



# **Summer Workshop 2001**

## ***Communication Skills and the English Speaking World***

*The College of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarah, India*

*19<sup>th</sup> August 2001 to 7<sup>th</sup> September 2001*

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*Workshop Report*

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## Summary

The ELST (English Language Scholarships for Tibetans) summer workshop 2001 was devised to help a wide group of young Tibetans to enhance and to improve their English language and communication skills. The three-week workshop was held in the College of Higher Tibetan studies in Sarah, India.

A team of six volunteer instructors from Cambridge were selected by the ELST committee to prepare and teach the workshop. Over a period of nine months, the Cambridge team devised a structure for the workshop based around five main subject areas, namely: English Language and Literature; culture; presentation skills; Finance and Development; Information Technology and Science.

English language lessons formed a core for the workshop with additional topics being taught with the assistance of pre-selected texts. Most workshop days consisted of two ninety minute language sessions in the morning and two ninety minute “topic” based classes in the afternoon. In addition there were three seminar days entitled “globalisation”, “political conflicts” and “development and progress”. The seminar days involved small group discussions, topic presentations, common discussions, and films/documentaries. The formal part of the workshop ended with every workshop participant making a formal presentation.

In addition to formal lessons, there were official visits and informal evening activities. The workshop as a whole visited the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa and the Cambridge team visited the Nechung Oracle. Evening activities aimed to promote English use in an informal context and included films, sport, indoor games, a bonfire and a walk.

An improvement, which could be implemented in future ELST workshops, would be an increase in emphasis on the language aspect of the course and the inclusion of a language expert within the team. However, feedback received from the workshop participants was very positive with participants enjoying the workshop immensely and noticing marked improvement to their English language skills and confidence.

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## Introduction

English Language Scholarships for Tibetans (ELST) aims to advance education by the provision of English language scholarships. The scholarships are aimed in particular, but not exclusively, for young professional and business people, and for secular and religious scholars, from the refugee Tibetan community in exile in India, and from related communities.

The ELST summer workshop was devised to help a wider group of such people to enhance and to improve their English language communication skills so that they can work more effectively for the benefit of both themselves and their families, and local and world communities.

This report describes the pre-workshop preparation, workshop details and feedback received from workshop participants.

## Pre-Workshop Preparation

### Cambridge

After being selected by the ELST committee in November 2000, a group of seven Cambridge graduates and postgraduates started preparing for the first Summer Workshop. The team was transformed on many occasions, as individuals had to leave due to other priorities. By August 2001, however, the workshop team was ready and on its way to India, with 6 instructors, a professional photographer, and three trustees of ELST.

<i>Cambridge Team</i>	Armen Papazian Rajesh Joshi Owen Pickrell Sarah Walters Tara Sinclair Catrin Roberts
<i>Professional Photographer</i>	Georgina Cranston
<i>ELST Trustees on the team to India</i>	Bill Papworth Hilary Papworth Penny Ainsworth

Through regular meetings and discussions, the Cambridge team developed the structure and content of the workshop over a period of 9 months. The team, given its expertise and knowledge base, narrowed down the content of the summer school to five main themes:

- 1- English Language and Literature
- 2- Cultures and the Global village
- 3- Presentations, written and oral
- 4- Finance and Development
- 5- Information technology and Science

Starting off as a lecture based interdisciplinary summer school, the workshop eventually crystallised into a hybrid structure where instruction was to take place through specific texts. This way, the workshop integrated the teaching of English with the teaching of finance, information technology, and literature. Based on 4 guiding principles, flexibility, adaptability, usefulness, and diversity, the team set to address, first of all, the English language needs of the prospective students.

While prepared and designed in Cambridge, the ELST Summer Workshop titled “Communication Skills and the English-speaking World” reached its final format in Dharamsala, India. After a planned day of introductions, discussions, questionnaires and language tests, the team adjusted its operating framework and transformed the structure of the workshop to fit the needs and interests of the participants.

## **Sarah**

The campus at the College of Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarah was simple but practical. The monsoon was in its final stages and future workshops could benefit by being scheduled a week or two later.

