The British Association for Applied Linguistics

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EDITORIAL

The main feature in this our 24th Newsletter is a set of responses to the DES document "English from 5 to 16". These are mainly approbatory in tone. The need for such a statement seems to have been fairly widely felt. Writers have noted however a number of inconsistencies, ambiguities and points which need further development.

There are in this edition, we regret, no reviews. We hope to remedy this in No. 25. Any suggestions for reviews should be sent to one of the editors at the addresses which appear below.

I would like to offer my thanks to Euan Reid, my co-editor Paul Meara, and above all to Magdalen Meade for all the invaluable help and patience extended to me during the production of this newsletter. Magdalen should be particularly commended for battling with an ailing, if not failing, Brain (our machine not her own).

Copy for our next edition should be sent as early as possible to one of the two editors whose addresses appear below.

I would stress that anything of interest relating to matters Applied Linguistic should be considered as potential material for the Newsletter and should be sent post haste to one of the editors.

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1. FROM BAAL 1985

1.1 Chris Brumfit has now retired from the position of Chairperson. Here is his closing report.

What I propose to do very briefly here is to list the major activities of the last three years, in order to indicate the areas of progress, and where work still remains to be done. I have been lucky during my term of office in having an exceptionally hard-working and pleasant body of people as fellow-officers and committee members. Particularly, I should mention the two secretaries in this period, John Roberts and Euan Reid, who took on the heaviest burden of work the Association offers, and Pam Grunwell, who as Treasurer reformed the finances of the Association.

We decided in 1982 that it would be worthwhile to look systematically at the whole organisation of the Association. It had by then been running for 15 years, and had established many patterns appropriate for smallish associations, but difficult when members exceeded 400.

1. A review of the work being performed by officers made it clear that unrealistic demands were being made on their time. Consequently, some aspects of the routine administration and mailings have been contracted out to CILT, in order to increase efficiency with the more mechanical aspects, and leave the Secretary free to operate more on policy matters. At the same time, an enormous amount of ground-clearing was performed by Euan Reid and Janet Price in establishing exactly who of our members were paying what subscription, and clarifying the mailing list. Much of the administration is now on word-processor, and routines have been established for most operations.

2. Various constitutional amendments have been made or proposed: the gender bias of the constitution has been corrected, the privileges of Associate Membership clarified, and the process of applying for membership simplified.

3. We have begun to address ourselves to relations with AILA. British Academy support for part of our AILA subscription has at last been obtained, and we have tried to establish systematic liaison with each of the AILA scientific commissions. Since I was elected one of the Vice-presidents of AILA last year, I have been chairing committees on relations between the central AILA body and organisers of Congresses, and on the finances of AILA. Both of these are areas where there has been dissatisfaction in the past, and it is hoped that policies will develop to improve matters.

4. The procedure for the Annual Meeting has been formalised somewhat, with abstracts requested in advance to be vetted, scholarships (with partial support from generous grants from the Bell Educational Trust) to students reporting on interesting research, and more varied modes of presentation. The proceedings are also being published from now on. It is also gratifying to note that offers for the Annual Meeting venue are now accepted up to 1989, and we are waiting for offers for 1990.

5. We have had some difficulty replacing John Mountford's excellent editorship of the Newsletter, but recent issues have nonetheless been of high quality. At present, plans are for groups of people from the same area to take on the editing. John Norrish will coordinate for a London-based group for the next few issues, and offers of help for now or in other centres later will be greatly appreciated. Our editorial involvement with Applied Linguistics has increased, and we provide annual, formal feedback to Oxford University Press. And we have started a series of proceedings of Annual Meeting papers, as I mentioned earlier.

6. Other areas of administrative tidying up that we have taken in hand include consultation on establishment of a design policy, organisation of the BAAL archive at Birkbeck College under Paul Meara, clarification of the consistution of the Committee for Linguistics in Education together with a guarantee of limited funding for its activities (this is our joint committee with LAGB), and the establishment of a systematic review of all aspects of BAAL activity in the various committee meetings throughout the year.

7. An important part of BAAL's activity has been response to official policy papers. The DES received a response to the paper on foreign languages in the school curriculum, and a large dossier of responses on the English 5-16 curriculum pamphlet. Responses have also been sent to NCLE and other documents.

8. We have continued to offer small sums for research support, and to assist publications that would not otherwise be easily produced. The procedure for the former has been formalised.

9. After a slight hiatus in the number of specialist seminars being organised, we are now richly endowed with promises and fixed seminars: there have been two in the 1985 summer vacation, two more are arranged for the next academic year, and at least two more are at an early stage of planning. These are the mainstay of BAAL professional activity, and further offers will be very welcome.

