English language training is one of the motors of the globalisation process and a multi-million dollar industry. How did the industry evolve and where did it start out? Amy Baker charts the rise of the ELT industry from visions of international understanding to the commercial reality of today’s marketplace, and provides potted histories of some of the main ELT players.

The evolution of ELT
There are many brands in English language teaching (ELT) that are recognisable because they have been a feature of the industry for decades. One of these is Bell International, which like many other schools, started out as the brainchild of one person. Like the eponymous Kaplan, Berlitz and King’s English schools, the Bell schools were named after founder, Frank Bell. Bell founded his first school in Cambridge, UK, in 1955 and his mission was similar to the ideals held among his peers: to “promote international understanding by providing high quality English language training to students all over the world”. Bell is said to have been inspired to set up a language school during his time in a prisoner of war camp in Borneo during the Second World War, when he set up a university inside the camp.

At Eastbourne School of English in the UK, which is thought to be among the UK ELT forerunners, these same ideals were championed by Frances Batchelor in the pre-war years. Cecil Williamson at the school explains that Batchelor started Eastbourne School of English “with the dream of encouraging young people of all nations to learn the English language and to foster friendship between nations of the world”.

Another factor that bolstered the development of the ELT industry in the early days was the prestige that was attached to second language acquisition at many universities. Oxford-based St Clares in the UK— which was originally known as the Oxford English Centre for Foreign Students— was set up in 1953 to offer, according to 1965 at the suggestion, rumour goes, of the government to provide training for students preparing for university entrance.”

Meanwhile, in Malta, the first English language school in the country is widely considered to be NSTS English Language Institute, which was set up by a university department. Francis Stivala at the school relates, “In 1954, the Student Representative Council of the University of Malta joined other European university student unions to develop student travel and exchanges as a means of promoting international understanding and peace after the devastating war years.” He explains NSTS was set up as a student committee and, in 1963, English language courses were established “as an activity to attract more of these visiting students”.

It is difficult to track down the very first English language schools in all markets, but our research indicates that one of the earliest schools on record, certainly one of the oldest schools still in operation, is Berlitz. Mike Palm at the company recounts that the school’s founder, German Maximilian Berlitz, often travelled to Europe to demonstrate his Berlitz teaching method in the late 1800s, as well as to teach English to various students—such as Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1890, then emperor of Germany and King of Prussia. “We know that in May 1900 there were Berlitz schools in 16 European countries,” he says. The first Berlitz language school was established in 1878 in Providence, RI, USA.

In the UK, one of the earliest schools was the London School of English, set up in 1912. Timothy Blake at the school comments, “The school was started by a Berlitz teacher called Alfred Larke, who
1962

SES Folkestone was five years old in 1962

A guide to some ELT landmarks through history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>First industrial revolution begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>World War I begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>World War II begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>First lunar landing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kaplan Inc.

From its humble beginnings as a one-to-one tutoring business in the USA in 1938, Kaplan was founded on the principle of helping students succeed. Founder Stanley Kaplan helped prepare students for standardised tests including the SAT, pioneering the test preparation industry in the USA. Kaplan expanded his operations nationally and in 1984, he sold his flourishing business to The Washington Post Company. In the early 1990s, an entrepreneurial team took the helm at Kaplan Inc. and the company entered into businesses such as post-secondary education, professional training and online learning. Kaplan began offering TOEFL preparation courses and then expanded into offering General English courses. Today, Kaplan English Programs has schools in most major US cities.

Aspect

Aspect Education, established over 35 years ago, is a group of 24 English language schools. Its origins date back to 1963, when two Swiss businessmen, Schiller and Schiller, formed Angloworld Travel, bringing the students from the UK to Japan and Switzerland to study English. In 1972, they decided to open their own schools in Oxford, Cambridge, Bournemouth and London. Angloworld Education merged with Aspect, a group of US language schools, to form Aspect International Language Schools in 1991. In 2000, through a merger with International Language Academies – which had schools in Australia and New Zealand – Aspect became a global education company under the management of David Jones, former president of EF International Language Schools.

OISE Group

Til Ginski, who still owns and manages the company, established the original Oxford Intensive School of English (OISE) in the UK in 1973. Branches of the school have since been opened in Bristol, Cambridge and London in the UK; Boston and San Francisco in the USA; Sydney, Australia; Madrid, Spain; Heidelberg, Germany; and most recently, Paris, France in 2000. The OISE group also owns other schools in the UK that continue to operate independently. These are Basil Paterson College in Edinburgh, Harvard School of English in Washington, Central School of English in London, Newbury Hall in Newbury and Pilgrims in Canterbury, which joined OISE in 2003. ACE in Madrid, Spain, is also a member of the group. Approximately 12,700 students were taught across the OISE group in 2004.