Volunteers were allocated rooms with en-suite bathrooms. These were simple, acceptable and secure. Participants shared two and three bedded room with communal bathrooms.

In addition the team used a guest suite which provided a meeting/common room and a further room for stationery, bottled water, etc.

The workshop was allocated five classrooms. In addition some classes were held in the excellent library facility and computer room.

Simple canteen facilities, exclusive to the workshop, were shared by volunteers and participants. An active ELST notice board was maintained adjacent to the canteen. This was updated daily with timetabling and other information as well as the College Rules which the Workshop adopted in full.

Maintaining a clear but flexible and re-active timetable requires great attention. The volunteer team, together with participant representatives and were appropriate ELST observers, need to meet for review and planning daily. These meetings usually took place around 5.30pm and lasted about half an hour.

## **Teaching Classes**

### **Organisation**

The workshop timetable was based around two morning and two afternoon teaching sessions, each session lasting one and a half hours with a half an hour break in between teaching sessions. We ran three concurrent classes in each teaching session. With six instructors on the teaching team, this meant that each instructor taught, on average, two classes each day. The two morning teaching sessions were reserved for language classes whereas the afternoon classes were reserved for text based, subject specific classes. On some occasions the subject classes were moved to the morning and the language classes to the afternoon. This was

necessary to enable use of the computer facilities at Sarah, which were only available in the morning.

## **Classification Test**

On the first day of the workshop, the group was set a hundred question grammar test which had been supplied by the Studio School in Cambridge. This classification test consisted of a sentence missing a word or phrase which had to be completed using one of four options (a-d) given with each question. Tests of this nature are often used in language schools in order to class the students, with the questions becoming increasingly difficult as they go on. The participants were given an hour and a half in which to complete the test.

From this test, we were able to divide the participants into three main classes. Class Three consisted of the students with the most advanced English, Class Two contained the Intermediate students and Class One had students who weren't quite as comfortable with English. Although we did not have the grading sheet that would have normally come with the test, the classes, based on our own classification system, seemed to contain participants of relatively equal ability. The exception to this was Class One. There was a wider range of ability in this class - ranging from those whose oral skills were excellent but perhaps couldn't read or write particularly well, to those whose English was very limited. Although all the members of this class greatly improved their English skills over the course, it was noted that they had difficulties with the afternoon lectures. If the aim of future workshops would be to discuss one subject such as business, it may be an idea to class the participants either before the course starts, or before they are accepted on the course in the first place.

A brief dictation test was also given to the participants during the introductory session. This consisted of a brief extract about the use of English from Bill Bryson's book *Mother Tongue*. It was a useful exercise that enabled us to check the aural ability of the participants and to correlate their comprehension with their grammatical knowledge.

## **Language Classes**

The language classes were intended to give a firm grounding for the lecture classes and were, as such, relatively intensive. Each class was taught by the same two teachers throughout the course. On reflection, this allowed for greater degree of cohesion and development between the classes. The three language classes were taught using books from the *Headway* series. Class One used the Intermediate book, Class Two used both the Intermediate and Advanced-Intermediate volumes whilst Class Three concentrated on finer grammatical points and spoken English interspersed with the Advanced *Headway* book. The *Headway* books are accompanied by audio-cassettes and these proved a useful tool - small points such as hearing various regional accents in the short dialogues were beneficial to the participants.

Class One concentrated on improving spoken English and acquiring a firmer grasp of English grammar. This was done using the book as a guide and also dividing the group into pairs to create situational dialogues. Grammatical errors were then noted, and fitted into the topic for that particular lesson - present perfect simple and so forth.

As noted in Classification Test above, the members of Class One had greater variety in their English ability than the other groups, and as such, extra lessons were provided for those who

appeared to be struggling somewhat. The timetable allowing, it was sometimes possible to take out these members and give them attention in pairs. Thus it was possible for all the class members to improve without hindering the development of the others.

All classes took advantage of extra worksheets designed to hone grammatical style as well as teaching elements of English such as Idioms. These worksheets were often given as homework, and most of class members reported that they were beneficial. It would appear that the format of the classes was, for the whole, effective - this was reflected in the feedback received at the end of the workshop.