10. A general policy of international contact has been pursued. A successful joint seminar was held with the Irish association, and informal talks are exploring possibilities of a joint American seminar. We have tried to obtain funding for a number of overseas visits and visits to us by foreign scholars, and have had generous support from the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the Pergamon Institute of English, and others. Nonetheless, we still lack reliable automatic support for the one or two overseas scholars we would like to invite to our Annual Meetings, though in practice we are exchanging with the Germans, and the number of overseas people attending our own meetings has increased.

11. We have tried to maintain close liaison with our membership, even when individuals cannot attend the Annual Meeting. A questionnaire went out to all members on general policy issues earlier this year, and we circulated all Associate Members past and present to find out their needs before clarifying their constitutional position. However, it is clear that we are not tapping our full membership potential. We tried this year

sending application forms to all the major applied linguistic masters courses, and the next few months should show whether this strategy breeds results. If we can increase our membership substantially without losing the intimacy and good atmosphere that is characteristic of our meetings we shall provide a great service to what is now a mature profession.

12. But there are still a number of areas where improvement of service is necessary, and a number of areas where I have failed to persuade other members to accept hobby-horses of my own. I would like to conclude by mentioning some examples of both these categories.

I think we are still unclear about what exactly we mean by being the British Association for Applied Linguistics. Clearly we perform a useful role as an arena for theoretical dicussion of language teaching, but many of our members are not primarily interested in that field. The psychosociological bases of language acquisition, translation, and language therapy are only three other areas which appear in recent or forthcoming seminars. We need to be sure that there is not too heavy a bias towards language teaching simply because of the accidents of early recruitment. And we also need to be sure that we have a constant relationship with linguistics proper, even if we acknowledge that processes of application are complex and difficult to chart precisely. The forthcoming seminar at Essex may help us to redefine the linguistics part of applied linguistics more clearly. Certainly we should aim, in my view, at being inclusive rather than exclusive, for we are the only organisation in Britain centrally concerned with the theoretical and practical issues arising out of language as a social and personal practice.

I think, too, that we should be more conscious than we have been about the composition of our membership. In a profession with a higher proportion of women than most, our work has still led to a succession of male chairpersons (though I should add that the relative numbers of officers and committee members compare favourably with most organisations). Further, it is increasingly true that applied linguistic work is being carried out by members of minority language-speaking communities; BAAL must ensure that its membership reflects this fact if it is to speak for the many social and political aspects of language that require current comment. Similarly, with language and ethnicity a major concern of many of our members, we need more black members. At the same time, of course, it would be much easier for us to recruit in these groups if there were more people appointed to university and college posts with such backgrounds.

Within the field of language teaching specifically, we need particularly to monitor the language awareness movement. This seems to be achieving a momentum of its own, but since it is concerned primarily with the development of linguistic concepts in school, BAAL should have a unique role to play here.

I would like - without I hope prejudicing the policies of my successor - to see the profession increasingly clear about its membership and their activities, in the public as well as the private sphere. For this reason, I regret failing to persuade fellow committee members of the necessity for a BAAL register of

members with limited "Who's Who"-type entries, similar to those held by other professional associations. Such identification of expertise and background available for public scrutiny seems to me an important part of professional consciousness. I also think that we should increase our international contact-systems, and work to achieve a strong position in the AILA commissions and in its other activities. Here it is apparent that our democratic procedures work against us, for there are many officers in AILA who have held high posts in their national associations for more than a decade, and have had a long time to establish a power-base in AILA. BAAL's policy of sending a new delegate every three years has not been the best way of gaining a major say in AILA's organisation. But there are signs that AILA wants to reform itself, and BAAL should certainly remain committed to the major international applied linguistic organisation. There are other ways also of cementing international contacts. BAAL has many overseas members, probably more than any other AILA affiliate; we also ask foreign scholars to our meetings regularly, and are now beginning to hold more joint seminars with overseas AILA affiliates. I think, though, that we could perhaps consider a more permanent committee on policy, especially overseas policy, to include members (preferably with good French!) who will stay with AILA beyond the normal three-year terms of our office-holding.

I think we should give more thought still to our publicity. In all the years of my involvement with BAAL, I have been consistently appalled by the lack of interest in language matters even in the serious academic and educational press. I believe that there are signs of this changing, though, as the Swann Report showed, there is a great need for general education in this area. Perhaps BAAL should consider writing articles for the general serious press - New Society, The Spectator, THES, for example - in order to get across important points on policy matters.

However, there is a risk that too much hopeful prediction will tread on the toes of the next chairperson. What I do have to say is that the people I have worked with as fellow-officers and committee members have been the nicest and most efficient group of people I have ever been on a committee with, and, whereas most chairing is an unmitigated chore, holding this position for BAAL has been consistently enjoyable, challenging and rewarding. I wish my successor all the pleasure that I have had.

