

# Why History (of ELT)? Whose History?

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<http://bit.ly/historywhy>

# Plan

1. Foundations
2. A turning-point
3. What to build from here?



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# 1. Foundations



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## **1.1 Why history? (1): Personal background**

What words, images, conceptions, narratives, ideas do you associate with the language teaching past, compared with now?

How have you acquired these words, images, conceptions, narratives, ideas?

How do these words, images, conceptions, narratives, ideas influence your current thinking and/or practice?



*English teaching, so I went to see the professor who was retiring (his*



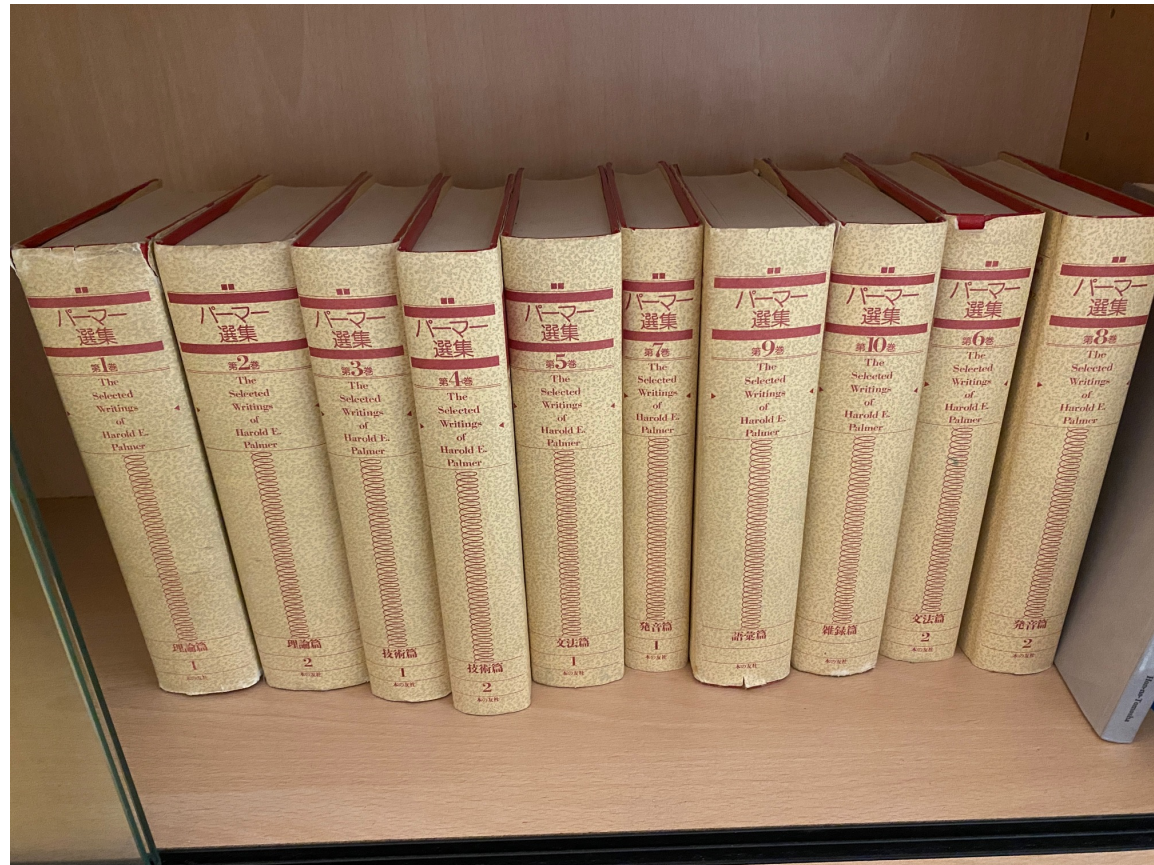
*name was Wakabayashi Shunsuke) to express my interest. He asked me, quite combatively (he was well-known for having strong opinions), ‘well, you native speaker teachers don’t necessarily know much about your own history of ELT – what do you*



*know about Harold E. Palmer, for*

*example?’ I had to confess that I didn’t know much about Palmer or ELT history at all – and I started to keep my ears and eyes open for evidence*





'Harold E. Palmer, IRLT and "historical sense" in ELT', by Richard Smith (2013). *IRLT Journal* 12: 1-8 (Journal of the Institute for Research in Language Teaching, Tokyo: Special issue to celebrate the Institute's 90th anniversary).