## **Optional Classes**

The students had a choice of three classes for each of the afternoon sessions. A choice of classes was offered so as to avoid clashes with similar subjects in each slot. The number of students in each class was not limited and every class was open to all students, regardless of language ability. In addition, there was no obligation on students to attend the same class as he / she attended the day before.

Initial worries were that allowing students to choose which sessions to attend in a very relaxed and informal way might cause problems in terms of class numbers. However, in practice the organisation of classes in this manner was very positive. It would have been extremely problematic to ask students to sign up to subjects in advance, due to the misconceptions that some harboured about certain subjects. (For example, many assumed that the literature class would be better for their English language learning than other classes. This was a misconceived idea as most sessions were text based no matter what subject was being offered.)

It was certainly the case that certain sessions attracted only a couple of students whilst others attracted larger groups. We felt, as teachers, that this was a positive effect, as the dynamics in different sized groups are very diverse. The fluid nature of the classes which meant that each day one would be faced with an entirely different group of students, with an entirely different dynamic, made the lessons exciting and challenging.

The organisation did necessitate a certain flexibility in teaching practice. For example, a lecture format was suitable for a larger groups but with only two or three participants, discussions and question and answer sessions worked better. In smaller groups it was also possible to spend more time discussing individual student's class work as a group and enabling the participants to learn from each others' written material. The necessity to respond to the needs of particular class sizes and to particular individuals meant that the more flexible an instructor could be with his or her planned lesson, the better the response from the class.

The two major drawbacks of not restricting the students in their choice of the afternoon sessions were that, firstly, it made setting homework problematic as the same students would not necessarily turn up to the next day's session, and secondly it made structuring follow-up sessions difficult. Future ELST teams will thus need to decide if they are going to attempt to structure courses in the afternoons as opposed to single isolated lessons, if so, a different form of organisation will be necessary in order to allow for more continuity.

The type of material used in classes depended on the subject and the instructor. We found that if the lesson was to be 'text-based', a paragraph or two was enough to sustain discussion for

the whole session, and that lessons based on a substantial amount of reading tended to drag or to stagnate. Oral and visual aids occasioned a very positive reception and more provision in this department could make future workshops more successful. All of the ELST team found that their planned or proposed lessons changed dramatically upon arrival at Sarah as we responded to participants' needs and wants. By the end of the first week our awareness of the particular desires of the students as well as a vague idea of which classes and subjects would interest them enabled us to target our lessons much more effectively. Getting to know the students personally, in and out of class, was a far more effective guide to our lesson planning procedures than the official feedback forms and questionnaires.

The theme of the workshop 'Communication Skills and the English Speaking World' was ideal, as it allowed for a very broad scope of subjects to be taught enabling each instructor to structure lessons around subjects that both interested them personally and which were also highly pertinent to the participants' experience. We made it clear from the outset that the workshop belonged to the participants as much, if not more, than to the instructors and that it was their forum for debate and discussion. Thus we encouraged them to bring as much as they could of their own experiences to the lessons and it was this openness to each other that made the sessions so exciting. This is perhaps worth bearing in mind when choosing the theme for future workshops as too narrow a theme, or too closed a pedagogic approach, could lead to a more one-sided mode of instruction and thus limit the potential for participants to develop their confidence in public speaking and communication in English. It was this confidence building that most participants felt was the major benefit of the workshop as opposed to grammar learning or knowledge gained, thus the more open future workshops are to the participants' contribution, the better.

What made the afternoon sessions successful above all else was the team's flexibility and ability to adapt. This capacity was greatly enhanced by the level of our communication with each other. In the daily team meetings we discussed plans for the coming day and made sure there were no clashes that were likely to cause problems. We had a vague idea of which sessions were likely to be very popular (such as the computer classes), and which were likely to work well with smaller groups. We were also aware when certain instructors wished to teach a series of classes and thus were careful to avoid placing the popular sessions in those slots.

We tried to ensure that there was enough diversity in the classes; hence there would usually be one technological or scientific class running simultaneously with a more economic or development oriented session at the same time as a class on literature or culture. During the course of the workshop joint sessions were sometimes run when two instructors felt they both had something to offer to a particular topic. The timetable thus evolved through the utilisation of our own communication skills and awareness of the participants' needs.

