these needed areas.

## THE IMPACT OF POLICY

National policy agendas surrounding the funding and delivery of second language programs for immigrants are just one manifestation of a much larger global and national picture (Block & Cameron, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005). Interacting with national language programs and policies (e.g., these include Skills for Life in the United Kingdom, the Adult Migrant English Program in Australia, the National Reporting System for Adult Education in the United States, the Canadian Language Benchmarks in Canada, the Adult ESOL Strategy in New Zealand, and the Swedish language programme for adult immigrants, Svenska för invandrare) are issues of citizenship, social integration, inclusion (and exclusion), and economic and labour market imperatives. Baynham and Simpson (this issue) note the tight relationships among national security, immigration, integration, and social cohesion (also taken up in Cooke & Simpson, 2008; see Richards' review of their publication in this issue). Language and language learning becomes indexed in the minds of political leaders, and many of the public, as national belongingness, although language fluency is clearly no sure mark of alignment to new country and new culture. ESOL programs that assume alignment with the majority ethnic groups (Warriner, 2007) may only serve to perpetuate such myths, as de Costa's (this issue) discussion on Americanisation and Griswold's (this issue) on American citizenship preparation make clear. For example, in Australia, as is typical in other immigrant-receiving countries, the policy focus surrounding adult ESOL funding and delivery has shifted from a long-standing concern with nation-building and settlement (see, e.g., The Adult Migrant English Program [AMEP], 2000) to one that places labour market skills shortages centre-stage and links future social inclusion specifically to economic involvement (see Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008): "Successful social inclusion outcomes for the AMEP are those derived from the production of processes and methods within the program that reflect social and economic participation as outputs which can also form the basis for ongoing policy development" (p. 7).

Such imperatives are reflected in other second language national contexts. Sandwall's (this issue) micro-analysis of a work placement environment graphically illustrates how policy for Swedish language for

adult immigrants is, essentially, directed at vocational training and employment. However, policy assumptions that placement in workplace programs will enhance language learning, and therefore socialization into Swedish culture, are shown to be misplaced. This is one of many examples where language is used as a policy tool but where its functions and implications are poorly understood.

Within larger policy environments, ESOL and other second language learning policies are highly susceptible to agendas other than educational ones, and thus, to ideological changes which can lead to ad hoc, unstable, ideologically based and incremental funding structures. Language and the need to learn the national language may then be used as a political tool to link with and feed other agendas, but often in ways that are poorly understood or envisaged too simplistically, as Johnson and Parrish (this issue) allude to in their report on transitions from adult basic education to academic programs. These themes permeate, too, the article by Miller (this issue), whose interrogation of the “unmarked” (p. 483) labour market roles fulfilled by immigrants, and their personal interactions with language learning reinforces the point.

In persistent tension with spasmodic and unpredictable policy, and therefore volatile funding sources and their distribution, are changing demands from policy makers for particular kinds of curriculum designs and delivery. Demands for accountability through standardised systems have led inevitably in most second language programs to specific earmarked resources. These resources are usually gained by institutions only through highly competitive tendering processes, accompanied by curricular frameworks created in order to show benchmarked testing and assessment, and predictable, conventional, and constrained progression routes. The audit culture that permeates policy-making trickles downward as a narrowing of the curriculum and a reductionist approach to learning and teaching as Baynham and Simpson (this issue) discuss. Also, ESOL and other second language programs often operate within much broader language and literacy policy frameworks, so that ESOL teachers may be working within literacy programs, as Ollerhead (this issue) illustrates, side by side with such programs or even in competition with them. In the case Sandwall (this issue) describes for Sweden, programs are currently operating within the third major curriculum change in five years, with the result that tensions between policy and local action soak up the professional energy of teachers and administrators, and teacher training and professionalism needs constantly to catch up with policy. Coupled with the vulnerability and the industrialization of language provision (Cumming, 1998) is the unpredictability through casualisation of teacher positions and careers, and hence, their continuing professionalism (Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2007; Burton, 1998).