'An investigation into the roots of ELT, with a particular focus on the career and legacy of Harold E. Palmer (1877–1949)', by Richard Smith - PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh.



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## 1.2 Why history? (2): Preliminary arguments


Stern (1983):


- There is a 'paucity of studies' (p. 76), especially 'in-depth studies [...] of restricted scope' (p. 83)
- A historical approach 'is needed if language teaching is not to fall victim to a succession of passing fashions' (p. 517)
- 'Through studying the history of language teaching we can gain perspective on present-day thought and trends and find directions for future growth' (p. 76)
- history of language pedagogy is one of the five source disciplines (along with the language sciences, the social sciences, psychology, and educational theory) 'which are essential to the development of a satisfactory theory of language teaching' (p. 517).







Bowen, Madsen and Hilferty (1985):

- History broadens ‘the language teacher’s range of resources and enable[s] him [*sic*] to evaluate contemporary methodologies more knowledgeably and honestly’ (p. 3).
  - Historical perspective should be useful in avoiding blind adherence to the most recent language cult on the scene, as well as restrictive polarization’ (p. 4).
  - History encourages ‘cumulative development in the profession’ (p. 5)
  - History as a means for evaluating the practical results of methods in specific historical circumstances (p. 5)
- 




## Maley (2001):

- history as an antidote to the ‘danger that arrogance could arise from ignorance of our past’ (p. 5).
  - ‘There is a sense in which we cannot know where we are going without an appreciation of where we have been’ (p. 5)
  - ‘the past offers us a rich source for generating new ideas [. . .] We can use it as a stimulus for our own present thinking’ (p. 6).
- 

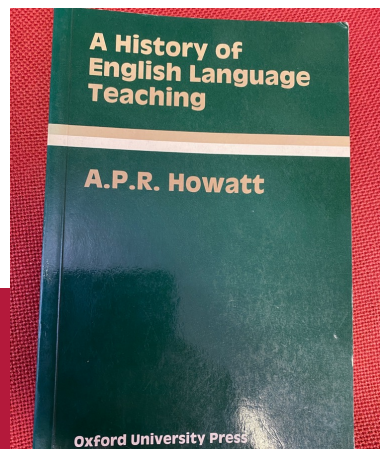


Plus (in retrospect), the excitement of ...

- new research discoveries
  - engaging one's imagination
  - sharing stories (don't we all like stories?)
  - building a new field
- 

## 1.3 Laying foundations (1): From Edinburgh to the Warwick ELT Archive

- *A History of English Language Teaching* by A.P.R. Howatt. Published by Oxford University Press in 1984 / 2004 (2nd edition, with H.G. Widdowson).
- 4 sets (22 volumes) of reissued works with Routledge, on the Reform Movement (2000, 5 volumes), 19th-century pioneers (2002), both sets co-edited by A.P.R. Howatt and Richard Smith; and on Pioneers of ELT (2003, 5 volumes) and Foundations of ELT (2005, 6 volumes), edited by Richard Smith.
- The Warwick ELT Archive

A screenshot of the Warwick Applied Linguistics website. The page features a red header with the Warwick logo and navigation links. The main content area is titled 'The Warwick ELT Archive' and contains a paragraph of text describing the archive's purpose and a list of links. A search bar is visible in the top right corner.