## **Computing**

### **General**

CHTS, Sarah had one computer room comprising of 14 PCs and one networked laser printer. The PCs were running Windows 98 and installed with Microsoft office software. This computer room was made available to ELST during the morning and sometime during the evening. The workshop participants made some use of the computer room in their own time, for example to prepare formal letters and CVs and to word-process their final day presentations. The computer room was also used by the ELST teaching team and committee to prepare posters, lessons and letters.

### **HTML**

A basic introduction to HTML course, comprising of four lessons, was taught during the workshop. The course was offered during the optional sessions and proved to be very popular, each class was therefore offered twice to prevent clashes with other optional classes and to enable every participant to have access to one computer during the classes.

The aim of the HTML classes was to provide the participants with enough knowledge to be able to write a basic but fully functional web-site. The course assumed no prior HTML skills and at least a basic computer proficiency. Each lesson began with a brief discussion of the topics by the instructor in front of the class. The participants were then left to work through a pre-prepared tutorial and a short exercise. The participants were helped with individual problems as they arose.

Three participants attended the course with very little previous experience on computers and these participants struggled through the course as some previous experience was expected. One participant had quite a bit of previous HTML experience and the course was of no real benefit to him. However, on the whole, the class format seemed to work well with the majority of participants completing the four lessons successfully and feeling that they had gained a tangible skill from the course.

### **Software Skills Class**

One practical "software skills" class was taught towards the end of the course, comprising of demonstrations of particular skills in Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. Again this class proved popular and more than one similar class, if possible, should be included in future workshops.

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## One-Day Seminars

The workshop was characterised by three one day seminars which were outside the format of the everyday schedule. They aimed at initiating debates and were on the following topics: Globalisation, Political Conflicts, and Development and Progress.

All three seminars involved small group discussions, topic presentations, common discussions, and films/documentaries. The seminars were special days where all the participants and the Cambridge team members got together as thinking beings and explored their understanding of a diverse set of issues. By inviting them to think together, exchange knowledge, and discuss experience, the seminars put to test the communication skills of participants and team members alike.

The **Globalisation Seminar** involved discussions on the economic, political, cultural and religious dimensions of globalisation. Participants addressed the civilisational characteristics of the globalised world and explored the meaning of 'globalisation' in a spiritually enlightened world.

The **Political Conflicts** seminar addressed issues relating to national identity, nationalism, war and peace, and to a range of case studies such as Tibet, Armenia, and Wales.

Last but not least, the **Development and Progress** seminar explored the meaning of progress. Participants and team members discussed progress in an abstract human world, as well as in the historically defined mosaic that we live today.

## Final Day Presentations By Workshop Participants

### Organisation

Early on in the 2001 workshop it was decided that it would be a good idea to give the participants the opportunity to present some aspects of their professions and their experiences as Tibetan refugees in India to the whole group. They were divided into four groups according to profession and asked to work in those groups to design presentations. The groups were:

- **Buddhist Philosophy** (presented by the monks and ex-monks);
- **Tibetan Medicine** (presented by doctors and astrologers from Men Tsee Khang and affiliated staff);
- **Refugees** (presented by workers at the Refugee Reception Centre and by those with personal experiences to relate);
- **Education In Exile** (presented by school teachers).

The idea was that every participant should have the opportunity to speak. Each group was allocated one or two instructors to help them with their presentations throughout the course of the three weeks.

## Experiences

After some debate over the most suitable time to hold the presentations and how long each group should be allocated it was determined that they should have 90 minutes each and that all four presentations should take place on the final Friday of the workshop before the presentation ceremony, play and final night farewells. This worked very well in practice as the day became something of a celebration of Tibetan culture and expertise. It also served to underline how the participants were going to use the skills they had acquired, or honed, over the three week workshop to serve their community and culture as a whole (a mission most participants expressed vocally and one which is fundamental to the ELST organisation).

