TRENDS IN THE FIELD OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE[1]

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Several weeks ago at the University of Arizona's Center for English as a Second Language there was a series of staff meetings to demonstrate and discuss classroom procedures at the various levels of the program. Most of the staff now employed by the Center have received the M.A./ ESL degree from the University of Arizona, where the training is still very much in the structural approach and the Audio-Lingual Method, combined, of course, with the Direct Method because of the many different native languages of the CESL foreign students. As various instructors gave forth with various techniques, especially in the teaching of oral English, one interesting characteristic emerged, the instructors were no longer adhering to the basic tenets of the Audio-Lingual Approach, which they had so carefully learned in their course work and practiced in their internships. That is, there was a drastic de-emphasis of pattern practice and the mimic-memorization procedure. What they seemed to be leaning toward was something close to a cognitive process based on Cognitive Code Learning Theory. The following are some of the characteristics of their classes:

1. The use of original subject matter related to the students themselves, their life experiences, and their previous background of knowledge.

2. The avoidance of rote learning.

3. The use of graphic explanations to clarify relationships.

4. The use of both written and spoken language to stimulate as many senses as possible, simultaneously.

5. The stressing of the functional use of grammatical patterns.

6. A concern for student attitudes as well as mastery of course content.

[1] A paper delivered at the Binational Center, Mexico City, January 3, 1977.

7. An effort to relate overtly the multiple components of language to one another.

What is indicated here is a quiet rebellion of the ESL instructor from the dicta of the entrenched methodology, thereby opening the way for the ESL professional to be responsible for his own adaptation of structural, transformative and cognitive theory to practice. Although these instructors had not given much thought to the theory behind their practices, they were made conscious of the fact that these practices were somehow incomplete without the support of a theory, just as theory is incomplete without some sort of practice to test and/or substantiate it. The key word which guided their procedures seemed to be "meaningful" --a major emphasis on meaningful learning, meaningful practice, and meaningful expression of ideas. Since the revolution in linguistics brought about by Chomsky's Syntactic Structures in the late 50's, various critics of Bloomfield and Fries' structural approach have questioned the basic notion that language is learned behavior; language, the new theorists say, is primarily a creative function of the mind. The Audio-Lingual method, the critics say further, has come full circle back to the grammar for grammar's sake of the traditional grammar-translation method, which was ridiculed prior to the advent of the Audio-Lingual approach.

Leonard Newmark, as one example, has written:

> "When structural-linguists first faced the problem of developing methods to teach exotic languages, and later languages like English, they maintained a natural emphasis on teaching concrete uses of language... As structuralists grew more and more confident about the "scientific" analyses of language, they modified their teaching programs more and more to reflect these analyses: phonemic drills and structural pattern drills were increasingly elevated from the minor role they played in the early Army language course to the major role they play in, say the Michigan English Language Institute textbooks or in recent Foreign Service Institute books. This increase in pattern drill is an index of the return from "natural" material to grammatical-illustration material." (Newmark, 1970, p. 212)

Pointing to the more specific, Newmark goes on to question the basic tenets of Charles Fries who, back in 1945, wrote:

> "In learning a new language... the chief problem is... at first... the mastery of the sound system --to understand the stream of speech, to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their production." (p. 3)

Newmark, however, states the following, a decidely transformational view:

> "The fact that the detailed phonological rules come late in the grammar suggests that attention to the details of pronunciation might be left until relatively late in a foreign language teaching program. Note that such delay in teaching "a good accent" is at sharp variance with the attitudes of most applied linguists today, but is in good agreement with our common sense feeling that is more important to be able to speak a language fluently and to say a lot of things in it than to have marvelous pronunciation but not know what to say. The relative lateness of phonological rules in a transformational grammar helps account for the fact that we can often understand a nonnative speaker even when he lacks most of the phonological habits of English; if we attempt to follow the order of grammatical rules in teaching simple before complex sentences, by the same token we should teach meaningful sentences before we worry much about teaching their proper pronunciation." (pp. 215-16).

Agreement and, at the same time, rebuttal, is offered by Joan Morley who wrote in 1975 that many teachers, as well as students find the pronunciation class a bore and a waste of time.

