Deliberate Semantics — an 'Interventionist' Approach to Second Language Teaching Methodology
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework for second language learning which frees it from direct comparison with early language learning by very young children, to which I believe it is only distantly related. In any discussion that touches on the relationship between first and second language acquisition, it is a necessary preliminary to remove the confusion which surrounds the possible applicability to second language learning of what might be called the 'Chomsky School' of child language acquisition theory. This confusion derives, it seems to me, from a failure to observe the distinction, quite clearly made by Chomsky himself, between *language learning,* i. e. the learning of language *per se* on the one hand, and the *learning of a language* on the other. When Chomsky talks of biologically determined cognitive capacities, innate predispositions to acquire language and so on, it is evident that he is speaking of the human capacity for language as such, the 'language faculty' as he calls it. Whether Chomsky's views are acceptable or not is not the point at issue here. What is at issue is their relevance to second language learning which, as I see it, is nil, since whatever the second language learner may be doing, it is quite clear what he is *not* doing — *he is not learning language for a second time.* He has already learnt it. To gain a clue as to what he might be doing, we can return to Chomsky's characterisation of the output of a learning theory of human language:

> "What is learned, the cognitive structure attained, must have the properties of UG (universal grammar), though it will have other, accidental properties as well. Each human language will conform to UG; languages will differ in other *accidental properties*" (Chomsky 1976, p. 29, my underlining).

It is now relatively straightforward to characterise the task of the L2 learner, namely the acquisition of those "accidental properties" of language which make L2 different from L1, and insofar as these "accidental properties" may be observed, and their relationships to existing cognitive structures made explicit, second language learning is basically a problem of translation. However, language behaviour is also subject to variability deriving from differing abilities to transform knowledge into practical skills and the 'laws of skill' are unknown, possibly unknowable.

You are either good at something or you are not, though you can improve with practice and guidance. In other words, intervention in the process of learning is a reasonable and justifiable procedure.

Intervention[1] in the second language learning/teaching process (LL/LT as Strevens (1978) calls it) will involve two quite distinct though related operations. Firstly, there is the form of intervention associated with the control of the data made available to the learner through the planning of the syllabus and its realisation in specially prepared and/or selected materials. Secondly, there is intervention in the learning process itself, i. e. between the learner and the data. This in turn will take three forms: (i) deliberate instruction in the constituent elements of the L2 and in those meaning-to-sound relationships which can be accounted for in explicit terms — this we may call *teaching,* (ii) attempts to improve the performance of skilled behaviours, particularly those associated with motor-sensory activity — for which *training* would be an appropriate term, and finally, (iii) *guidance* in the development of L2 intuitions through experience of using the new language for communicative purposes.

In order to implement such a programme effectively, and establish priorities among the types of intervention mentioned above, we have to discover what the learner can already do with language and what he already knows about it. This implies a study of the *whole history* of first language development, up to and including the time at which the learner takes up a second one. As Chomsky said (albeit in a different context):

> "An organism has attained a certain state through maturation and experience. It is faced with certain objective conditions. It then does something." (Chomsky 1976, p. 16)

I. The argument

My starting point is the paper by Strevens already mentioned above (Strevens 1978) in which he argued strongly that if we seriously want to help L2 learners to reach higher standards of achievement more easily, and presumeably we do, then we must consider LL/LT in its own terms and not simply as the application of research in child language acquisition

1 This is not a commonly used term in teaching, though it is familiar in language retardation work (cf Schiefelbusch & Lloyd, 1974). It has the advantage of implying that learning is a natural process involving a learner and a task which teaching is designed to *assist* rather than *'cause'.*

("applied psycholinguistics"). In other words, L1 learning and LL/LT "belong in two universes of discourse", as Strevens puts it, which "overlap in only a limited way". I am sure he is right, but perhaps for somewhat different reasons, which emerge if we look at first language acquisition *as a whole* (and not merely the first two years or so).