Timetabling the presentations for the last day meant that the participants were given plenty of time to prepare high quality work and to summon up the courage to present them. By being informed of the task well in advance the participants were made aware of a sense of occasion; the effect being that all took the day seriously – many dressing especially smartly to present their work. The other effect of holding the presentation day at the end of the workshop was that the participants were able to explore how they had all increased in confidence in spoken English. Even the shyer, or less able members of the groups spoke fluently and made a real effort to present their information. There was clear development shown by most participants over the course of the workshop in this respect.

The day was made a success both by the enthusiasm of the participants and also because they were encouraged to use audio-visual aids to make their presentations lively and exciting. The Buddhist Philosophers thus acted out a debate on selflessness; the Tibetan doctors performed a public consultation with one of the ELST team and the Refugee group used photographic displays to describe the detention centre and a documentary video to illustrate the experience of escaping from Tibet.

Working with the team members on their group presentations throughout the three weeks outside class time was a positive experience as it allowed the participants a chance to have individual attention with regard to their written work, allowed them time to discuss in English their professions and experiences and thus to build a deeper understanding and relationship with members of the ELST team. The team was impressed by the standard of the work produced and the process was an important one in getting to know the participants better as individuals.

## **Official Visits During The Workshop**

As a group, including the Tibetan participants, the instructor team, and members of the E.L.S.T. committee, we visited the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa. The third visit was to the Nechung Oracle to which the 'Cambridge team' went.

The first official visit was for an audience with His Holiness the Karmapa, the head of the Kagyu school of Buddhism and a new refugee from Tibet, who is staying in a monastery just outside Dharamsala. We received a short teaching on Dharma and a blessing.

We were also granted an interview with His Holiness the Dalai Lama for which we prepared four questions in advance. These were picked out from many questions which were suggested mainly by members of the Cambridge team. The participants were reluctant to suggest questions to be asked, maybe because they felt it was such an important occasion. And accordingly, it was quite difficult to settle on only four questions. The Dalai Lama spoke for over an hour mostly on the topic of education, the situation inside Tibet, the future of the Tibetan people, and the way to a better world.

The final visit was to the monk known as the Nechung oracle, who is the State Oracle of the Tibetan Government. He was not channelling the oracle at the time, and so, over tea and cakes, we talked about his life in general and his travels to different parts of the world.

## Evening Entertainment

Entertainment was offered after dinner on all evenings apart from the weekends when a large number of the participants went home. Although the entertainment was optional, participants were encouraged to attend as it offered an excellent opportunity for further English practice in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Two Tibetans were elected as entertainment representatives to assist the Cambridge team and to offer suggestions for entertainment. The following entertainment was offered :

- **Films** (Shown on different evenings) : *The Three Musketeers, Shawshank Redemption, The Great Escape, The Graduate, Gladiator, Seven Years in Tibet, Jurassic Park 3*. Many people were keen to watch films as sources of evening entertainment. Some people did not attend as they had either seen the films before, they did not enjoy watching films or their English was not sufficient.
- **A Quiz** : The Tibetan participants were pitted against the Cambridge team. The Cambridge team asked questions about British/Western culture, literature and geography and the workshop participants asked questions about Tibetan culture and geography. Everybody attended the quiz and it was a great success. Following the quiz, everybody retired outside for a round of candlelight story and joke telling.
- **Basketball Game** : ELST vs Sarah. The game proved successful although not all of the participants could be involved. More sport during the workshop would have been popular however, it was difficult to find time for sport with classes being held all day and it getting dark shortly after dinner
- **Walk** : The majority of the workshop participants and the Cambridge team went for a two hour circular walk in the vicinity of IBD Sarah. The walk offered an excellent opportunity for informal English practice although it meant that Dinner had to be re-scheduled to ensure that the walk could take place in daylight.
- **Tibetan Games Evening** : This evening was organised entirely by the Tibetan participants and proved to be a great success. The evening involved mixed teams consisting of participants and the Cambridge team competing against each other in 'party' style games. The games were high spirited and were enjoyed by all. Following the games 'campfire' style songs and dances took place by candlelight to end the evening in style!
- **Bonfire** : This was held a short distance away from the IBD campus after dinner. The wood was bought from the village together with supplies of food and drinks. The evening provided an enchanting atmosphere (although it was quite hot!) for informal conversation. Unfortunately the English and Tibetan song repertoire had almost been exhausted from the Tibetan games evening so campfire songs were a little thin on the ground!
- **Ladies Evening** : A ladies evening was suggested as it was felt that the female workshop students were slightly shy and were therefore overshadowed by their male colleagues at the beginning of the course and were therefore not benefiting fully from the extra-curricular activities. The evening did not get off the ground however – the

ladies were not interested! At the end of the course the ladies lost some of their shyness and were able to make more of a contribution towards the evening activities.

