

David Brazil 1925-1995. Biography.

David Brazil was born in Worcestershire on 1st May 1925 into a working class family. He left school at the age of 14 to become an apprentice electrician, but did not finish this apprenticeship. When he was eighteen he joined the RAF and served in the latter years of World War II in Italy. He subsequently served for a time in India. On leaving the forces he trained as a teacher. He then began teaching English in a number of schools around the United Kingdom. During this period he studied for an external degree of the University of London, which he obtained after six years of hard work. David is perhaps best known for his association with The University of Birmingham which began in the 1960s.

A new degree of Bachelor of Education had been established, and John Sinclair, as professor of Modern English Language, had insisted that courses on English Language should be a compulsory component of this new degree.

This necessitated the retraining of teacher-trainers, and David - now a teacher trainer - was one of the first to attend lectures on the subject given by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard. In the early 1970s, he studied for a Master's degree at The University of Birmingham, and was subsequently seconded to the then School of English to act as a research assistant on the Social Science Research funded projects. It was his work on these projects which became the subject matter of his PhD, and which led to the famous discourse analysis publications of the mid 1970s and the publication of *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching* (Longman, 1980). After the projects ended he was employed by the University as a full time lecturer from 1979 to 1983.

The 1980s were a time of retrenchment in British Universities and in order to save money, the university put pressure on many people to take early retirement. In 1983 David chose to retire in order to allow younger members of staff to remain in post. He was, however, employed on a part time basis for a further three years. In 1986 he entered full retirement but, far from becoming inactive, he undertook a series of secondments and lecture tours overseas. Moreover, the time he had at his disposal enabled him to undertake writing projects which culminated in the publication of *Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* (CUP, 1994) and *A Grammar of Speech* (OUP, 1995).

All those who knew David would say three things about him: "He is one of the nicest men I have ever met"; "He is a great teacher"; "He is an original thinker". He had affability, charm, and an ability to relate to everyone he met. Many people find academics intimidating and condescending: however everyone who met David would immediately comment on his approachability, and the friendly way in which he would engage with people in whatever most interested them. In his teaching he had the ability to make complex ideas seem simple. He had a way of teaching that made students - and his colleagues - feel that they were participating in a joyful discovery process in which David was learning just as much as they were. He came into academic life later than most scholars, though the advantages of this outweighed the

disadvantages. He had a mind untrammelled by preceding practice, and this enabled him to place at the centre of his description of intonation those features of speech that other writers felt they had to peripheralise. For example, other descriptions would only have recourse to contextual considerations when all the possibilities of ingenious syntactic explanation were exhausted. He, by contrast, place such considerations at the centre of his description. As a result, he produced a model which was at once elegant, simple, and above all, teachable - and his contribution to intonation studies had an immediate impact wherever he lectured.

The only disadvantage of his coming late to academic life was that his work did not gain ready acceptance amongst those who were already established scholars in the field. It was only towards the end of his life that his work began to get recognition beyond the circle of people who had come into personal contact with him. His work, particularly *The Communicative Value of Intonation in English* (1985/1997), is increasingly cited and borrowed from in pedagogical texts, and his own *Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* (1994) brought him gratifyingly large royalties in the month immediately publication. His last and most ambitious publication, *A Grammar of Speech*, was published in the early part of 1995, and it is a matter of great regret that David died before he could receive the accolades it was awarded.