It seems to me that the mistake which is often made is to compare the beginning of second language learning with the *beginning* of first language acquisition. At first sight this does not look like a mistake. The beginning looks like the logical place to start. In fact in many ways it is the wrong place: what we should be looking at is the *end* of first language learning as the point at which second language learning *begins.* As Eliot said in *Little Gidding:* "the end is where you start from". This is not merely a poetical conceit; it expresses a vital practical issue. L2 learners do not start from 'scratch', they start from where they already are, and with what they have already experienced. And they move *forward* from there. They do not 're-metamorphose' like quasi-chrysalids turning into new butterflies. They are butterflies *already,* learning how to fly in a different way which may be useful if and when they change their habitat. We cannot help them properly if we do not recognize this fact. That is the general gist of my argument but it is necessary to spell it out more fully. This I shall try to do in the next few pages.

Let us begin at the end by observing a native speaker of a language, English for instance, in conversation with a very practised fluent non-native. For most practical purposes their behaviour appears identical, though the former may have, say, a London accent and the latter a Parisian one. Closer investigation will, however, show this surface similarity to be misleading and will reveal certain, possibly substantial, differences. On questions of 'linguistic intuition', for example, the native will be more secure, and he will be more resistant to confusion under conditions of communicative stress or 'noise' (cf. Spolsky 1973). There may well be certain contexts, mathematical calculation for instance, where the non-native reverts to the mother-tongue. Then there are all the lapses and insecurities which occur in natives and non-natives alike, but take different forms. It is very difficult to resist the generalisation of Sapir that:

> "It is quite a mistake to suppose that an English speaker's command of French or German is psychologically in the least equivalent to a Frenchman's or German's command of his native language. All that is managed in the majority of cases is a fairly adequate control of the external features of the foreign language." (Sapir 1933)

It is the position of this paper that the reason why native and non-native performance are not 'psychologically equivalent' (or only very rarely) is that they have *two quite different developmental histories.*

Having started at the end, let us return to the beginning. The very young child, according to Macnamara (1972)[2] is able to make sense of language in the same way that he is able to make sense of the rest of the environment in which he lives. Language is deeply embedded in everyday events and forms part of those happenings, deriving meaning from them and projecting meaning on to them in a dynamic interaction. The child's understanding of language and his growing ability to control it are essentially intuitive activities of which he is for the most part unaware, and which are resistant to attempts at 'improvement' or 'tuition' by adults. We do not know how children manage this task so effectively, but we do know that by the time they start going to school, they have mastered their mother dialect sufficiently well to cope with the demands of the immediate environment. However, they still have a lot to learn before they can cope with more 'distant' environments, and the experience of school plays a crucial role at this stage of their development.

When children go to school they have to learn how to do things *on purpose,* how to work things out and explain them to other people, especially the teacher, and how to remember what they have learnt even though there is no obvious and immediate practical use for the information they have acquired. Learning in school has its own structure and organisation which relates only indirectly to everyday experience outside. Of course this 'intellectual weaning' takes many years of cognitive and experiential growth, and it does not mean that access to intuition is 'lost', but it is modified by the growth of awareness.

So far as language is concerned, the catalyst in this process of becoming aware is the *experience of literacy.* Through discovering that language exists and endures 'out there', so to speak: in books, on walls, in Christmas cards, the child becomes aware of it in its own right, "disembedded" as Donaldson puts it, from immediate social action and therefore amenable to conscious control. Language, as Halliday stresses:

> "evolves in the context of (the child's) thinking about the universe no less than in the context of exploiting it". (Halliday 1975, p. 75)

2   This section of my paper owes a great debt to Margaret Donaldson's splendid new book *Childrens' Minds* (Donaldson 1978) and to the Macnamara paper which the book referred me to. The interpretation and its shortcomings are of course entirely mine.

This private function of language, which Halliday calls 'mathetic' and Vygotsky (1962) refers to as 'egocentric', does not of course derive solely from the experience of literacy, but the two are deeply intertwined in a manner which, following Vygotsky, I shall attempt to describe below. It is I believe in the psychological, social and cognitive structures underlying literacy or, as Vygotsky calls it *'written speech'* that a second language or as I shall refer to it *'L2 speech'* first puts down its roots. Later of course it grows and develops through practice and experience into a form of communicative social speech akin to that of a native speaker.