1.2 Euan Reid reports on the last year from the Secretary's
    perspective

1. An agreement had been concluded with CILT for them to act as BAAL's agent in the despatch of mailings to members, and in routine matters relating to subscription maintenance and renewal. It was to run in the first place for a two year period which began on 1 June 1985. The cost will be £2.40 per annum per new or amended entry on the list, and £2.00 per unchanged entry carried into a new year.

2. In the course of the year three mailings to members had been despatched, including two BAAL newsletters, the first issue of the new AILA Review, details of BAAL (and other) seminars and Annual Meeting, our 1985 List of Members, offers of discounted subscriptions to various journals, details of other publications, of AILA and so on. The last of these mailings came to members directly from CILT.

3. With the help of the Membership Secretary, a new publicity leaflet and application form had been produced. The information on the new form might form the basis of a Register of Members at a later stage.

4. A BAAL Archive had been set up in Birkbeck College's Department of Applied Linguistics, and would be available to any member, or other interested person, on application to the Secretary.

5. The first award had been made in the course of the year under our new Small Research Grant scheme: it went to Duska Johnson, University of Surrey, to assist publication of the final research report on her project Error Gravity: Communicative Effect of Language Errors in Academic Writing.

6. Discounts on journal subscriptions for members were maintained for Applied Linguistics and System, and extended among others to Journal of Linguistics, Linguistic Abstracts, Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development, Studies in Second Language Acquisition.

7. Design proposals for BAAL papers and publications had been considered by the Executive Committee, but it had been decided not to proceed at the moment.

8. It had been agreed to apply for affiliation to the Association of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences, but not to a proposed new federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations.

9. Responses to DES Documents English 5-16 have been elicited and forwarded, and to the Swann Report are being prepared, as is a response to the latest proposals on the future of CILT.

10. Thanks were expressed to all fellow Executive Committee members, and especially to the retiring Chairperson, C.J. Brumfit.

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2. REPORTS AND NOTES ON TWO SEMINARS AND A CONFERENCE

2.1 Rod Ellis reports on the seminar he organised in Ealing.

Contextual Variability and Second Language Acquisition
at Ealing College of Higher Education (10-12 September 1985)

Background

The Seminar was supported by financial grants from Pergamon Institute of English and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (1).

Aims

The aims of the Seminar were to examine:

1. methods for investigating interlanguage variability
2. the linguistic and situational determinants of interlanguage variability
3. the role of variability in second language acquisition
4. the significance of interlanguage variability studies for language teaching and testing.

The concept of contextual variability in second language acquisition was intentionally defined broadly to include both skill aspects of learning (e.g. reading) and input factors.

It was also envisaged that the Seminar would provide a forum for bringing together researchers in the field of second language acquisition and practitioners in the field of language teaching.

Format

The format of the Seminar was as follows:

1. Summaries of written papers presented by the authors of the papers.
2. Oral responses to the papers by invited discussants, to whom the papers had been sent in advance of the Seminar.
3. Plenary discussion of points raised in the papers.

Papers

A total of sixteen papers were presented at the Seminar. These covered the main aims of the Seminar and were organised, as far as possible, to reflect a progression from research to pedagogical issues.

There was one keynote address by an invited speaker, Elaine Tarone, University of Minnesota.

Social Events

There were two social events organised:

1. Wine and snacks on Tuesday 10 September.
2. A buffet meal on Wednesday 11 September.

Accommodation

Accommodation was provided at the Ealing YMCA, which is adjacent to the College. Approximately 20 of the Seminar participants used this accommodation.

Evaluation

1. **Attendance**
   The Seminar was well supported. Attendance at individual sessions varied from a maximum of 60 to a minimum of 30. Most sessions were well attended.

2. **Content and Quality of Papers**
   The content of the papers reflected the broad aims of the Seminar. The papers included reports on empirical research, both quantitative and qualitative, and more theoretical, argumentative pepers. It was difficult to assess the quality of the papers from the oral summaries provided at the Seminar, but the initial impression from a reading of many of them was that a fairly high standard was maintained.

3. **Format**
   The chosen format led to a rather dense and demanding programme. In general, the seminar participants appeared to appreciate the opportunity to hear a dual response to an issue (i.e. from the authors of the papers and the invited discussants). There was, however, no opportunity to consider the papers in depth, as only oral summaries were given, and inadequate opportunity to discuss each paper within tha allocated time schedule. The main achievement of the Seminar was perhaps to offer participants insights into the range of issues involved in viewing second language acquisition as a variable phenomenon, which could be taken up later, according to individual interest.