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### The Warwick ELT Archive

The ELT Archive is a stand-alone, browsable historical collection of published and unpublished materials relating to the teaching of English as a foreign language and the development of applied linguistics, c.1880–c.1990. The collection now constitutes a unique resource for students, teachers, researchers and others interested in the history of ELT, and the histories of language teaching and applied linguistics more broadly. We welcome enquiries from potential doctoral students (see below for some areas of possible supervision) and other researchers interested in using the Archive.

**Announcement:** Webinar series (27 May–10 June 2023): [Appropriate methodology for Bangladesh and elsewhere: How appropriate are Michael West's ideas today?](#)  
Organized by Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association (BELTA) in association with the A.S. Hornby Educational Trust and the Warwick ELT Archive. [Video of Webinar 1](#)

[Insights for English Language Education from Historical Research](#). Inaugural webinar by Richard Smith for the History of English Language Education – India Research Group / AINET Association of English



# 1.4 Laying foundations (2): Establishing an ELT (UK) tradition

- 'The origins of *ELT Journal*' (OUP website, 2007) & 'A brief history of *ELT Journal*' (*ELT Journal* 75/1: 4–13), by Richard Smith
- 'The history of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, from a British and European perspective', by A.P.R. Howatt and Richard Smith (2014). *Language and History* 57/1: 75-95.

## DHI FONÈTIK TÏTCER

Dhi organ ov dhi fonètik tÏtcerz' asociécon  
 edited bai PAUL PASSY  
 NEULLY-SUR-SEINE (NIR PARIS) FRANS  
 10. Fèbruari 1887. (500 koplz)

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 Dr. Rhode, Lübban i L., Deutschland.  
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 Abbé Serme, 7 rue de l'Arade, Paris.  
 J. Thorikelson, Sölogade 22, København, Norge.  
 F. Thorikelson, Reikjavik, Island.  
 Dr. J. de Vries Van Daeuburg, Dordrecht, Nederland.  
 M. Walter, Realschule, Kassel, Deutschland.  
 A. Western, Friedrichstr., Norge.  
 G. Zaga, Reikjavik, Island.

## THE BULLETIN

OF  
 THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN  
 ENGLISH TEACHING  
 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, TOKYO, JAPAN

Vol. I, No. 1. June 1, 1923

Institute for Research in English Teaching Established

English Phonetic Recommendations American Pronunciation for Japan; Whereas, American Phonetic Recommendations "Southern English."

Professors Daniel Jones and C. H. Grandgent Differ as to a Standard of English Pronunciation for Japanese Schools.

On Tuesday May 1, the special committee of the Department of Education, consisting of Messrs C. Matsura, T. Komatsubara, S. Ichikawa, Y. Okamura, J. Nagaya, S. Mikami, K. Fujioka appointed to advise in matters pertaining to the work of Mr. Palmer in Japan, met at the Mombusho to hear from Dr. Sawayanagi the plans of the Institute for Research in English Teaching.

The committee approved the Institute, and as individuals they consented to become members of the Advisory Council of the Institute.

It was also resolved to entrust the details of administration and research to a committee which shall be nominated by Dr. Sawayanagi.

Dr. Sawayanagi has therefore with Mr. Palmer appointed the following as the Administrative Committee of the Institute: Dr. M. Sawayanagi, President of the Imperial Education Association; Mr. T. Komatsubara, Inspector of the Department of Education; Prof. Shigeharu Kimura of the Tokyo University of Commerce; Prof. Kinshiro Ishikawa of the Higher Normal School, Tokyo; Prof. Tatsuomi Chiba of the School of Foreign Languages, Tokyo; Prof. Shigeru Ueda of the Peers' School.

As an alternative he suggests the adoption of American pronunciation as shown in Krapp's book, "The Standard Pronunciation of English in America". The full text of Prof. Jones's note on this subject will be published in a subsequent Bulletin.

In the same mail Prof. Charles H. Grandgent of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., one of America's foremost phoneticians advised this same committee to adopt "Southern English" as that type of pronunciation is the only one that has been scientifically recorded on a phonetic basis.