It is difficult to summarise Vygotsky's model succinctly and perhaps the following diagram might help:
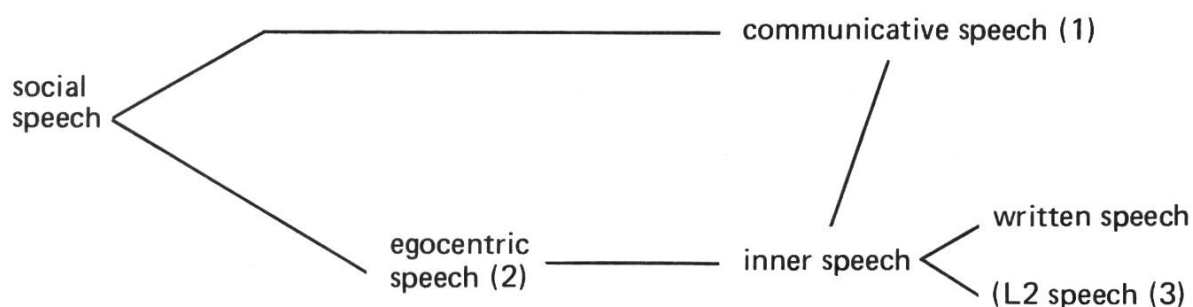
(1) cf Halliday's pragmatic/interpersonal function
(2) cf Halliday's mathetic/ideational function
(3) Not of course Vygotsky's term. I have added it, in, I hope the interests of clarity.

The key concept in Vygotsky's model is that of inner speech, a kind of mediating structure between thought and language, which he maintains is related to written speech in quite a different manner from the way it relates to communicative speech. Vygotsky traces the development of inner speech through the history of egocentric speech which, in the early years of childhood, takes an oral form but gradually falls silent or 'goes underground' to become inner speech. It does not die out, but becomes covert rather than being overtly manifest in audible language behaviour.

When Vygotsky comes to discuss the problems that children have in learning to write, he traces them to the specific characteristics of the relationship between inner and written speech (which should not of course be confused with physical acts of writing) which combine to make it structurally and functionally distinct from (oral) communicative speech. L2 speech, it seems to me, shares the same characteristics.

The first of these characteristics is *abstraction.* The child learning to write has to become aware of the existence of meaning as independent of physical form ("to replace words by images of words"). Then he has to map these meanings on to new forms ("symbolize the sound images in written signs") which must have been learnt and memorized before, a process which requires *deliberate analytic action,* finally, he has to

organise these meanings into stretches of language which must be consciously framed and structured without the assistance of an immediate social context *("in the absence of an interlocutor")*. This process of elaboration from the abbreviated, condensed and "maximally compact" inner speech to the socially independent "maximally detailed" written speech requires, he says, *"what might be called deliberate semantics — the deliberate structuring of the web of meaning".*

The similarities between this description of the problems of acquiring literacy and the difficulties faced by the learner of L2 speech are striking[3]. Like the young learner of (L1) written speech, the learner of L2 speech needs to abstract meaning from form — become aware for example that the lexeme LIVE is not identical with the lexical item *live* — and also has to map new linguistic forms, which have to be learnt and memorized, on to existing meanings. In this respect he has to go much further than the learner of (L1) written speech since re-symbolization in L2 speech implies the acquisition of new acoustic as well as written systems. Finally, like the (L1) learner of literacy, the learner of a new language has to come to grips with the problems of expressing thought and creating language in the absence of a motivating social context (an interlocutor). The description of this task as "deliberate semantics" seems to me particularly apt.

There is a sense I think in which a child encounters a 'second language' when he meets the written language of his mother tongue for the first time. It is his first attempt to learn 'L2 speech'. Of course the 'distance' (cf. Corder, 1978b) between the oral communicative speech of his *mother dialect* and the written speech of his *mother tongue* (the distinction is important) is 'closer' than that between his L1 and even the 'nearest' L2. But it is only a matter of degree, and for some children even this distance is difficult to bridge.

