

Speech presented at November 1980 meeting of ATESI, Rome.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Language Teaching

Recently I welcomed to Georgetown University a guest lecturer who had been invited to discuss one of the current trends in language pedagogy: individualization of language learning. His talk was of particular interest, not only because of the topic itself, but also because the lecture was part of a series of seminar sessions begun at Georgetown in 1979. The seminars were designed as a forum to allow proponents of the many and varied language teaching methodologies to present their points of view or demonstrate their approaches.

As the series has progressed, many interesting features of the current scene in language teaching have been brought to light.

First, although initially only six or seven seminars were planned for the academic year, an endless list of possible speakers came quickly to mind, an illustration of the variety of language teaching methods currently under discussion.

Second, although the seminars were intended primarily for Georgetown University language teaching faculty, the series soon attracted the attention of language teaching personnel from other Washington area universities, from government organizations, and from the Center for Applied Linguistics, a suggestion of the keen interest with which

professionals in the language teaching field follow the discussions.

In this context, it is of particular interest to note that many of the methods currently under consideration are rooted not only in language or linguistics, but also in the related humanistic disciplines of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

I do not propose an exhaustive treatment of current language teaching methodologies. Rather, I would like to outline briefly the contributions of psychology, sociology, and anthropology to linguistics -- in particular, their contribution to the development of language teaching methodologies.

Let me begin the outline with a historical note. In the past, linguists were quick to insist on the autonomy of their discipline. They did not wish the scientific study of language to bend to the winds of logic, philosophy, or literary criticism. This principle of autonomy fostered the study of language as a formal system -- a conception which is summed up in the term 'structuralism.' However, once linguistics had established its credentials as a mature academic discipline, linguists, particularly applied linguists, could afford to consider other disciplines which are relevant to language and language learning. As mentioned above, I will direct my remarks to the contributions of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Psychology

Although many linguists will still insist that the analysis of linguistic structures is their central concern, fewer continue to assume, as was common in the 1950s and 1960s, that the units used in analyzing language are the same ones needed in learning it. The learning process is clearly a psychological one, and a meaningful one, and until recently psychology and meaning were not central to the linguist's concern. However, within the last decade in particular, applied linguists have widened their horizons to include studies by psychologists. Most psychologists are aware of the fact that the human mind operates on linguistic symbols; similarly, most linguists admit that a psychological drive sets the grammatical process in motion. The interaction of these two features in the process of first- and second-language acquisition is the focus of the discipline of psycholinguistics.

In the past several years, research has focused on determining the factors involved in the second-language learning process. In an effort to understand how adults learn language, researchers turned to studies of child-language acquisition, which demonstrated that children acquire language in regular, clearly defined and predictable stages. Similarly, adult second-language learners exhibit a highly regular order of acquisition. Simply put, learners internalize linguistic rules in two ways, distinguished as language learning and language acquisition.

Language learning refers to the adult's conscious focus on formal linguistic rules.. Language acquisition refers to the adult's development of tacit intuitions about language. The implications for language teachers is that classroom techniques for fostering both learning and acquisition must be devised.

Theories and research studies on this topic continue to develop. One view of particular relevance is that of John Schumann (1978), who argues that two groups of variables -- social and affective -- cluster to form what he claims is the major causal variable in second-language acquisition: acculturation, that is, the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language group. Schumann argues that second-language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation, and that the degree to which learners acculturate to the target language group will control the degree to which they acquire the second language. He concludes that no matter what 'method' is employed, the long term results are determined by the play of social, cultural and psychological variables.

Anthropology

A different aspect of the interdisciplinary nature of language studies is illustrated by the close relation of linguistics and anthropology.

It is of particular interest to note that cultural anthropology made significant contributions to early linguistic theory as expounded by Boas, Sapir and Bloomfield, anthropological linguists who based their theories on analyses of American Indian languages. The methods and findings provided by these studies were later applied to the more familiar languages, and provided the foundation for the linguistic principles on which early linguistics, particularly North American linguistics, were built.