In retrospect, an improvement would have been to have a less dense programme (which inevitably intruded into tea and coffee breaks) and to provide more time for discussion of key issues, perhaps by setting aside sessions specifically for this purpose. Another improvement would have been to circulate full copies of the papers before the Seminar. Experience of trying to ensure that discussants received papers in sufficient time to prepare comments, suggests that general circulation of papers prior to the Seminar would have been impractical. Such a format would only be possible with a smaller number of parpicipants.

Note
1. The grants from Pergamon and BAAL were spent on the guest speaker's air fare from the USA. This speaker, Elaine Tarone, was also invited to give a plenary address at the BAAL Annual Meeting in Edinburgh (13-15 September 1985).

2.2 Bill Littlewood reports on the Communicative Grammar Seminar he organised in Bath.

Report on BAAL Seminar on
Learning Grammar as an Instrument for Communication in a
Foreign Language
at the University of Bath, 8-10 July 1985

The seminar was attended by about fifty participants with a wide variety of interests within the field of foreign and second language taaching. This variety was felt to be a considerable asset since it led to much cross-fertilisation of ideas and ensured a rich exploration of topics during discussion.

The seminar opened on Monday 8 July at 3.00 p.m. Four papers were presented on the first day:

David Little and David Singleton: 'The role of "grammar" in language teaching: will learners be helped by what they think they need?'

Michael Swan: 'Grammar or grammars?'

Margaret Rogers: 'What does it mean to "know" a grammatical rule?'

Eva Paneth and Bill Dodd: 'A receptive grammar for functional German '

The second day was taken up by eight papers in five sessions:

Pauline Rea: 'How does grammatical competence relate to communicative competence? Some models and some data.'

Meriel Bloor and Tom Bloor: 'Alternative syllabus or alternative methods: teaching grammar for specific communicative tasks.'

N.S. Prabhu: 'Guided and unguided grammar construction.'

Keith Johnson: 'Cognitive skill acquisition and the teaching of grammar.'

Anita Pincas: 'Sentence patterns and their meanings.'

Ian Mason: 'Communicative grammar within the SULFRA Lyon a la une course: a corpus-based approach to the grammar of discourse.'

Margaret Lang: 'Teaching communication and grammar'

Anu Virkkunen, Leena Koskinen and Anna Mauranen: 'Teaching English abbreviated clauses.'

On the final morning there were two papers:

Ulrike Meinhof: 'Mediator or stumbling block? Grammar between text and speech act.'

Roger Bowers: 'Grammar as topic.'

In the final session there was general discussion of issues. A high priority was felt to be the need to coordinate research efforts.

The papers at the seminar were of high quality in both content and presentation. They stimulated lively discussion which was all the more enjoyable because it took place in an unconstrained atmosphere. Domestic arrangements went smoothly, aided by the efficiency and cooperation of the conference services at the University of Bath.

Bill Littlewood

2.3 Tom Bloor gives his impressions of the first International Conference of SEAL in Woodford.

IMAGES AND HEMISPHERES
(The SEAL First International Conference)

A man stands on the platform; he is a man of considerable stature but with a comic touch, a man of substance seen through the eyes of Dickens' illustrator, Phiz. He is selling a little booklet for a dollar a time, or, if you haven't a dollar, for a pound. Since this is Woodford and not Gaithersburg, Maryland, most of us have pounds. This is one memory I retain of my long weekend in Woodford: a tall, portly man in a grey three-piece suit with a rotary club lapel badge, one capacious hand dealing out booklets like cards from a diminishing deck, the other clutching a growing wad of banknotes.

When I close my eyes, I see W C Fields as snake-oil merchant: "Just one dollar, folks. This amazing potion from a recipe revealed to me by Sitting Bull himself will remove warts, lumbago, diarrhoea and gonorrhoea. Rubbed on the scalp it cures baldness; properly applied elsewhere it removes unwanted hair."

The image is probably somehow related to the figure on the platform for I had just undergone a session of "image-streaming" under his direction. This involves simply closing your eyes and describing to a partner what you "see" behind your eyelids. It is supposed to develop connections between the right and left hemispheres of the brain so that "even the trivial things around you you discover are charged with significant meaning, history and colour and interest, and your entire living becomes one great rich exhilerating (sic) 'A-ha!'" My idiosyncratic visions are no doubt yet another example of the complex networks of memory nexuses of which Stevick has spoken for what we have here is certainly no snake-oil cure-all but a scientific contribution to the field of applied psychology, a document persuasively entitled "An Easy Way to Increase Your Intelligence and to Profoundly Improve your own Insightfulness" and subtitled "Introducing a Major Accessway to Your Own Resources Featuring the 'Ten/Ten Test'". It is published by Psychegenics Press, Maryland, USA, and we are getting it at half price, special conference rate. The author is none other than the big man on the platform, Dr Win Wenger, founder of "Project Renaissance", internationally recognised authority on the "Limbic System as Source of Genius" and

author of Beyond O.K., Making Your Language a Very, VERY Fine Bed of Sand, and How to Increase Gifted Students' Creative Thinking and Imagination - a Step-by-Step Instructional Guide for Teachers and Administrators (to name but a few).