Again, in the same way Miss Anne M. Kae, a teacher of phonetics at the Girls High School, New York City, in an article called "Cultured and American speech" (to be reproduced subsequently) intimates that there is one standard of cultured speech among educated peoples in the leading centres of the English-speaking world which may be studied in Jones's Pronouncing Dictionary.

The members of the Institute who have seen these statements consider them very significant as well as interesting and they have expressed a hope that here in Japan there may be discovered the standard that Prof. Jones's note on this subject is neither too English to be uncomprehensible to Americans, or too American as to be displeasing to the ears of English people.

This relieves the other secretaries for the technical work of research which is so important for the Institute to concentrate its

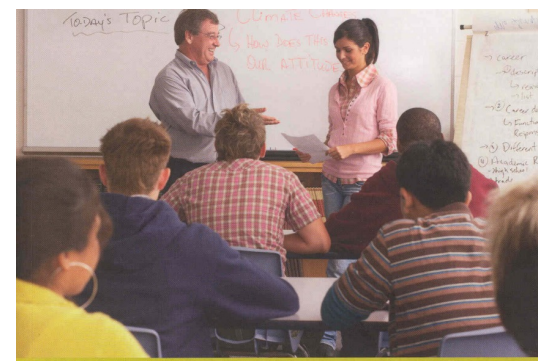
## ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

A Periodical devoted to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Volume I No. 1 October, 1946

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An international journal for teachers of English to speakers of other languages

Volume 66/1 January 2012

# ELT journal

Articles

A. S. Hornby and the Hornby Trust  
 Learning of routine formulae  
 The myth of the natural-born linguist  
 Developing multiliteracies in ELT  
 Learner negotiation of L2 form  
 Culture in ELT  
 Transnational peer review of teaching  
 Improving teacher talk  
 Point and counterpoint  
 ELT  
 Technology for the language teacher  
 Digital literacies

Readers respond  
 CLIL and immersion

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 The NNES/Lens: Non-native English Speakers in TESOL  
 The Construction of English: Culture, Consumerism and Promotion in the ELT Global Coursebook  
 IATEFL 2010 Harrogate Conference Selections  
 Shakespeare on Toast  
 Provoking Thought: Memory and Thinking in ELT  
 Towards Multilingual Education  
 Perspectives on Management in English Language Teaching  
 The Language and Intercultural Communication Reader  
 Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes

OXFORD in association with



## 1.5 Laying foundations (3): HELT as part of HoLLT

- Special issue of *Language & History* (57/1) on 'History of Modern Language Education in Europe', co-edited by Nicola McLelland and Richard Smith (2014).
- Special issue of *The Language Learning Journal* (46/1) on 'Histories of language learning and teaching in Europe', co-edited by Richard Smith and Nicola McLelland (2018).
- *The History of Language Learning and Teaching*, 3 volumes (Vol. I: *16th-18th Century Europe* Vol. II: *19th-20th Century Europe*; Vol. III: *Across Cultures*), co-edited by Nicola McLelland and Richard Smith (2018). Legenda (for the Modern Humanities Research Association).
- HoLLTnet: AILA Research Network on History of Language Learning and Teaching (website)

## 1.6 Laying foundations (4): HoLLT research as part of Applied Linguistics

- 'Building "Applied Linguistic Historiography": Rationale, scope and methods', by Richard Smith (2016). *Applied Linguistics* 37/1: 71-87.
- 'History of language teaching and applied linguistics' by Richard Smith (2021), in Coombe, C. & Mohebbi, H. (eds.) *Research Questions in Language Education and Applied Linguistics: A Reference Guide*. Springer, 743–747.





## 2. A turning-point?



<http://bit.ly/historywhy>

A graphic consisting of two grey triangles pointing downwards, one slightly larger than the other, positioned above the text.