Anthropology has also focused on the fascinating question of the relationship between language and culture. Does language structure determine cultural perceptions? One version of the theory asserts that, since language influences the minds of those who use it, consequently, people using different languages classify their experiences differently.

This theory holds great intuitive appeal; however, proof of the hypothesis has not been established. Nonetheless, the theory has had its effects on classroom strategies. Put in its most general terms, the theory translates into the following tenet: differences among individual learners must be taken into consideration. The theory also supports contentions made by psycholinguists that the rate of language acquisition differs among learners.

Sociology

One of the most important theoretical developments in linguistics in the late 1960s was the emphasis on language in its social context. The study of language and society, sociolinguistics, has shifted the focus of language studies and language teaching away from its preoccupation with the elaboration of structures (language for its own sake) toward a consideration of forms of language as a function of its use.

Sociolinguistics interprets linguistic data relative to specific cultures, societies, social groups or speech communities. Sociolinguistics underscores the principle that language both unifies and separates; studies of geographical and social dialects illustrate the thrust of the two-edged sword that language wields. Furthermore the interrelationship of language with social and political questions is well illustrated by the separatist movements in Belgium and Canada and by bilingual education controversies in the United States.

The study of sociolinguistics has a number of implications for the language classroom. One aspect of sociolinguistic studies constitutes the most radical departure from traditional teaching methodology. Sociolinguists have taken pains to chart instances of variation in language use, since their focus of interest is language

performance. Consequently, there is no longer the pressure to insist that language forms be restricted to meet with an established standard. In fact, sociolinguists have done much to dispel many arbitrary notions of 'correctness'.

Another important contribution of sociolinguistics is the concept of communicative competence as a goal in language instruction. Communicative competence was formulated on the model of Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence, that is, the speaker/hearer's implicit knowledge of his language as contrasted with performance, that is, the actual use of language in concrete situations. Competence does not refer to actual speech, but to the speaker's ability to produce, out of a finite set of rules, an infinite number of grammatical sentences.

Elaborating on Chomsky's theory, it was suggested that a person endowed with only linguistic competence would be a social misfit, a cultural monster; that is, while he would know the formal rules of the language, he would not know the socially conditioned aspects of language: when to speak, when to be silent, what linguistic options to exercise on a given occasion, etc.

Dell Hymes (1972) elaborated on the social feature of language in formulating his concept of communicative competence. Simply defined, communicative competence is the ability to use sentences appropriately in a given context or situation. Communicative competence is governed

by psychological, cultural and social roles which discipline the use of speech in social settings. The notion of communicative competence has become central to many of the more recent developments in language teaching methodology. It has developed as a reaction to the inadequacies of the audiolingual approach which unconsciously equated linguistic competence (the ability to produce well-formed utterances) with communicative competence (the ability to use language properly and appropriately in a given setting). Having recognized the importance of communicative competence, teachers are now facing the challenge of teaching this competence explicitly in the classroom, stressing the social implications of language use.

Mary Finocchiaro (1973) has pointed out that motivation is the all-important element in the acquisition of communicative competence. She has insisted that motivation must be sustained throughout the learner's struggle for communicative competence. She argues that an integrated approach to learning is a method of strengthening motivation. An integrated approach indicates the real-world communicative functions of an utterance or speech-act. That is, the real world approach shows how certain set functions -- apologies, compliments, requests for information or action -- are translated into a variety of common, everyday situations. The integrative approach

instructs the learner in the words and forms that are appropriate to convey the message.

The impact of the concept of communicative competence on language teaching methodology has been particularly strong in Europe. The most obvious example is the Council of Europe project to develop a threshold level syllabus in the languages of the community nations. The threshold level works from the idea that the syllabus must be based on previously defined communicative needs. The main task was seen to be the determination of linguistic content and the definition of stages of proficiency.

Interpretations of the term 'communicative competence' have become so divergent that it has become an umbrella concept, and now refers to many very different approaches.