I have not yet tried the "Ten/Ten Method" which involves practising image-streaming with a partner for 10 minutes a day over a ten day period, but we have been assured by Dr Wenger that even the short workout on image-streaming has raised our IQs by 1 or 2 points. (Incidentally, Dr Wenger has two children, Erika and Whimsey, who, a publicity leaflet inform us, "have been winning ribbons and trophies on the Watkins Mills Swim Team". Well done, Erika and Whimsey Wenger!)

About 140 participants from a wide range of countries from Australia to Liechtenstein met in Woodford from 24-26 May to share their thoughts or feelings about improved learning methods, In the main as applied to language learning.

Earl Stevick was the keynote speaker and he also ran a workshop session on "mental imagery as an aid to foreign language learning." Stevick, who recently retired from the U.S. Foreign Service Institute School of Language and Area Studies, has increasingly identified himself in recent years with so-called "humanistic approaches" to language teaching and, without specifically espousing it, has expressed his approval of "Suggestopedia", the brainchild of the Bulgarian psychologist, Dr Georgi Lozanov.

Suggestopedia seems to be the dominant spirit in SEAL, or at least it was at this conference, and, for my money, the most enjoyable sessions were the two practical demonstrations of suggestopedic language teaching by Gabriel Racle (Canada) and Lonny Gold (France). It is unfortunate that the language taught in both cases was French. It might have been more enlightening to try being an absolute beginner. Moreover, given the indisputable talent and charisma of the teachers, it is difficult to say how far the success of the demonstrations was due to Lozanov's insightful innovations, but they were certainly impressive lessons.

To put a simplistic gloss on suggestopedia, it is a method which entails massive and intensive rather than carefully measured and thinly-spread language input, and it places great emphasis on the removal of threat from the learning situation. Students are encouraged to relax in a comfortable environment and to adopt a fantasy identity. There is considerable use of games and songs and the adult learner is encouraged to reacquire childlike attitudes. One striking feature is the use of texts, prepared by the teacher and worked on in a variety of ways, notably being read aloud (or rather performed) by the teacher, to a background of classical music while the students listen in a fully relaxed state.

Having only read about suggestopedia before this conference, I can report that relaxing in a comfortable chair with eyes closed listening to Bach or Mozart can produce a feeling of well-being. But a lot of you knew that already. What's new? New to me at least was the discovery that it feels good even when some teacher is reading a French dialogue in varied ways over the music. Whether one learns better that way I cannot say, but it seems plausible though it could

be disastrous, I suppose, if you detest classical music, and the unquestioning faith in European music is perhaps a touch ethnocentric. Certainly, the concern for reducing tension, fear and competition is to my mind entirely laudable, and it seems fairly certain that the parsimonious language input favoured by the audiolingual methods of the 50s and 60s was a big mistake. Of course, these insights are not exclusive to Lozanov and his followers, but they do not claim exclusivity on any specific principle, only on the package as a whole.

Suggestopedia was not the only approach promoted at the Conference. Michael Lawlor (Britain) one of the conference organisers, expounded the virtues of his "Inner Track Method" ("inner track" because you get there quicker and because of the inward nature of its yoga-influenced concerns); this is based on Suggestopedia and Silva Mind Control, whatever that might be. Bernard Cleveland (USA) talked about NLP in the classroom (NLP: Neurolinguistic Programming: "a system based on the work of psychotherapist Milton Ericson, which enables learners to make use of their dominant sensory mode - visual, auditory or kinesthetic", according to a Conference circular.) There were also opportunities to find out about the Alexander technique; PCP (Personal Construct Psychology); teaching English through yoga in French secondary schools; and Jill Johnson's "new approach to foreign language teaching", tout court. There was also something called PERSONA, which I missed completely, and Dr Wenger's intelligence-boosting efforts already mentioned. The fact is that with four sessions running simultaneously throughout most of the Conference, it was not possible to get anything like a full picture even with full attendance.