There are two conclusions I wish to draw from the argument so far. The first is that the learning of L2 speech, like the learning of L1 written speech, requires deliberate analytic action, and if learning is deliberate, then instructional intervention in some form is possible and, if any degree of competence is to be attained, *necessary.* How extensive and helpful this intervention can be depends on how explicit we can be about the rules of the new behaviour (cf. Macnamara, 1973).

Secondly, to close the argument at the point at which it began, it is the logical implication of the analysis as outlined above that the develop-

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3   I am not of course advocating that L2 literacy is the objective of L2 teaching. Written speech may be realised in acts of speaking as well as acts of writing. It is pertinent to recall that virtually all L2 teaching materials are in fact *written* (whether they are spoken later in the classroom or on tape or not).

mental history of the mother-tongue from maximally intuitive social speech to maximally deliberate written speech *is reversed in the developmental history of the second language,* which proceeds from maximally deliberate L2 speech to maximally intuitive social conversation, a process requiring long hours of practice and probably direct experience as well. Second language learning is not an analogy of first language learning; it is in a strict sense a *'mirror image'*[4].

II. Three practical issues

I should now like to take up 3 issues which arise out of the analysis so far and have, I believe, important practical implications for language teaching. The first is a brief comment on language planning policy, the second deals with the notion of 'natural methods' and the third with motivation and achievement.

(i) *A Note on Language Planning Policy*

The correspondances which I have tried to draw between L1 literacy and L2 learning clearly emphasise the expression of existing meanings through the medium of new forms and may appear to run counter to the neo-Whorfian view that languages are different. The 'web of meaning' in one language, it could be said, is quite different from that in another. This is of course quite true; it is what language teaching is all about. "Two co-ordinate webs of meaning" describes quite well what you *end* with, but that is not where you start. Between the two lies language learning, by a process of *assimilation* where there is congruence and *accomodation* where there is dissonance, to use Piaget's terms. It is the teacher's task to ease the transition from the one to the other by methods which suit both the nature of the task and the capacities of the learner.

Secondly, as Halliday points out: "we are not the prisoners of our semiotic; we can all learn to move outside it" (Halliday 1975, p. 140). This is in my view the primary justification for the inclusion of second languages on the secondary school curriculum.

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4   There is no conflict between this view and current research findings in inter-language (cf Richards & Kennedy, 1977; Corder, 1978a) which have observed a commonality of sequencing in the acquisition of L2 systems. To the extent that this commonality reflects the intrinsic complexities of the systems, one would not expect it to be much influenced by deliberate learning strategies.

(ii) *'Natural Methods'*

The model I have tried to outline in the first part of this paper implies that the ideational function of language will *take priority* over the interpersonal function in L2 learning, at least in the early stages. This is what is meant by "speech without an interlocutor". However, this must not be taken to imply that there is any loss of communicative value. "Speech without an *interlocutor*" does not mean "speech without an *addressee*". The teacher is well able to function as an addressee in the normal classroom conditions, but does not find it easy to function as an interlocutor (for a detailed discussion of this distinction though in rather different terms, see Corder 1977). What this means in practical terms is that language which is predominantly (not solely) ideational will be mainly concerned with the *communication of personal experience.* As Halliday himself puts it: "the ideational represents the potential of the system for the speaker as observer; it is the content function of language, language as *about something*" (Halliday 1975, p. 127, my underlining).

This use of language, to make even very simple personal statements reflecting events, facts, truths of one sort or another, seems to me more appropriate in acquiring a new language than the use of language to *influence* social action, as an interpersonal bias would imply ("the interpersonal is the participatory function; language as *doing something*" (Halliday 1975, p. 128) my underlining). To adopt an ideational rather than an interpersonal bias does not make language any less 'natural' or 'communicative'.

I am aware that this ideational bias runs counter to the prevailing wind in L2 teaching at the present time. There is a belief that the interpersonal participatory function is not only 'basic' but 'natural' and corresponds more closely with (operational) 'learner needs' and motivation. I cannot accept this argument, at least not in such an over-simplified form. It derives from a 'folk myth' that the 'best' way of learning a new language is to live in the country where it is naturally spoken and by implication the classroom is condemned as 'artificial' and 'distorts the natural processes'.