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APPLIED LINGUISTICS

- 
- Achievements but some concerns, looking back
  - Some opportunities and *needs*, looking forward
- 

### 3. What to build from here?



<http://bit.ly/historywhy>

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# 3.1 Building HELT 'in its own right' – attracting more interest

(but not just for celebration — investigating limitations & coloniality more? Subverting the 'global')

The poster features logos for Hornby (A. S. Hornby Educational Trust), BELTA (Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association), and Warwick (The University of Warwick). The title is 'Appropriate ELT methodology for Bangladesh and elsewhere: How relevant are Michael West's ideas today?'. It describes a series of three webinars organized by BELTA with support from the Hornby Trust and the University of Warwick ELT Archive. A central text block provides a biography of Michael West (1888-1973), a British educator who worked in Bengal and developed influential ELT materials. A circular portrait of Michael West is shown to the right. At the bottom, three webinar sessions are listed with their topics, speakers, and dates.

**Hornby**  
A. S. Hornby Educational Trust

**BELTA**  
Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association

**WARWICK**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

**Appropriate ELT methodology for Bangladesh and elsewhere:  
How relevant are Michael West's ideas today ?**

A series of *three webinars* organized by **BELTA**  
(Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association),  
with the support of the *Hornby Trust History of ELT/ELE* initiative  
and in collaboration with the *University of Warwick ELT Archive*

Michael West (1888–1973) was a British educator who spent twenty years in Bengal in the 1910s–1930s, serving as Principal of the Teachers' Training College (TTC) in Dhaka from 1920 to 1932. During this time, he developed many original insights into problems of teaching English in 'difficult circumstances', as expounded in works such as *Bilingualism* (with special reference to Bengal) (1926a), *Learning to Read a Foreign Language* (1926b) and – much later in his career – *Teaching English in Difficult Circumstances* (1960). He was also a successful textbook and supplementary reader author – becoming well-known internationally for his Longmans New Method series, itself based on readers originally designed for Bengali pupils.

In this webinar series, organized to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Michael West's death, the panellists consider the continuing relevance of his ideas – and the relevance of historical studies of ELT in general – with a focus on issues of appropriate methodology in the challenging conditions of classrooms in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the Global South today.

**Michael West**  
(1888–1973)

**WEBINAR 1**  
**Contributions of Michael West in the History of ELT: In Bengal and Beyond**  
Hamidur Rahman and Richard Smith with comments from Henry Widdowson  
**Saturday 27 May, 2023**  
13:00–14:30 GMT / 19:00–20:30 BDT

**WEBINAR 2**  
**The present-day relevance of the work of Michael West**  
**(1) Teaching in difficult circumstances and (2) Reading Method**  
Richard Smith, Hamidur Rahman, and Ranjit Podder  
**Saturday 3 June, 2023**  
13:00–14:30 GMT / 19:00–20:30 BDT

**WEBINAR 3**  
**Contributions of Michael West to ELT in Bengal and beyond:**  
**(3) Construction of textbook materials and (4) Teaching of speaking**  
Santosh Mahapatra, Richard Smith, Rubina Khan and Arifa Rahman  
**Saturday 10 June, 2023**  
13:00–14:30 GMT / 19:00–20:30 BDT


## 3.2 Mainstreaming history – towards stronger arguments

Stern (1983):

In methodological introductions, ‘the historical antecedents are often no more than a backdrop to set off with bold strokes those aspects the writer wishes to emphasize, and the historical treatment is necessarily brief and often reveals a definite bias’ (p. 77)

Hunter and Smith (2011) discuss how ‘packaging up’ of methods consigns them to the ‘dustbin of history’, enabling the establishment of new ideas


What does this kind of ahistoricity / ‘abuse’ of history justify/support, in more depth?



Critical analysis of three core texts in TESOL teacher education, each of which is widely used and has gone through a number of editions:

- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2013). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (2014). *The practice of English language teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson.