> "This is sad, because so much of the joy and the satisfaction and the power of using language comes through speaking and listening. Perhaps the problem lies in conflict... conflict between underlying concepts about language learning and language teaching which have changed a great deal during the past few years... and materials and methodologies which have not changed very much. And conflict puzzles us; it makes us uneasy and not as sure of ourselves as we once were, a state of mind which students soon sense." (Morley p. p. 9-83, 1975)

She goes on to state, however that pronunciation should definitely be taught from the very beginning and that it should be isolated from other aspects of language practice. At the root of the problem is that there are few existing materials and methodologies which encourage students to be active, not passive participants in their own learning. Teachers should emphasize active student involvement in the learning process, and at the same time assume more responsibility for their own performance. This is done by establishing ESL classes in which the students are involved cognitively and are apprised to what they are doing and why they are doing it. In other words, she is saying that the emphasis should be on learning, not on teaching. Seldom are students taught how to monitor their own speech performance; at one time

this was even considered unsound. But from my own personal experience teaching in the language laboratory, I found that after hearing a model, students were constantly correcting their own pronunciation and grammatical errors and felt that somehow this phenomenon should be exploited to the point where they could systematically evaluate their own learning progress.

What this all leads up to is that the field of ESL today as noted by numerous applied linguists is in a state of "ferment" and there is very much a need for new directions. What is happening really is a reassessment of the field, something that must occur periodically in all the arts and sciences to keep them healthy and thriving.

Another major trend, as pointed out by Muriel Saville-Troike, in both theory and methodology, is relating language use to its total cultural context. Research in ethnography of speaking is providing us with information about verbal and non-verbal routines, systems, and linguistic repertories necessary for effective social communication. This is what the CESL teachers at Arizona were doing individually and seemingly without prescribed methodology to guide them. This position they have assumed intuitively after observing the needs and goals of the university-bound students they teach and by witnessing in their classes the considerable evidence that different people learn in different ways, and that learning preferences are as important in second-language learning as they are in any other kind. Students learn through the eye as well as through the ear, by deduction as well as by induction, and by learning about as well as by learning how. Even according to Ronald Wardhaugh of the ELI at the University of Michigan -- that bastion of the A-L approach-- there is little need to abide by the order of listen, speak, read and write. "This," he says, "is particularly true when we are dealing with older children and adults who have learned to learn in certain ways." (In Lugton, 1971, p. 19)

At this point I must admit that most discussions of trends in ESL have concentrated on the teaching of English to non-native speakers in the United States. Now and then, "How to..." and "My experience in ..." articles pertaining to foreign students in foreign countries creep into the journals. Still, as it was fifteen years ago when I began my teaching career in Greece, a major problem is to create within the students studying English in Mexico, Greece, Japan and elsewhere, a true sense of urgency to learn and speak the target language. Results, as well as efforts, so far have been of varying, and to speak honestly, un-impressive, degree. Another major problem, noted by Leonard Bloomfield over fifty years ago and unresolved today is as follows:

> In spite of the fact that there has been more than a hundred years of vigorous linguistic investigation in accord with sound scientific methods, very little of the results of these investigations has actually got into the schools to affect the materials

> methods of teaching language and the actual conditions under which language teaching is attempted... Even where there are well-equipped teachers who have acquainted themselves with the modern approaches to language teaching, the administrative circumstances to which they must conform are usually such as to make impossible effective use of their knowledge and ability. In fact, the naive and conventional views of language have been so much in control that there has been little opportunity even to try materials and methods based upon our scientific knowledge and research. (In Fries 1945, p. 1)

At the same time we are reassessing theory and methods, we should also reaffirm the ultimate goal in second-language methodology. That is to discover a method which will make the process of acquiring a second language as uncomplicated as that of acquiring a native language. In all the reading and at all the ESL meetings I have attended in recent years, I haven't heard this goal or any other mentioned. Most of the material has been in one way or another, an explanation of reactionary techniques as a response to the increasing criticism against prevailing methods. Some of the transformationalist criticism I have already mentioned. Structuralists, such as Freeman Twaddell, fight back with highly inflamatory remarks. In his response to Karl Diller's article announcing the untenable position of Audio-Lingual Methods, Twaddell states,

> "I do not find that Diller's article has lightened the burden of proof on those who would reject procedures with a record of considerable success in the classroom in favor of methodologies based on theories of very dubious relevance to classroom teaching and learning. The article appears to ignore the realities of age-group differences; it --intentionally or carelessly-- misrepresents the familiar strategy of progressively changing teaching procedures to parallel a learner's progress toward control of a foreign language. The alternative praised by Professor Diller as pointing the way toward 'improving the teaching of foreign language' are either inadequately described... or are inapplicable to classroom realities to the point of freakishness..." (1976, p. 117)

Twaddell, in the same article, puts the burden of proof upon those who advocate abandoning accepted doctrine and procedure in favor of something new.