To participants accustomed to the barely civil cut-and-thrust of academic conferences where claims require at least a pretence at objective proof, this was an odd experience. The impression was given that the structure and function of the brain are as well charted as Greater London and that manipulating connections between the left and right hemisphere is easier than getting from Woodford Green to South of the river. Spiritual uplift was more the tone than rational argument. The Chairman of SEAL, Peter O'Donnell, congratulated the Conference on the lack of criticism, but, in my left-brain old-fashioned way, I would have welcomed a little more scepticism, rational caution, genuine debate and a lot less complacency and revealed truth. Earl Stevick, for all his proud boasts of being regarded as a loonie by more conventional academics, was clearly odd man out in ending his address with 'I don't know'." His were the only doubts I heard expressed. Elsewhere there was confident assertion, appeal to guru authority with occasional glib "research-has-shown"-type statements and the sort of in-group supportiveness one might find at a cycle-club weekend or more probably a revivalist meeting, marred only by the occasional metaphorical clunk of a cash-register, perhaps inevitable where so many participants are limited companies rather than salaried employees.

It is easy to make fun of inspirational and unconventional movements, the smart business suits and suave manners of the leadership notwithstanding. It is easy to quote the man who, when asked by Stevick to comment on the relative merits of two versions of a text (one stilted English, the other intended to be more realistic) said he

saw one text as brown and the other as blue-green, or the woman who declared at the Forum, "I feel like a little girl at a party. I'm so excited I don't want it to end." There was a lot of that sort of thing at Woodford, but the feeling remains that, among all the self-indulgence, commerce and sheer daftness, some of them may be on to something worthwhile.

Thomas Bloor (Aston University)

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3. NOTES ON FORTHCOMING SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

3.1 Information on the Manchester Literacy Conference

MANCHESTER LITERACY CONFERENCE IN CONJUNCTION WITH UKRA

SECOND COLLOQUIUM ON THE HISTORY OF READING

VENUE: All Saints Building, Manchester Polytechnic
DATE: Saturday 9 November 1985

Organising Committee: Nigel Hall   Manchester Polytechnic
                      Greg Brooks   National Foundation for
                                    Educational Research

                      Tony Pugh   Open University

Following the successful Colloquium on the History of Reading held in March 1984 at the University of Reading with the support of the UK Reading Association, a further colloquium will take place in Manchester from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm on 9 November 1985. There will be ten speakers, each giving a short presentation on an aspect of the history of reading and literacy. There will be a display of some early literacy materials, and the Polytechnic will open its large collection of Victorian children's books and journals.

The fee for the day is £9.00. This includes lunch and refreshments.

An edited version of the proceedings will be published.

For details, contact Nigel Hall, School of Education, Manchester Polytechnic-
99 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 8RR

3.2 Details on the History of Lexicography Seminar at Exeter.

SEMINAR ON THE HISTORY OF LEXICOGRAPHY 21-23 MARCH 1986

at the Dictionary Research Centre, Language Centre, University of Exeter, Queen's Building, Exeter EX4 4QH (tel 0392 77911 ext 715)

When all the abstracts are available, certain themes may emerge for linked treatment in workshops, e.g. the bilingual dictionary with English as a common denominator, or a particular dictionary. There are plans for an exhibition of historic dictionaries.

Venue

The Seminar will be held at Crossmead, an attractively furnished conference centre of the University of Exeter located in hilly parkland overlooking the city from the west. Accommodation will be in single rooms or double rooms, as requested, at Crossmead, where meals and meetings will also take place between dinner on Friday 21 March to breakfast on Monday 24 March 1986.

Charges

The all-inclusive fee of £75.00 includes a conference booking fee of £10, all meals, accommodation, and transport from and to the railway station at Exeter St David's.

There is a 10% discount for members of EURALEX and DSNA. Some financial assistance may be given to those participants whose institution cannot meet the full cost attendance, and in exceptional cases a contribution to travel may be possible.

The Seminar fee (due by 31 October and refundable until 31 December 1985) should be paid by means of (sterling or Euro) cheque, postal money order, or bank transfer to "Dictionary Research Centre, University of Exeter". Overseas participants should add £5.00 to cover bank transfer charges.

Deadlines

for Abstracts   30 June 1985
for Registration   31 October 1985
for Papers   31 December 1985

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TESOL 1986

The British Council is offering a limited number of Travel grants to contribute towards the cost of participants' travel to TESOL 86. Eligibility will depend on acceptance of paper and attendance at the whole of the conference. Applications (by 31 December) for the attention of:

Mrs Rose Smith
Specialist Tours Dept
The British Council
65 Davies Street
LONDON W1Y 2AA

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Fifth Nordic Conference of Applied Linguistics

This will be held at Jyvaskyla, from June 4-7, 1986

Details from AFinLA, Dept of English,
University of Jyvaskyla, 40100 JYVASKYLA, Finland

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4. AWARD PRESENTATION TO IAN CATFORD ON HIS RETIREMENT

The University of Michigan presents the Warner G. Rice Humanities Award to John C. Catford

The Warner G. Rice Award is given in recognition of the immense contributions made by Professor Rice during his career of 40 years with the university, to the support and direction of study and teaching in the humanities, and with the realisation that, in an age of scientific and technological development, the existence and welfare of the humanities are often neglected.