For each of these, we are considering the extent to which the history of language teaching has a place at all and the nature of the view of history implied.





## Reproduction of 'myths':

### 1. 'Scientism': reinforcement of ...

- progressivism
- applicationism

### 2. 'Coloniality': reinforcement of ...

- native speakerism / Anglocentrism
- universalism

These conspire to disempower [periphery] teachers, counteracting their autonomy and agency



### 3.3 Countering scientism and coloniality by placing history at the heart of AL and ELT

Cf.

- Keynote paper on 'The role of historiography in decentring ELT' by Richard Smith (2018). ELTAI National Seminar on 'English Language Education: Theory and Practice', University of Hyderabad, India.



## A guiding question

How can English teachers [in public education systems and in 'difficult circumstances'] develop appropriate methodology?

## A preliminary answer


We need to identify / bring into being *suitable foundations* for language teaching, given what we know about the inappropriateness of top-down / centre-periphery propositions

Can historiography help?



What grand narratives of scientism / coloniality might we find being countered via history?

Stories of ...

- good practices in the past, handed down by teachers
  - teachers innovating appropriately in context
  - inappropriate impositions / failures of outside-in reform
  - teachers resisting inappropriate reform
- 

## 3.4 Building History of Applied Linguistics (HoAL)

Viewed as history of theory–practice relationships, i.e. applied linguistics ‘avant la lettre’, and of alternative conceptions, not just internally to post-1946 Anglo AL.

- 'Harold E. Palmer's alternative "applied linguistics"' by Richard Smith (2011). *Histoire–Epistémologie–Langage* 33/1: 53-67.

## 3.5 Engaging in grounded histories (focusing on contexts and practice)

- *Policies and Practice in Language Learning and Teaching: 20th-Century Historical Perspectives* co-edited by S. Doff and R. Smith (2022).
- *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching: Historical Perspectives* co-edited by Richard Smith and Tim Giesler (in press). Benjamins

## 3.6 Focus on neglected voices



E.g. Women in ELT history

*Women in the History of Language Learning and Teaching* (forthcoming). Amsterdam University Press.

Via oral history / neglected documents and other sources?

**HERstory of ELT: ‘There are Hordes of Us, but less loudly sung’**



## 3.7 Histories of English Language Education (HELE) in different contexts

- *HELE in Japan* -

'Lessons from the past: traditions and reforms' by Richard Smith, with Imura Motomichi (2004).

- *HELE in Germany* -

e.g. Klippel, Friederike. (1994) *Englischlernen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert: Die Geschichte der Lehrbücher und Unterrichtsmethoden*. Münster: Nodus.

- *HELE in India* -

e.g. *Language Policy and Education in India: Documents, Contexts and Debates*, co-edited by M. Sridhar and Sunita Mishra (2017). Routledge.

HELE-India research group

## 3.8 Developing resources and activities for teacher education

E.g.