There is some force in this, as in all folk myths, but it is over-stated and ignores many of the real problems and facts. It is perfectly true that for a young child (aged, say, 5—10) entering a new speech community, the world is well-structured for him to learn the new language by participating in events. The adults in this world are usually fairly tolerant of developing speech patterns, there are plenty of physical activities in which language plays a *subordinate* role and so can be assimilated, school provides people to talk to who are relatively unaware of differences in language and so on.

In a word, there is as much for the young child to *do* as there is to *say,* and doing and saying are intimately linked.

However, for the adolescent or the adult the world is very different. True, there are some activities (participating in sports, watching films with a strong action-line etc.), and there are a few aspects of everyday work and public behaviour, in which language may be said to be subordinate to action, but for the most part language is *dominant* in the structure of social organisation and non-linguistic action is absent, even at times taboo ("don't talk with your hands"). As such, language is virtually unlearnable without some form of intervention (which need not take the form of a teacher, it may be through books or particularly tolerant friends). The folk myth needs some qualification (see Macnamara 1973 for a more detailed discussion of this point). The so-called 'natural processes' for most older learners are processes of frustration if not outright failure.

With these points in mind, it is easier to account for the failure of 'natural methods'[5] in the classroom. Unless they are heavily modified, they cannot succeed[6]. Perhaps the rather alarming labels indicating imminent and agonising death which sometimes describe these methods ('sunburn', 'exposure', 'total immersion') should be taken seriously.

At a more sensible level, the technique that is usually adopted in modelling 'real life' is the situational dialogue. It is a time-honoured device in language teaching going right back to the beginnings of 'modern' language teaching in England in the late Middle Ages. Whereas in the past, dialogues were fairly loosely structured devices for telling stories (and are often used like this today as well), there is a contemporary view that they model "what people actually say". Not only is this a rather doubtful notion in principle, it has certain practical implications which need to be looked at closely — for two reasons. The first is that dialogues are *psychologically unreal,* and the second is that they are *inexplicit.* Unfortunately, the more psychologically real they attempt to be, the more inexplicit they become.

The dialogue is in effect a 'theatrical metaphor' of language and this may account for its popularity with histrionically gifted teachers. Whether their students are equally gifted is another matter. Most people are appalling actors, and Stanislavski, the great Russian theatre director and actor,

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5   Cf Berlitz (1907): "The Berlitz Method is an imitation of the natural process by which a child learns its mother-tongue". To be fair, Berlitz did not take this too literally and the modified versions can be quite effective.
6   Cf Brown (1973), pp. 23—25 for a wry description of his personal experience in 'learning' Japanese.

explained why: "the mistake most actors make is that they think about *the result instead of the action that must prepare it*" (Stanislavski 1967, p. 112). This is very pertinent to language teaching. Dialogues train students *what* to say, but ignore *why* anything is said or *how* meaningful speech is socially organised.

In an attempt to get away from the psychological unreality, teachers begin to move along the road towards greater improvisation. It starts with doing substitution exercises, then moves to inventing dialogues according to a sort of 'social action recipe' ("You are a hotel receptionist . . ." and the situation is then filled out in more or less detail) and finally ends with totally improvised role-playing in often fairly elaborate 'simulation' situations. While I appreciate that these exercises can be useful in certain circumstances, it should be noticed that the continuum from dialogue to simulation is a continuum of inexplicitness. This may not matter for the experienced native-speaking teacher with students whose role-playing is close to their everyday experience (e. g. hotel-situation simulations with groups of hotel staff) because their knowledge to some extent 'fills in' what is otherwise left inexplicit in the relationship between language and the social action out of which it arises. However, I suggest that it *does* matter very much when the teacher is a non-native speaker with little experience of the L2 in such circumstances, and students for whom such activities are alien or unfamiliar[7]. How is such a teacher to know what a hotel receptionist is likely to say? And what information can he seek? Grammars and dictionaries are models of explicitness, for all their faults, compared to the vague terminology we have available to describe relationships between language and social action. While it may be possible to attach a few broad functional labels to certain fairly well established formulae (e. g. "Let's . . . = suggestion) this does not really go very far. Any teacher who has ever tried to account, for instance, for tag-questions in English, knows how inadequate the sociolinguistic terminology actually is: "not very polite", "a bit unfriendly", "not how I'd address the boss", and the ubiquitous "colloquial". We have to do the best we can, but a sociolinguistic Roget is a long way off.