From a very early age (his first formal paper on phonetics was given as a schoolboy) Ian Catford has reflected deeply on the activities of the human vocal tract, and he has written lucidly about them. As a result, much of what was once mysterious and unrecognised is now part of our routine refined knowledge of phonetics. As a fieldworking scholar, his studies have taken him to all parts of the world and into a great many languages, most recently the very difficult languages of the Caucasus. His insights in phonetics, dialect study, translation, language teaching, and general linguistics have been passed on to many generations of students in many countries — with clarity, meticulous care, liveliness, and exemplary modesty.

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5. ON THE AILA SCIENTIFIC COMMISSIONS

BAAL is trying to revive links with the Scientific Commissions. There follows the list of guidelines to these commissions and secondly the entire list of commissions.

5.1 Guidelines on the Scientific Commissions of AILA

Adopted by the International Committee in Zagreb
30 August 1980

1. Objectives
   AILA's Scientific Commissions seek to promote research in addition to gathering and disseminating information in their respective fields.

2. Fields of activity
   The field of activity of a Scientific Commission is delimited by the International Committee which is responsible for the creation and dissolution of the Commissions as well as for the appointment of their convenors.

3. Forms of activity
   The forms of activity of a Scientific Commission include the following:
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   The convenors decide, in agreement with the membership, on the appropriate means of working towards their Commission's goals. Each February they report on activities of the preceding year to the International Committee.

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   At the time of the international congresses of AILA each Commission organises, in cooperation with the Congress Organising Committee, an open meeting in order to discuss its research topics and its programme of activities.

7. Financing
   Each Commission finances its own activities.

8. Members
   Members of Scientific Commissions must be members of AILA

Note: The foregoing Guidelines grew out of a proposal submitted by an ad hoc committee consisting of Jos Nivette, Jacques Girard, Helene Huot and Ranko Bugarski. A French version was subsequently prepared by Jos Nivette, which formed the basis of the present English text, prepared by Ranko Bugarski.

5.2 AILA Scientific Commissions 1984-1987

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Liaison with AILA Scientific Commissions 1985

In each case the title of the Commission is followed by the name of the Convenor, then the name of the BAAL member who has agreed to liaise and report for the Association. If you are interested in undertaking the liaison work for those which are still blank, please contact the Secretary.

Adult Language Teaching: A.Raasch, Saarbruecken; L.Dickinson, Edinburgh.

Applied Computational Linguistics: A.Zampolli, Pisa; P.Skehan, London

Child Language: E.Oksaar, Hamburg;.........

Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis: G.Nickel, Stuttgart; J.A. Norrish, London

Discourse Analysis: John Regan, Claremont, California; R.Birnie, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Educational Technology and Language Learning: N.F.Davies, Linkoping; ....

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Language and Sex: D.Brouwer, Utrecht; J. Cheshire, London.

Language for Special Purposes: J.Qvistgaard, Copenhagen; J.Price, Brighton.

Language Planning: J.Rubin, Pinole, California; C.P. Hill, London

Language Testing: C.Klein-Braley, Duisburg; C.Alderson, Lancaster

Lexicography and Lexicology: R.Ilson, London; R.Ilson, London.

Mother Tongue Education: G.Gagne, Montreal; C.J. Brumfit, Southampton

Psycholinguistics: T. Slama-Cazacu, Bucharest; P.Meara, London.

Rhetoric and Stylistics: B.Spilner, Duisburg; H.G. Widdowson, London

Second Language Acquisition: P.Lightbown, Montreal; P.Meara, London.

Sociolinguistics: M.Hartig, Paderborn; ....

Terminology: L.Drozd, Prague; J.C. Sager, Manchester.

Translation: J-R. Ladmiral, Nanterre; P. Newmark, Guildford.

6. RESPONSES TO THE DES DOCUMENT 'ENGLISH FROM 5 TO 16'

We include responses to this document from the following:

Greg Brookes, NFER
Professor Gillian Brown, University of Essex
Professor Chris Brumfit, University of Southampton
Dr Joanna Channell, University of Nottingham
Dr Jenny Cheshire, Birkbeck College, University of London
Ms Pam Czierniewska, Open University
Professor Mike Stubbs, University of London Institute of Education

Introductory Note

The comments appended were all sent to the secretary of BAAL in response to a request for comments, although in a few cases they may have reached the DES through other channels also. Our original intention was to conflate these comments into a single document, but it seems more helpful to pass them on as they stand, to represent the views of a number of applied linguists with expertise in relevant areas. It may be worthwhile, though, to make a few general introductory points.