Despite the constraints and complexities of second language policy, the contrast between those countries where there is funding and structure, and those where basic resources and support are lacking, is marked. Wachob and Williams (this issue) in Cairo and Lee (this issue) in Korea are case studies which show some of the global inequalities in resourcing adult second language learning and the problems of sustainability in underresourced provision and reliance on the volunteer sector.

## **MIGRANT IDENTITIES, AGENCIES, AND THE CLASSROOM**

Bound up with the experiences of those who participate in ESOL classrooms are questions of identity and agency (Baynham, 2006) afforded by the processes of instruction and participation. The label of *student* offers a kind of stability and entity within a particular social environment and affords for some a type of institutionally related status. At the same time, this title may be peripheral to many classroom participants, and therefore, to the more important aspects and pressing aspects of their lives. Using and learning English, or another second language, is inevitably a part of the classroom experience, but at the same time it is also constantly elsewhere in the way it is encountered in daily existence. Classroom experiences can mean as much the loss of cultural and social capital as the gaining of such capital. Here, emic perspectives on the ESOL classroom are important because they serve to illuminate the nature of the knowledge and values that may be brought in and (re)negotiated. Such perspectives, which are well represented in this issue, present challenges to the profession; although they assume that practices enhance the affordances available to adult immigrant learners in their lives in a new environment, practitioners may in reality be buying in to social reproduction. Griswold (this issue) shows how myths of a monolingualistic, monocultural United States are promulgated and perpetuated in citizenship preparation classes through classroom narratives embedded in ideologies of individualisation. The stories told by the teacher to explain the bases of citizenship position students and their personal experiences to comply with Western-centric ideology. Students' attempts at resistance to these ideologies are treated as invisible or driven underground. Hidden classroom agendas reappear around sexual preference (see Nelson, this issue) and lead to the shutting down of this and other sensitive themes relevant to students' lives and experiences. More significantly, as Nelson shows, they may perpetuate, in subtle and conflicted ways, the very discrimination that a gay or transsexual person left their home countries to escape. Through

close ecological analysis of classroom environments and interactions, Nelson shows that learner agency in such circumstances comes to mean subverting heteronormative, gendered, and other kinds of ideological assumptions.

The continuum of experiences between the inside and the outside of the classroom affects learner identity and agency in other ways. The question of how learners are positioned in relation to the expertise they bring to the classroom is one that underpins learning opportunity, as de Costa (this issue), Finn (this issue), and Sandwall (this issue), respectively, explain. Classrooms can be places for building trust and healing, as the case of Vue Lang in de Costa's account well illustrates, or for assimilation, as Ollerhead (this issue) shows. It is the sociodiscursive practices of the classroom that constitute the means by which agency and student expertise are mediated and through which students' perceptions of their capacity to act may or may not be reborn. As Finn (this issue) argues, the use of authentic texts that bridge the gap between the inside and the outside allows for a reconceptualisation of language learning toward greater communicative legitimacy. In the routinely monolingual space of the ESOL classroom, such practices constitute the sources, or otherwise, of what are seen as socially or culturally appropriate topics of conversation, a theme which is raised also in Miller's (this issue) article.

## **THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES**

There is a chill irony that ESOL and other second language provision is, once again, constrained by policy and funding cuts at a time when research in this area is becoming increasingly more theoretically and methodologically sophisticated. More nuanced theoretical approaches reframe ESOL research, shifting away from simply what works in the classroom to what could work if language and migration were better understood, holistically, through the lens of social theory. Some of these theories speak to the language and migration theme particularly clearly. In this issue, de Costa (this issue) and Nelson (this issue) use Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to discuss the relationship of structure and agency (Giddens, 1979), and this relationship also frames the discussions in Miller (this issue) and in Baynham and Simpson (this issue). Baynham and Simpson also draw on cultural geography to show how both material and symbolic space are appropriated but unequally distributed in positioning students. Sandwall (this issue) draws on an ecological approach, examining the affordances (Canagarajah, 2008; Kramsch, 2002; van Lier, 2004) in workplace settings.