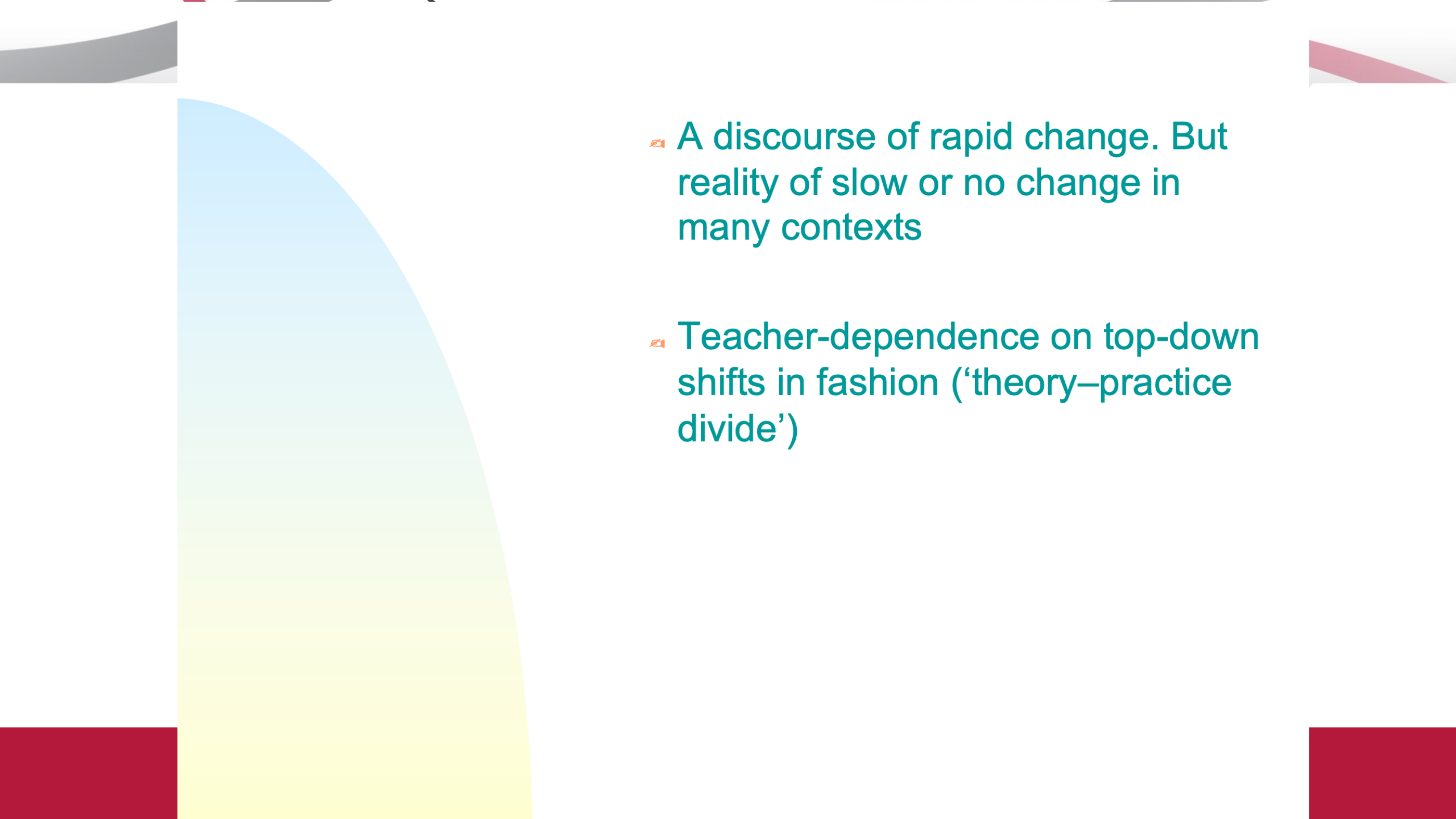
- Online resources for ELT teacher educators (cf. Language Teaching: Learning from the Past for modern language teachers in the UK)
- Using oral history interviews / engaging students in oral history interviews