In the context of the Council of Europe project, communicative competence is characterized by a very analytical approach both to language and to the social setting and communicative situation.

In the United States, programs to foster communicative competence have quite a different focus. Concerns with the integration of language communities are related primarily to the debates over programs of bilingual education. Outside of this context, popular methodologies for language learning are, by contrast with the European experience,

decidedly non-analytical; that is, in the United States, the so-called non-conventional approaches to language teaching have received the focus of attention: Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, Dartmouth Method, etc. -- methods which stress the importance of emotional attitudes in facilitating learning. Perhaps the clearest exposition of these methods is contained in the writings of Earl Stevick (1976, 1980). Although Stevick includes practical pedagogical suggestions, his emphasis is not strictly on technique. Rather, he stresses the importance of personal security and commitment on the part of both the learner and the teacher in creating a fruitful atmosphere for learning.

In Canada, approaches to communicative language learning are both analytical and non-analytical. The former is represented in the adaptation of the European notional-functional syllabus for use in federal government language schools; the latter is evidenced by widespread immersion programs which involve the learner in a real life communicative setting where the second language is used naturally.

H.H. Stern (1980) described the work of linguists at the Modern Language Centre in Toronto, Canada. These linguists are trying to develop a curriculum combining both the analytical and the non-analytical approaches.

A scheme has been put forth to advance the curriculum along three lines:

- 1) language instruction must be structured, that is, it must have a grammatical component;
- 2) the curriculum must have a functional or sociolinguistic component;
- 3) the curriculum must also have a communicative, experiential component, that is, the learner must be actively involved in second language use. Learners need the contact experience in order to make them participants.

Stern regards this curriculum as an advance over previous attempts, and stresses the need to regard all three components not as separate stages, but as elements present simultaneously. However, he would like to add a fourth component, one which he feels has so far been overlooked: the socio-cultural component. Twenty years ago Robert Lado made the point that language cannot be studied without reference to culture (and vice versa). Nonetheless, adequate descriptions of cultural components of languages are still lacking. The inclusion of the socio-cultural component which Stern considers crucial to the curriculum first requires research and writing in the description of cultures and the use of language within the culture.

There is a dearth of descriptive research on cultures, i.e., language as used by the native speaker and by the foreigner.

Stern's insistence on the socio-cultural component ties in very closely with another very current concept of language studies, namely, an increased emphasis on international, intercultural studies programs. The concept of international studies will remain ill-defined until studies of culture are undertaken. However, before discussing projections for language studies programs in an international curriculum, I would like to discuss briefly the role of the teacher in light of the language teaching methodologies I have described.

The 1970s has often been described as the decade of the learner. Certainly it is true that teaching methodologies have focused on learner needs. Nonetheless, the teacher continues to play a key position in effecting the new classroom strategies. Many of the new methods require that the teacher undergo special training (for example, the Dartmouth Method). The Silent Way and Suggestopedia make special demands on the teacher to orchestrate the classroom atmosphere and student requirements. In the interest of making the student responsible for his learning, stricter demands are being made of teacher performance in the classroom. This aspect of current language teaching methodologies should be considered quite carefully before

attempts are made to adopt them in the classroom.

Teacher education is at the heart of successful classroom teaching. Teachers should have a thorough grounding in the basics of language teaching, i.e., not only the courses on methodology but also courses which elaborate the principles of linguistics, sociology and psychology which underlie language learning. If language teaching is to become more and more interdisciplinary, as seems to be the case from the latest developments and from projections on the future, then the language teacher must acquire wider expertise in the supporting disciplines.

I would note here that the TESOL organization has long insisted upon the importance of teacher education. TESOL has prepared a set of guidelines for programs of teacher preparation.* The guidelines emphasize a multidisciplinary approach based on the most recent research in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and professional education techniques. By setting down guidelines, TESOL works to ensure the professionalism of its members, programs and publications. It is also worth noting that some of the most promising research and teaching in

* Guidelines for the Certification and Preparation of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages in the United States. Available from: TESOL, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

language learning and language acquisition in the United States is being done by TESOL professionals.