The overarching theme of this special issue, the relationship between classroom learning and migrants' subjectivities within regulatory



frameworks, is landscaped by ethnography, linguistic ethnography (Rampton, Maybin, & Tusting, 2007; Creese, 2008), and narrative analysis. Ethnography and micro-analysis work together both to tie down interpretive speculation and open up the data box to more detailed scrutiny or links to larger structuring processes. Griswold (this issue), for example, uses narrative analysis to explore the taken-for-granted ideologies of citizenship pedagogy, and Baynham and Simpson (this issue) situate the detailed practices of classroom routines within a larger ethnographic study of the educational site. Miller (this issue) takes a reflexive and postmodern stance on traditional methods like the ethnographic interview. Reflecting Briggs (2003), she shows how the linguistic technology of the interview constructs the informant and positions them as having relative agency within a socially and linguistically stratified society.

## CONCLUSION

The areas explored in this article are tied into the themes that emerge most strongly from the contributions to this special issue. But they still reflect only a few of the complexities that affect migration, adult learning, and the language classroom. Research on adult learners' global movements, and their settlement into and experiences of living and learning in a new (pluri)linguistic environment is scarce indeed. Much more research is needed on the realities of globalized migratory experiences in the lives of adults; the impact of policy development, adoption, implementation and modification; the interaction between simplistic, and simplified, manifestations of policy thinking and the realities of adult migrant learning experiences; and the creation and implementation of curricula that speak to these realities, rather than close them off or drive them into narrowly focused channels. Fundamental to these concerns, too, are the implications for the program providers and teachers who must meet these challenges in the second language classroom—their training, their insights into immigrants' social and cultural realities, and their affordances for professional progress.

Although second language programs for adult immigrants have formed part of the enterprise of language teaching both politically and educationally, and in some national contexts for many decades, they have received insufficient attention internationally at a theoretical level and as a serious research enterprise. Subsequently, the body of research on which this field might draw has been pervasively fragmented, lacking in coherence and usually focused on very specific political contexts and imperatives. It has similarly been subject to changes in political views tied

up with policy pressures related to citizenship, economic, vocational, and societal ideologies. What little funding has been available for academic research has typically been constrained by short-termism, and demands for external and political accountability. Nevertheless, as this special issue shows, the thematic interests of researchers engaging with research in this field are gaining sophistication as they seek to develop new ways of theorizing, illuminating, explaining, conceptualizing, and interpreting fundamental concerns within an important and growing sector of the globalized second language teaching world.

## THE AUTHORS

Anne Burns holds positions as Professor in Language Education at Aston University, Birmingham, England, and Professor of TESOL at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. For over 15 years she was a researcher at the Australian Government's Key Centre for the Adult Migrant English Program, the former National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR).

Celia Roberts is Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of Education and Professional Studies and the Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication, King's College London. Her research interests are in language and discrimination, institutional discourse, and ethnographic method.

## REFERENCES

- Alidou, H. (2004). Medium of instruction in post-colonial Africa. In J. Tollefson & A. Tsui (Eds.), *Medium of instruction policies: Which agenda? Whose agenda?* (pp. 195–216). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2008). *Review of the Adult Migrant English Program* (Discussion Paper). Retrieved from [http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/amep\\_discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/amep_discussion_paper.pdf)
- Baynham, M. (2006). Agency and contingency in the language learning of refugees and asylum seekers. *Linguistics and Education*, 17, 24–39.
- Block, D., & Cameron, D. (2002). *Globalization and language teaching*. London, England: Routledge.
- Briggs, C. (2003). Interviewing, power/knowledge, and social inequality. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Post modern interviewing* (pp. 243–254). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bruthiaux, P. (2002). Hold your courses: Language education, language choice, and economic development. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 275–296.
- Burbules, N., & Torres, C. (2000). *Globalisation and education: Critical perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burns, A. (2006). Surveying landscapes in adult ESOL research. *Linguistics and Education*, 17, 97–105.
- Burns, A., & de Silva Joyce, H. (Eds.). (2007). Special issue on language in the workplace. *Prospect*, 22(3). Retrieved from [http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/prospect/volume\\_22\\_number\\_3\\_2007](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/prospect/volume_22_number_3_2007)
- Burton, J. (1998). Professionalism in language teaching. *Prospect*, 13(3), 24–35.

- Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Canagarajah, A. (2008). In this issue. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 1–3.
- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (1992). Language in the immigrant labor market. In B. R. Chiswick (Ed.), *Immigration, language and ethnicity: Canada and the United States* (pp. 229–296). Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.
- Collins, J., Slembrouck, S., & Baynham, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Globalization and language in contact*. London, England: Continuum.
- Cooke, M., & Simpson, J. (2008). *ESOL: A critical guide*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Creese, A. (2008). Linguistic ethnography. In K. King & N. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education, Vol. 10* (2nd ed., pp. 229–241). Philadelphia, PA: Springer Science and Business Media.
- Cumming, A. (1998). Skill, service or industry? The organisation of settlement programs for adults learning English in Canada and Australia. *Prospect*, 13(3), 36–41.
- Duff, P., Wong, D., & Early, M. (2002). Learning language for work and life: The linguistic socialization of immigrant Canadians seeking careers in healthcare. *Modern Language Journal*, 86, 397–422.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory*. London, England: Macmillan.
- Kramsch, C. (2002). Introduction. How can we tell the dancer from the dance? In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language acquisition and language socialization. Ecological perspectives* (pp. 1–20). London, England: Continuum.
- Lindberg, I., & Sandwall, K. (2007). Nobody's darling. Swedish for adult immigrants: A critical perspective. *Prospect*, 22(3), 79–95. Retrieved from [http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/prospect\\_journal/volume\\_22\\_no\\_3/Nobodys\\_darling.pdf](http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/docs/prospect_journal/volume_22_no_3/Nobodys_darling.pdf)
- May, S. (2004). Maori-medium education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In J. Tollefson & A. Tsui (Eds.), *Medium of instruction policies: which agenda? whose agenda* (pp. 21–42). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Murray, D. E. (2005). ESL in adult education. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language learning and teaching* (pp. 65–84). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Social processes and educational practices*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Omony, T. (2007). Alternative contexts of language policy and planning in sub-Saharan Africa. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, 533–550.
- Rampton, B., Maybin, J., & Tusting, K. (Eds.). (2007). Linguistic ethnography: Links, problems and possibilities (Special issue). *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 11(5).
- Roberts, C. (2005). English in the workplace. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language learning and teaching* (pp. 117–136). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Roberts, C., & Baynham, M. (2006). Introduction to the special issue: Research in adult ESOL. Where talk is work the social contexts of adult ESOL classrooms. *Linguistics and Education*, 17, 1–5.
- Singh, P., & Doherty, C. A. (2004). Global cultural flows and pedagogic dilemmas: Teaching in the global university contact zone. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38, 9–42.
- The Adult Migrant English Program. (AMEP, 2000). *The AMEP—50 years of nation building*. Available from <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/1855510>
- Tollefson, J. W. (1991). *Planning language, planning inequality: Language policy in the community*. London, England: Longman.
- Tsui, A., & Tollefson, J. W. (Eds.). (2007). *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- van Lier, L. (2004) *The ecology and semiotics of language learning. A sociocultural perspective*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic.
- Warriner, D. S. (Ed.). (2007). Transnational literacies: Immigration, language learning and identity (Special issue). *Linguistics and Education*, 18 (3/4).
- Zeungler, J., & Cole, K. (2005). Language socialization and second language learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language learning and teaching* (pp. 301–316). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.