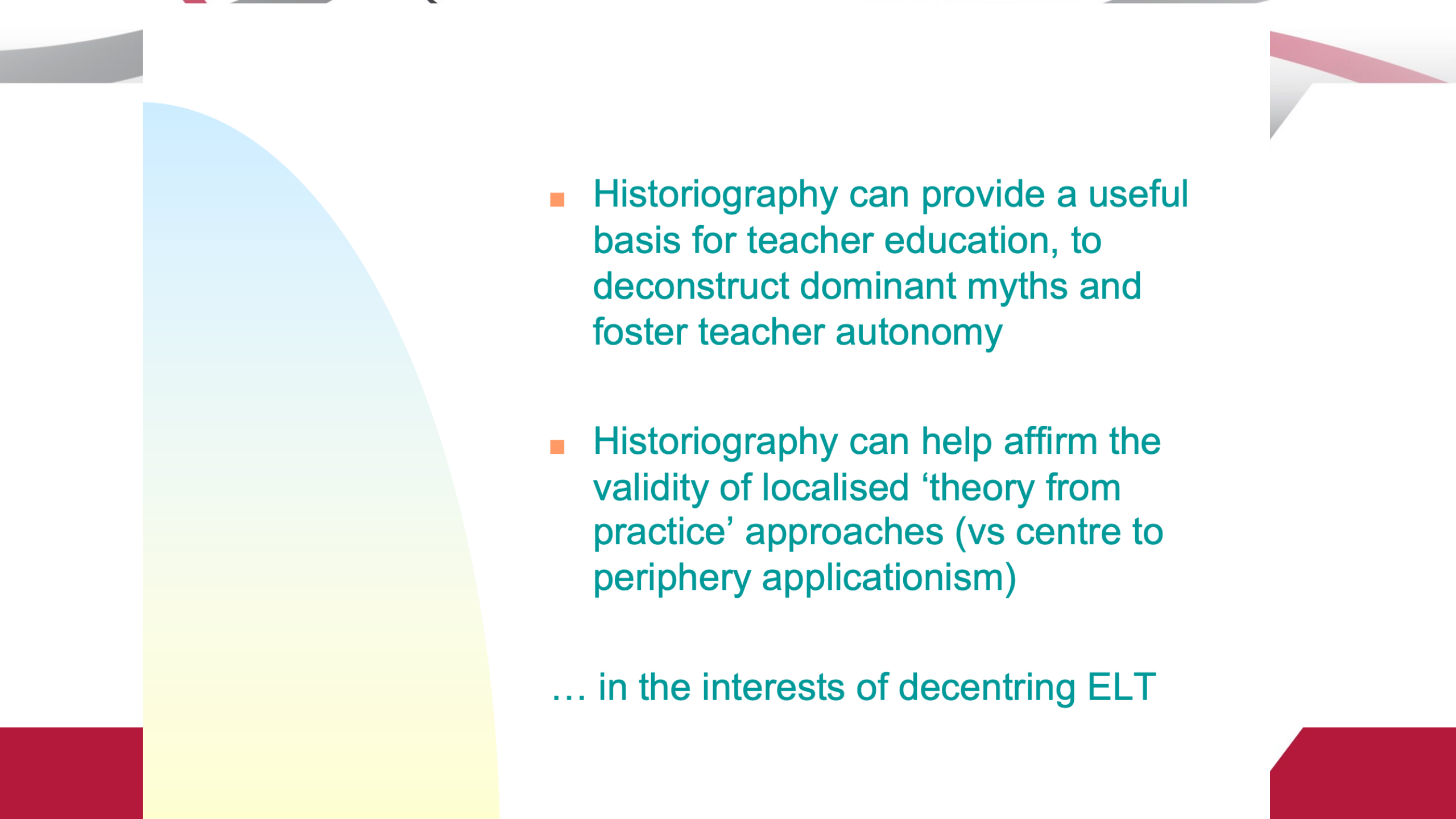
etc.

\* 28–30 June conference, Faro - Language teachers, methodologies and teacher training in historical perspective

# Finally, then ...

- 📌 ELT is a dynamic, forward-looking field ('paradigm shifts', 'quantum leaps' etc.)
- 📌 The past is undervalued / dismissed as outmoded / appealed to only propagandistically, in support of the latest ideas.
- 📌 Instead of history, we have 'myths'

- 
- ✉ A discourse of rapid change. But reality of slow or no change in many contexts
  - ✉ Teacher-dependence on top-down shifts in fashion ('theory–practice divide')

- 
- Historiography can provide a useful basis for teacher education, to deconstruct dominant myths and foster teacher autonomy
  - Historiography can help affirm the validity of localised 'theory from practice' approaches (vs centre to periphery applicationism)

... in the interests of decentring ELT