King’s

Frederick Walter King and Robert Quinton Watts co-founded King’s School of English in the UK in 1957 in Bournemouth. Upon King’s retirement, sole ownership passed to Watts and the school is still owned by the Watts family. A London branch of the school opened in 1966 and a specialist school for junior courses opened in Wimborne in 1971. King’s College, specialising in English for special purposes (which is no longer in operation), opened in Bournemouth in 1976 and St. Joseph’s Hall in Oxford, now known as King’s Oxford, joined the group in 1987. The first King’s College in Thailand opened in 1995, under the co-ownership of Mrs. Watts. There are now five King’s schools there. King’s was opened in 1999 by Mr. Watts’ oldest daughter and her husband.

At around this time, English language teaching was offered in some form at a number of universities in the UK and the USA. Although it is difficult to ascertain the first university programmes in both countries, in the USA, Columbia University’s Extension Teaching Division in New York, NY, offered “English for foreigners” in 1911, “the earliest year for which we can find records”, states David Quinn at the institution.

The first stand-alone ELT division of a US university, however, is widely acknowledged to have come into existence much later, in 1941. Joan Morley, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI, confirms, “In June 1941, by action of the Board of Regents, the English Language Institute (ELI) was established at the University of Michigan. The ELI programme [an intensive course of 25 hours per week] was the first ever offered on a university campus in the Western Hemisphere.”

Morley offers a fascinating insight into the reasons for the ELI’s establishment, illustrating that politics also played a role in ELT evolution. She explains that the students enrolled in the first course were predominantly professionals – in medicine, law, engineering, finance, and psychology – who wished to undertake advanced study in the USA in their fields. “They were all graduate-level students from Central and South America – Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru and Venezuela,” recounts Morley. “In fact, Michigan was chosen to serve the greater good of the political affairs of the USA. Specifically, the University of Michigan received its mandate to develop language and cultural programmes for Latin American professional personnel and students as a part of then-President Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Good Neighbour Policy’."

This was a policy to “counter pre-World War threats of totalitarian takeovers in Central and South American countries and to strengthen ties with the United States, Canada, and Mexico,” Morley adds.

The first language training departments at Canadian universities opened soon after, in 1942 at the University of New Brunswick Fredericton and Queens University in Kingston, Ontario. However, it was not until after the Second World War that private language teaching institutions started to appear more regularly around the world, capitalising on a new era of post-war prosperity and capacity for travel. In the UK,
many more schools emerged during the 1950s, most of which were set up on a tight budget. In the case of the Oxford English Centre for Foreign Students, founders Anne Dreydel and Pamela Morris initially offered English language training in their own homes, or in a room provided by the British Council, relates Peters.

John Eckersley, one of the pioneers of the UK industry and the only director who is still involved with the running of a school – in this case, the Eckersley School of English in Oxford – points out, “In the 1950s, it was pretty easy to start a language school. You found some premises, opened the doors and the students flocked in. There was a big demand from all Western European countries and Britain was the only country to come to.” He points out, like Peters, that the au pair business was another factor that powered industry growth in the 1950s, “so there was strong demand for part-time classes as well as full-time classes”.

Regulation and industry association came some time after that. Eckersley remembers, “There were no Tefl courses or certificates, until John Haycraft started them at International House (in the UK), so you...”
The 80s made their mark on Bell students

21982

New Zealand and South Africa were the last two countries to develop a private ELT industry. Dominion English School, which was set up in 1969, was the first in New Zealand, while in South Africa, the Cape Town School of English claims to be the first school of its kind, having been launched in 1990 and registered in 1991.

John Langdon, Managing Director of Dominion, remembers that New Zealand’s ELT industry only really took off in the mid-1980s. “I had just returned from my overseas experience, mainly teaching English at Berlitz in Paris, in 1969,” he recounts. “At first we had to do many things to survive. Occasionally a student would arrive off the street to learn English.”

The ELT industry has evolved considerably since those days. As Eckersley points out, “a lot of big operators have come into the market”. Opinions are mixed about how onward development of the industry will manifest itself, but changes are certain. With a number of smaller schools approaching their 40th or 50th anniversaries, ownership of schools will be passed on to heirs or possibly sold to other companies. Scott Anderson of SES Folkestone in the UK – one of the founder members of Arels – underlines, “The natural lifecycle of a family-run independent [school] is very much tied up with the longevity of its creator/s.”

Further new developments, other than ownership, will be in the geographical direction of school growth. A number of larger schools now have in-country operations, as well as schools in locations where the English language is spoken. Examples include Geos, which in fact started out in Japan; ACL in Asia; and St Giles, which has centres in Brazil. A further development among larger schools has been opening in-country offices to support agents.

This is a business plan of Geos and EF, among others, and could become more widespread. Anders Ahlund at EF comments, “Asia continues to have a growth that is stronger than Europe and South America. EF has a very strong presence in all Asia, with excellent networks of agents and support offices.”

Whatever direction industry growth takes, it seems clear that agents will remain pivotal to the prosperity of ELT schools in the future.