It is obvious that the interdisciplinary focus provides a comprehensive framework within which to pose questions of language acquisition and language teaching. On the other hand, it is somewhat unrealistic to expect teachers to master each new technique as it arrives on the scene. At best, the teacher should orchestrate the methods available in a manner most suited to the classroom and to the learners. What is perhaps most important is that teachers come to rely on their own good judgement as to what suits the classroom. The teacher must be able to develop a critical approach to the plethora of facts and findings which abound. The teacher must also learn to treat certain theories and techniques, if not cum grano salis, then at least with a healthy portion of skepticism, or even disrespect.

One critique levied at language teaching methodologies, whether their basis be audiolingualism, cognitive code or communicative competence, is that they are devised and promoted on the basis of very little empirical evidence and without plans for long-range evaluative studies, i.e., studies spanning 10 years or more.

Another criticism is that research findings are applied directly to a situation which does not replicate the original research setting. Let me illustrate my point with an example from the bilingual education issue in the United States. Studies of a French immersion program in Canada undertaken by Wallace Lambert and G. Richard Tucker contributed greatly to research and techniques in bilingual education. However, many theorists and practitioners have since tried to apply their findings and methods directly to situations which exist in the United States, without regard to fundamental differences in the settings. Tucker (1980) himself has criticized the procedure:

During the past year or so, it has become increasingly clear that, despite explicit warnings to the contrary, many American educators have interpreted the abundant Canadian research data as offering empirical support for the immediate submersion of limited . . . English speaking youngsters in monolingual English-medium classrooms.

The claim that results from studies of Canadian immersion programs lead to the conclusion that minority group youngsters in the United States, Canada, or the third world should be immersed or submerged in the the target language is false.

I would like to close my remarks on the role of the teacher with one final suggestion. The very fact of the abundance of language teaching methods seems to be the best argument for taking a very common sense approach to

the whole matter, an approach which has long been espoused by Mary Finocchiaro. No one method is sufficient unto itself and conscientious teachers and educators have always known that there is never an either/or answer to any question of educational theory or practice. Rather, they have advocated an eclectic but integrated approach, one which combines non-conflicting and mutually supportive theories from several disciplines.

Celce-Murcia (1980) provides a useful outline of major approaches to language teaching, which have held sway in the 20th century. She names seven:

1. Grammar-translation
2. Direct 'method'
3. Reading approach
4. Audiolingualism
5. Cognitive Code
5. Affective/humanistic approach
7. Functional/ESP approach

All of the non-conventional methodologies mentioned previously - are compatible with each of the last three approaches listed.

Celce-Murcia recommends that the teacher consider student needs and instructional constraints and then extract useful ideas and techniques from these approaches for use in the classroom. She echoes Finocchiaro in calling for a common sense approach to adaptation of new

methodologies.

My final point is that not only do language and linguistic studies draw on various humanistic disciplines (here I use the term "humanistic" in both the traditional sense associated with liberal arts studies and in the narrower sense referring, in psychology, to the social and affective domain of human behavior), but they also are part of the larger humanistic discipline of international studies. That is, the two definitions of humanistic given here are combined to create a broader view of the humanities, i.e., an international, even global perspective which frames language and area studies within a larger multidisciplinary dimension.

The philosophy behind this new curriculum is well described in a recent special issue of one of America's foremost educational journals, Change magazine. The special issue, entitled "Educating for the World View" expanded on theories of international education, an interest sparked by the recent report of the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies which elaborated on the current status and future requirements of America's expertise in language and international studies.