It may be difficult to overcome these problems, but I believe we need a methodology which recognizes that they *exist.* I am not entirely convinced that a 'theatre methodology' based on 'real life' behaviour always does.

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7   It could be argued that inappropriate methods should not be exported. The fact is they *are,* for a variety of reasons some of which we can influence.

(iii) *Motivation and Achievement*

One of the underlying themes of this paper is the role of motivation in achievement. Since it has not been the ostensible subject-matter so far, it is important to bring it to the surface.

Motivation is obviously far too large a topic to discuss in detail here. I simply want to make one point, and it is this. All the commentators on motivation make some distinction between the motivational force of *external relevance* i. e. the relationship between L2 learning and "something else" (operational learner needs, interests, likes/dislikes, cultural identification etc.) and, on the other hand, the motivational force of *success in learning*, i. e. the relationship between L2 learning and *itself*. Which of the two is stronger will vary from one learner group to another.

There is an obvious link between motivation towards external relevance and situational teaching of one kind or another. Given the current dominance of this methodology, it seems to me that motivation deriving from the successful completion of the learning task itself is underestimated at the moment. We rarely if ever hear that a new language instruction course is better because it is easier; the criteria are almost always non-educational: it is more realistic, or more entertaining or more like 'real language'. None of these aims is unworthy — no one wants dreary irrelevant courses. It is a question of balance. The research in this area is predictably inconclusive (see Burstall 1978 for a recent review), but the logic of intervention must be towards the easing of learner difficulty on the grounds that if success is not experienced in the early stages of learning, then relevance becomes redundant.

It is with the general aim of developing this notion of case of learning (*if necessary* at the expense of relevance, at least of a superficial kind) that I should like to make one or two comments in the last section of the paper on the organisation of the syllabus.

III. Two interpretations of the term 'syllabus'

Intervention cannot be justified unless it can propose an instructional plan or syllabus which is more likely to be helpful than simply leaving things alone. Essentially this means controlling the language data available to the learner by releasing some and withholding the rest *(selection)*, and by organising what *is* released into a sequence which is *comfortably assimilable, (grading)*. Since more has been written about selection in recent times than about grading (e. g. Van Ek 1975; Wilkins 1977), and since the

issues raised by grading are more pertinent to the general thesis of this paper, I should like to restrict my comments to this topic.

I should like to start from a remark of Vygotsky's concerning the relationship between teaching and learning:

> "Instruction has its own sequences and organisation, it follows a curriculum and a timetable, and, *its rules cannot be expected to coincide with the inner laws of the developmental processes it brings to life."* (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 101)

This distinction between the course of instruction and the course of development is crucial to an understanding of learning of all kinds, not specifically language learning. What it implies is that in effect there are *two* "syllabuses": an external instructional syllabus and an internal developmental one, and curves of progress: the external curve of instructional progress and the internal curve of acquisition. We could call the external syllabus the *instruction syllabus* and the internal one the *acquisition syllabus.*

(i) *The Instruction Syllabus*

An instruction syllabus will specify, in advance, the order in which selected elements of the language system will appear in the data made available to the learner. This is the traditional syllabus which tells the teacher when the present perfect, for instance, is 'introduced'. However, it is important to notice that it cannot be specified in terms of linguistic systems. You do not, for example, introduce the 'modality system' since, if you did, you would be constructing a linguistic grammar and not specifying a pedagogical one. What you do is introduce 'chunks of language' which exemplify certain elements of these systems. Other elements appear later. This has the effect of creating a 'spiral' structure (cf Howatt 1974) however 'linear' it may look on paper, and it might be helpful to students if the 'spirality' could be made more explicit. There is a tendency to overlook new instances of an 'old' system once its initial appearance has been noted.