- **Dinner at Hotel Tibet** : The ELST committee hosted the whole workshop group and Cambridge team for a formal dinner at Hotel Tibet, McLoed Ganj on the last Tuesday of the workshop. Two workshop participants had to leave the course early and the evening provided an ideal opportunity to bid farewell to the participants. Again, the evening provided an excellent basis for English language conversation away from the classroom. Being at the end of the course, it was pleasing to note how the participants' English had improved.
- **Last Night** : A presentation ceremony was made by Bill Papworth and Armen Papazian before the final dinner where certificates and gifts were presented to the course participants. After dinner at CHTS, the play was performed to the whole group which was an excellent way to finish the course at Sarah. The whole group then proceeded to a restaurant at Dharamsala for the remainder of the evening – a good time was had by all!

## **The Play**

### **Organisation**

It was decided early on in planning the workshop that some form of drama class would be a good informal way to get the participants to use English. The original plan was to take a text with us and to rehearse a short play for performance. Instead, we decided to write our own play with interested participants. Two members of the team thus devoted approximately five sessions (in and outside class time) to the play. It was written in the first two and rehearsed from then on. It took the form of a comic skit about the workshop entitled 'Seminar: Fashionisation', in which the participants played upon the foibles and follies of the team members. The play was written in the second and third weeks after sufficient time had lapsed for the participants to pick up on all of our shortcomings and quirks!

### **Experience**

The ELST team members found getting the participants to supply ideas for the script rather difficult – although the process gave rise to a lot of laughter, and the actors were more than willing to perform once the script had been written. Some participants might have preferred writing the play outside class time so as not to miss out on more serious lessons. Generally speaking the play was a popular idea and some participants expressed a desire to devote time to more serious dramatics. The play was performed on the last night and was a fun way to round off the workshop and to say goodbye.

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## Feedback

Feedback was obtained both from informal discussions with the workshop participants and also through a formal feedback form given to students to complete during the last teaching session. The vast majority of the feedback received was favourable and the overwhelming impression gained was that the participants both enjoyed the workshop and improved their English language skills. Some constructive criticism was also obtained and this is described in more detail below. Some graphs on pages 17 and 18 illustrate the response to a selection of the questions in the questionnaire – the remaining areas are summarised below.

### Language

75% of the participants said that the language classes were the single most useful part of the workshop and 50% would have liked more English language classes. About 50% of the participants thought that the English Language teaching was excellent and above their expectations (these were predominately the people from the lower level English ability class). The remaining 50% (predominately from the advanced language classes) were satisfied with the language classes and said that their English had improved. However, this group thought that they would have benefited from more advanced and formal grammar lessons and more instruction in advanced, subtle aspects of the English language.

A few candidates suggested that a few more presentations and informal discussions would have been useful as a means of improving their confidence and public speaking ability. 40% of the participants suggested an increased grammar component in the English language classes.

### Selection

The majority of the candidates said the course was over and above their expectations, although a small number expressed doubts over their suitability for the course – these were participants with a high level of English. As already mentioned previously in this report, perhaps more consideration should be given to the level of English catered for in the workshop in the planning stage and during candidate selection.

### Entertainment and Visits

All participants enjoyed and felt privileged to visit H.H., for many this was the highlight of their workshop. All participants, except one, enjoyed the evening entertainment and the chance for informal gatherings. Many would not change the entertainment schedule in a future workshop. Some suggestions offered for entertainment in future workshops include more quizzes, question and answer sessions with course participants, more sport and story-telling sessions.