Naturally, the question can be argued at length, and I do not intend here to dwell on the discussions contained in the Change special issue. What is of particular interest is the interrelation which is presupposed between

language studies and international and intercultural exchange, understanding and cooperation. One of the contributors to the issue, Harlan Cleveland, wrote of this interrelation in a manner which is all the more interesting to us because he is neither a linguist nor a language teacher, but a political scientist:

It is true that I have long been skeptical of the too easy assumption that linguistic skill, cultural empathy, and political acumen are likely to be found in the same package . . . But while language learning is not a sufficient condition for cross-cultural understanding, it is a necessary condition of global perspective. It is especially useful if the language learning is embedded in a total experience, including the learner's immersion in a situation where everybody else already speaks the language the student is trying to learn.

Obviously, the workings of the Council of Europe are a microcosm of the efforts to build bridges among nations and cultures. Questions of language have been central to their tasks. The Council of Europe Threshold Level Project may well be considered one of the most exciting developments in language education. In addition to its implications for language teaching methodology, its development and implementation is a prime example of international cooperation in the interests of intercultural exchange. This, beyond the specific questions of methodology, should be the goal to which we are striving.

I am extremely pleased to see the renewed emphasis on the humanistic basis of language studies, both within the discipline, as I described at the beginning of my remarks, and within the larger scope of international education. I have mentioned that a learner-centered curriculum has placed increasing demands on the teacher. Nonetheless, I would like to charge us all as teachers with yet another task: When it comes to curriculum we must take an interdisciplinary approach to language study at every level -- beginning, intermediate and advanced -- in order to ensure the learner a complete and value-oriented education. The goal of language studies must be not only to build communicative competence, as valuable a development as this may be, but also to build an awareness of moral and social values. Language study must return to its humanistic roots. As language teachers we must express the humanistic basis of our undertaking and present the wider view of language studies as central to and expressive of humanistic endeavors.

I have always believed that the study of language must be approached as a humanistic study. I have always insisted and will always insist that even the study of language as language is a humanistic study; that is, all the uses and manifestations of language and linguistic

communication, in all their philosophic, social, and geographic and ethnic splendor are the basis of a humanistic discipline. Studies of language structure: meaning and change of meaning, forms, sounds, styles, standards of usage, even humor are closely intertwined aspects of human behavior. They take their shape and function as results of the impact of the speech community upon the individual and of the impact of the individual upon the community. They cannot be studied in isolation. Naturally, there is a place for restricted, specialized study, but that study is meaningless unless it is seen as part of the rich complex which is language. Language, in its turn, must be seen as part of the total pattern of human experience.

Close cooperation between the study of language and other disciplines is not a matter of fashion, but of necessity. Language, an integral part of human organization and organizations, cannot be treated as a subject independent of the realities it expresses. The alliance of history, anthropology, sociology and psychology -- to name but a few -- with language studies may, therefore, provide the key to many a linguistic question, be it a specific detail of etymology or the intricate relation of language to thought.

Finally, since language is the single attribute which distinguishes that very special creature known as Man, it is devoutly to be wished that the interdisciplinary alliance espoused here may provide the key to many of the problems which beset Mankind.

REFERENCES

- Celce-Murcia, Marianne. 1980. Language Teaching Methods from the Ancient Greeks to Gattegno. *Mextesol Journal* 10.4.2-13.
- Finocchiaro, Mary, and Michael Bonomo. 1973. *The Foreign Language Learner: A Guide for Teachers*. New York: Regents Publishing Company.
- Hymes, Dell. 1972. *Towards Communicative Competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schumann, John H. 1978. The Acculturation Model for Second-Language Acquisition. In: *Second-Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching*. Edited by Rosario C. Gingras. Arlington, Virginia: CAL
- Stern, H.H., et al. 1980. *Module Making: A Study in the Development and Evaluation of Learning Materials for French as a Second Language*. Toronto: Ministry of Education of Ontario.
- Stevick, Earl W. 1976. *Memory, Meaning and Method*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury Publishers, Inc.
- Stevick, Earl W. 1980. *Teaching Language, A Way and Ways*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Tucker, G. Richard. 1980. Implications for U.S. Bilingual Education: Evidence from Canadian Research. *Focus, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education*. February, 1980, No.2.