The specification of an instruction syllabus has received renewed interest recently with Wilkins (1977) important reminder that greater attention should be paid to the semantic properties of linguistic elements introduced into the learning data. However, sometimes this proposal is taken as implying an alternative syllabus constructed entirely around semantic categories, and Wilkins himself hints at this possibility. It is true that the familiar structural syllabus specifies surface structure forms fairly

explicitly, while leaving their semantic values implicit. This should be corrected because of the curious effects it produces in the semantic structure of teaching texts. But there does not seem to me to be any great advantage in merely turning the picture back-to-front, so to speak, thereby ignoring the properties of surface structure syntax and morphology which contribute very significantly to the ease or difficulty of language processing. The specification of an instruction syllabus is a specification of meaning-form relationships ordered in a sequence which, when they appear as features of instructional texts, will assist rather than hinder the processing of meaning. Thus, in the end, an instruction syllabus is a sequence of *texts* (rather than categories) exhibiting certain more or less explicitly specifiable linguistic characteristics.

If we can leave the unanswerable question: "what makes one *category* easier than another? " and turn to the more approachable question: "what makes one *text* easier than another? " we can see that the structural/notional argument is a non-starter. Both aspects of language are involved in each utterance presented as data to the learners.

What then *does* make one text easier than another? Wanner (1973) has suggested that we can look at this question either in terms of the structural properties of the *signal* ('outside in') or in terms of the *learner's expectations* ('inside out'). Structural grading and lexical control of the familiar kind seem to me excellent devices for keeping the complexity of the signal within the bounds of processibility. If a learner cannot process a sentence like "my house is big", he cannot be expected to cope with one like "my house is really rather bigger than I can cope with one way or another". The provision of materials to aid the teacher in orientating the learners *towards the text* ('inside out' processing) has, however, received rather less attention. Such materials would, it seems to me, fulfil a practical role in developing the learner's abilities to process texts at more than one level of difficulty. There would be a series of texts *at a lower level* of linguistic complexity which would demonstrate how the linguistic elements of the L2 work, and which the learner would be expected to process for himself ('outside in'), and, in the same learning unit, a series of texts which would be *at a higher level* of linguistic complexity (and could therefore be of greater intrinsic interest and authenticity) whose function would be to show learners how meanings are realised in the new language. This presupposes of course that the basic organisation of the text has been discussed in detail in advance, and the learner is thoroughly familiar with the content and the way it is structured *before* reading or listening to the text itself. If teachers could be persuaded that this is not "doing the student's work for him", a *'two-tier' structure* could be introduced into L2 materials at a relatively early stage and perhaps help to

overcome the sense of disappointment that creeps into second language learning from about the middle of the second year, where the need for semantic and content organisation to keep 'in lock-step' with syntactic development results in texts of restricted intellectual stimulation, particularly for the more gifted students. In the first few months of learning a second language, *any* success in making sense of a chunk of the L2, however banal it may seem to the teacher, is rewarding. But as the learner acquires enough of the linguistic system to enable him to develop powers of prediction and expectation, assisted by the natural redundancy of language, merely 'understanding the text' is not sufficiently reinforcing to him. He needs to be rewarded also by the information within the text to make it worthwhile troubling to process it in the first place. This point was made in different ways very forcibly by many of the children in the National Foundation for Educational Research survey of French teaching in England and Wales (Burstall 1970).

(ii) *The Acquisition Syllabus*

We must now move briefly to the other type of syllabus, the *acquisition syllabus*. Unlike an instruction syllabus, an acquisition syllabus is specifiable in terms of linguistic systems and their development over time. Through some of the current work in interlanguage (see Richards and Kennedy 1977 and Corder 1978a for detailed reviews), we are becoming rather more knowledgeable about acquisition sequencing that we used to be, but we are still, of course, quite a long way from being able to predict orders of acquisition with accuracy. Secondly, there is the all-important question of *time.* We know that rapidity of learning is variable (that is obvious to anyone), but what we do not know is whether the intervals between the acquisition of elements of linguistic systems are *necessarily proportional to each other,* or whether they are sensitive to environmental influence and can be 'speeded up', as it were, by teacher intervention. If for instance we agree that the elements in a particular system are normally acquired in a sequence X — Y — Z, does this imply that the time taken to add Y to the system after X is proportional to the time taken to add Z later? Clearly there is no reason to expect the intervals to be the *same,* but there may well be a necessary intervening period of maturation and experience of the language before Z can be expected to be acquired.