> It is a common failing of apostles of one or another variety of Transformational-Generative doctrine to assume the validity of their beliefs as given, and try to put holders of widely held views and users of successful practices on the defensive. (1976, p. 114)

In his reply to Twaddell concerning age differences, Diller says that it is much easier to adapt direct methods to different age groups through the use of meaningful practice of a language instead of mechanical drill. Age differences thus become a much less serious issue from a methodological point of view. It is on the levels of technique and content that we must take age differences more seriously. Also in his reply, Diller re-emphasizes that, in his opinion, the method of pattern drill and mimic-memorization is bankrupt and that

> "... the rationalist theory of language learning associated with generative grammar has re-opened the door to the direct method and has fostered various new language teaching methods, some of which will prove in the long run to be better than others. It seems inappropriate for anyone to be making a priori pronouncements against these methods without being willing to experiment or to examine new evidence. (1976, p. 121)

This discussion of methods, theories, and research brings up another serious problem in the field: a serious lack of means of processing and distributing the pertinent information relevant to language learning. Language is a major area of study in the fields of linguistics, education, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, among others. Who knows from what research the principle key will come? This dearth of knowledge is certainly one reason why practice is so far behind theory, and sorting out what is essential will continue to be one of the major tasks of the applied linguist and ESL teacher. The really over-abundance of textbooks and how to select them is also a problem, especially in the United States. So many of them are packed with inflated claims in their introductions. At the same time, reviews of textbooks in journals such as the TESOL Quarterly are becoming less and less genteel. One review, that of Hall's ORIENTATION IN AMERICAN ENGLISH, states the following:

> In their promotional literature and elsewhere... the publishers and authors try to make us believe that the text is something radically new under the sun. Take the first paragraph of the teacher's manual for example: "The text is similar to other approaches in one BASIC respect --one of its major goals is

> to help people learn a language. Unlike other approaches, however, it's based on the belief that people should be able to learn to communicate as well and as quickly as possible." The absurd suggestion that "other approaches" are based on some contrasting belief is surely insulting to the reader's sense of logic. (Eugene Mohr, 1975, p. 77)

Anyone who has ever presided over a meeting of an ESL textbook committee understands the problem of choosing the right texts to satisfy student needs, as well as teachers' standards. We also understand the drastic implication of making an unwise decision in the choice of a text, however heartened we are by the notion that its basic purpose is to be a springboard for communication. Students who come to our Center after twelve years or more of schooling in their native countries have very fixed ideas about what a book should offer them. It's a source of answers and these answers must always be correct. We have found, however, that by gradually weaning the student from the bounds of his textbook, he eventually sees language learning for what it ultimately is: practice in functioning in all four skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing, and that oftentimes, especially if he plans to study in our country, these skills will be required simultaneously. With this in mind, the Center has begun pilot programs such as the English Backup Component/Lecture Program for advanced students. Its purpose is to function as a transition between English as a second language classes and regular university course work. The students are given three hours of lectures per week in either History of the United States or Physical Science, each requiring two instructors. The lectures are complemented by seven classroom hours a week of English, devoted to developing and augmenting speaking and study skills. The students are required to participate orally in class discussions and debates. Individual oral reports on the subject matter are also required. The Backup Component stresses the development of note-taking and test-taking skills, aural comprehension and oral fluency.

Quest for Liberty, a high school text, was selected for the history section. The science section uses Guided Reading Study Guide, put out by Instructional Communications Technology, Incorporated. Reading assignments stress accuracy, comprehension, and speed. The students are tested on both the English Backup Component and the Lecture Program. They also present research projects on historical and scientific topics. The EBC reinforces and clarifies the lectures, emphasizes necessary skill and study development, and focuses on linguistic problems. What must be made clear is that we are not trying to duplicate a regular university course; the main purpose, in addition to the learning of useful or "true" material, is a bridging effort over to what I might loosely call an academic language or register.

The Center has also given up using a complete series from beginning to advanced levels. We have become too aware of the fact that different people of university age learn in different ways and that a consistent, single style of language is not what our students need; nor do they need a consistent teaching style in their five or six classes per day. It is important, however, that the students know and understand each teacher's procedure and what is expected of them. After all, these students already possess skills in another language. We must be conscious of their linguistic and cultural differences and at the same time teach them to understand our culture as it is expressed by the American English they are learning to comprehend and use. This involves (1)assisting them in learning how to learn and progress in English (2) Guiding and encouraging them in their consistent acquisition of new language forms (3) providing them with support for the English that they are learning, without overcorrection of what has not yet been mastered (4) providing them with the language--vocabulary and structures--for the concepts they need and wish to understand and/or express and (5) giving them the opportunity to ask and understand questions. Muriel Saville-Troike emphasizes these points by noting the following:

> In teaching English to foreign students at the university level, we have been recognizing that our instruction falls short of their needs. We have been leaving them inadequately equipped with the skills they need for coping with university-level instruction in English. The need is for earlier and stronger emphasis on reading processes and for teaching the more formal style required by textbooks and lectures rather than the conversational style of the Audio/Lingual materials. (Mean, p. 1, 1974)

Returning to the problems of teachers of ESL in other countries, we want first to identify the internal and external benefits of learning a second language--in our case, English. We are told that learning about another culture through language helps us to better understand our own. This is not, of course, acquired automatically in an ESL classroom. The student should also acquire an insight into the complexities of language, which controls not only one's speech, but one's thoughts, and if we adhere to Sapir-Whorf, one's view of the world. As teachers of English in a non-native speaking environment, we shouldn't think of it as just ESL --in this discussion I am using ESL-- as a cover term to cover English as a Foreign Language as well- but as SESL- that is, Sensible English as a Second Language. It is very well to say that English is English no matter where it is taught. This may be true as far as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics are concerned, but in each area of the world the ESL teacher must determine the goals and kinds of English suitable for his/her students. There must be more attention paid to individual student needs and their relationship to the choice of subject matter.

In the non-English speaking environment there should probably be a healthy balance of both cognitive exercises and audio-lingual practice. In other words, exercises in the comprehension of forms and the conscious selection of forms to fit a particular context, and drills to instill automatic action and reaction into the students' repertoire of verbal stimuli and responses. The ideal curriculum would emphasize a full range of study materials through which the grammar material is presented; natural, informative dialogs, clear and concise grammar explanations, useful, stimulating dictations and readings; and a variety of questions and exercises that involve vocabulary and reading development, aural-oral discrimination, and most important, opportunities for extended speaking, reading and writing.

This is probably as good a time as any to bring up the question of analogy between first and second language learning. Transformationists have made a large contribution to this field of study. In the acquisition of a first language grammar, a child learns early to do the following:

1. He can determine the linguistically significant generalizations of categories in his acoustic environment. For example, he can determine what a sentence is and what a speech sound is.

2. He can store in memory the features of the above category. That is, he can recognize a sentence. He can store in memory the functional relationships between rising and falling intonational contours.

3. He can determine the fit and structure of sequences he produces and hears.

4. He can expand and alter his structural descriptions as he matures. (Menyuk, 1969, pp. 152-153)

Difficulties for developing his grammar are created by the following four conditions, as outlined by Carol Chomsky, 1969, pp. 6-7.

1. The true grammatical relations which hold among the words in a sentence are not expressed directly in its surface structure. For example: the roaring of lions vs. the training of lions.

2. The syntactic structure associated with a particular word is at variance with a general pattern in the language.

For example: He told him to go vs. he promised him to go.

3. A conflict exists between two of the potential syntactic structures associated with a particular verb. For example: John asked Bill to leave vs. John asked Bill what to do.

4. Restrictions on a grammatical operation apply under certain limited conditions only. For example: When he was tired, John usually took a nap. He knew that John was going to win the race.

In first language acquisition then, an error shows that full competence has not yet been attained and the development of a grammar is still in an interim state; in second language learning, however, an error is taken to show that a form has been wrongly learned or is an unlearned pattern. Possibly, as suggested by some psycholinguists, the second language learner should be allowed greater freedom to make mistakes while he is testing his various grammatical hypotheses so that he can discard those that are unsuccessful. If the analogy between first and second language learning holds, the ESL teacher should not deplore a student's errors, but instead encourage a native-speaking child. But now I ask you to try to hold two opposing ideas in your mind simultaneously by adding a structuralist behaviorist view:

> ... in the audio-lingual method, the student... must not, as the small child does, experiment with new combinations and analogies, some accurate and some inaccurate. Instead he must be induced to produce the right response by the teacher's careful arrangement of the circumstances of response. His mistakes are not 'cute' but dangerous, in what they represent decremental, not incremental, learning. (Rivers, 1964, p. 102)

In the structuralist school, grammar is defined as the patterns, or arrangements of words that have a meaning over and above the separate meanings of the words in sentences and the patterns of arrangement of words into words are its grammatical structure. To test grammatical problems is learning the second language, and by testing the problems we are testing the language proficiency of the learner. As you can see, I am making no attempt to decide the issue.

I hope that it is apparent from this brief survey of trends in the teaching of ESL that a great deal of study and research must be done before we achieve even a small understanding of the complexities of second language learning. Considering the status of English in the world today, I should add that this investigagion must be an international one. For too long, teachers have relied too much on the "experts." It is the teachers who must form the basic disciplines that underline English language teaching. This you can do by carefully examining the theoretical insights and utilizing and reporting on those that show promise in improving the second-language learning process.

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