Instruction and acquisition syllabuses are independent of each other. Elements of linguistic systems are made available to the learner by appearing in the data in quite a *different* order from their order of eventual acquisition. To take a concrete example, the article system in English

must appear in an instruction syllabus very early indeed, in fact many courses introduce it in Lesson 1 ("This is a book"). However, it may well be a very long time indeed before the acquisition curve shows anything much above a chance 50-50 level of learning for those learners whose mothertongue does not include regular devices for signalling the semantic contrasts carried by the articles in English. This is an example of acquisition sequencing as a reflection of semantic complexity, but formal complexity will also play a part. The German number system, for instance, and its interaction with the gender and case systems could well take a considerable time before acquisition by a learner whose mothertongue was, say, English (but it is doubtful if the L1 in this instance would exert any influence at all), yet there is no way that the number system can be 'held back' in an instruction syllabus.

To sum up, *instruction syllabuses* are organised in order to permit access to the language in the most comfortably assimilable manner. They consist of a sequence of *texts* in which certain elements of the language system being learned (morphological, syntactic and semantic) make *their first appearance* in a predetermined order. The contents page of the text-book can be very misleading in this respect because it looks as if the present perfect, for example, is *taught* in, say, Lesson 17, but this is not the case. It appears for the first time in Lesson 17 and more attention is paid to it that other aspects of the system for the duration of that Lesson. It is taught *from then on.*

Acquisition syllabuses, on the other hand, specify the development of linguistic systems over time. We do not of course have any printed acquisition syllabuses at the present time, though most 'examination syllabuses' are in effect acquisition syllabuses of a very inexplicit kind. Possibly the notion of printed acquisition syllabus makes little sense anyway; what is really needed is a greater understanding on the part of course designers and teachers alike that linguistic systems are not learnt 'as a whole' or 'instantaneously' at the point of first appearance in the course texts, but that they take time to emerge, and if we can permit ourselves one generalisation it would be that meaning takes precedence over form. As Slobin (1971) puts it: "rules related to semantically defined classes take precedence over rules relating to formally defined classes".

In the future, language teaching will, I feel sure, take a greater interest in developmental processes as well as others at present rather neglected (in particular storage and retrieval processes in memory), and in doing so will find a different, and possibly more precise, function for familiar techniques from the past, such as grammatical explanation, translation, structural drills or role-playing, which at various periods in the history of the subject have exercised a kind of imperial dominance.

Conclusion

Ultimately the only justification for intervention in language teaching is the success of the learner since I believe, with Burstall (1978), that success is a condition for achievement later on and 'grows on itself'. Other matters such external motivation, relevance to learner needs (in the operational sense), intrinsic interest of the material and so on are all important — after all no one is going to argue for pointless, dull and irrelevant courses — but if there is conflict between ease of learning and relevance to outside criteria of 'naturalness' etc. and it seems to me that quite often there *is,* then ease would appear to have a higher priority. Secondly, I believe that in order to achieve success it is necessary to take the learner as he *is* and not as he *might* be, to teach him, in the most explicit way appropriate to his age and capabilities, how meanings are expressed in the new language and help him *to express his own meanings* by using its resources. Again, I would not expect anyone to quarrel with objectives of this kind, but it seems to me that if we take them seriously, we have to admit to some doubt about procedures which derive from imitating or modelling the behaviour of the 'outside world', particularly when the justification for such procedures is sought in observing the circumstances in which language is acquired by the very young child. I agree — it *is* disheartening to climb a mountain with sweat and tears only to find a four-year-old infant prattling at the top of it. But there is nothing we can do about it — except choose our parents more carefully perhaps.

Envoi

A young boy aged about 8 years old from a very ordinary background was interviewed recently on television. He was a pupil at a private school in England where they still teach Latin to little boys as they always have done. We had just seen the class being put through their 3rd conjugation verbs in unison. The interviewer asked him whether he liked Latin. "Yes", said the boy, "you see — it's easy".

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