A number of points come up several times in our comments:

1. There is general, though perhaps cautious approval, both of the initiative and of the approach taken, for it represents an attempt to take language issues very seriously.

2. The objectives themselves raise a number of uncertainties: levels of description appear to be confused, there is often a lack of specificity, and the criteria for the selection of objectives are unclear

3. The tendency to concentrate on the product rather than the process leads to an inevitable neglect of questions of how to achieve such objectives, and this distorts the perspective of the document in relation to current views on the learning and teaching of language.

4. The arguments for teaching about language are unnecessarily muted, and the suggestions of what to teach could be much more carefully thought through (see, as a starter for discussion, CLIE Working Paper No 4)

5. The document appears sociolinguistically simplistic. Particularly, it does not consider the concept 'standard English' with enough sophistication, and it fails to relate language development in English to the development of second and foreign languages.

6. The implications of the document for teacher education, both pre- and in-service, are very considerable, for few English teachers have any serious academic background in this area. These implications need to be made much more prominent.

It might be worth pointing out that the contributors to this discussion, like their fellow members of the British Association for Applied Linguistics, are mainly people with experience both of teaching languages and research and support activity in this area. The Association is concerned with the role of language in all areas of social activity, so the perspective here differs from that of most associations responding to the DES invitation to comments.

Christopher Brumfit
University of Southampton

Gillian Brown, University of Essex

My comments are restricted to the spoken language topics raised in the booklet, since that's the area I've worked in extensively. Most of my experience has been in Scotland, concerned with the implementation of the Munn & Dunning reports, particularly with the development of materials and assessment procedures for a spoken English syllabus and the implication of that for teacher training.

Page 2: 1.6 "Education in the spoken word should aim to develop the pupil's ability to speak . . and to develop their capacities to listen in a similar variety of situations."

It's important to recognise that for most pupils there will be a developmental imbalance between their ability to listen and their ability to produce extended talk.

Pupils need to be able to understand the content of a brief exposition (as on a point in a lesson) very early in their school career, far earlier than it would be reasonable to expect them to control the production of an extended, coherent, piece of spoken language. This point is particularly important with respect not only to primary school children but also with academic 'low-achievers' in secondary education. They may never, while still at school, get to the point of being able to produce, say, a coherent 3 minutes' exposition. Such pupils need a consistent training programme first of all in learning to listen actively to extended chunks of language and then a carefully graded programme in learning to produce extended talk. Teachers will have to be trained to construct such programmes if the present situation is to be improved.

Page 3: The fourth aim - "to teach pupils about language". I hope that any development here will include discussion of the way the accent/dialect of the child is appropriately used in a range of circumstances but that a further range of linguistic ability may be required in producing a more standard form of the language for writing in school, for talking to people who come from other areas and, eventually, in a job in the adult world. There's no indication here of the problem for many teachers of sensitively managing what often appear to be conflicting needs for the child - remaining a member of his peer group and family while extending his control of language in ways that they may not share or may positively discourage. Many might think it would be more

valuable for teachers to concentrate on extending the range of children's experience of language in different genres, and specifically extending their ability to express themselves clearly, rather than spend time on studying the analytic categories of language description.

Page 6 et seq: Objectives for 11 year old pupils (and 16 year olds)

The objectives sound attractive and reasonable looked at from the point of view of academically successful pupils. Currently many, perhaps 40%, of 16 year olds will fail to meet the 11 year old objectives. If we are to see an improvement here, specific training will be necessary which means that teachers will have to be trained to undertake the task. It's relevant that in the Munn & Dunning programme in Scotland, an extensive programme of teacher education is being implemented, specifically for the bottom 30% of the ability range, and specifically in speaking/listening skills.

Page 16: "Periodic testing" - as a member of the APU Steering Committee for English I am familiar with their testing techniques. I believe there are a number of problems in supposing that unprepared teachers could beneficially use their testing methodology. I hope that BAAL will urge the implementation of a teacher-education programme at least on the scale of that being undertaken in Scotland. Note that such an undertaking would mean that many teacher-trainers would need in-service courses on oral skills, the distinction between spoken and written language forms and functions, the relationship between standard language and dialect. A whole generation of teacher trainers are now in post, the vast majority of whom know very little, if anything, about the nature of language and the problems of oracy.

Page 18 (last line): I find the naivety of this rather disturbing. It must be clear that a pupil's performance of a task resulting from verbal instructions and a text input may be affected by at least 3 variables:

(i)   his understanding of the language of the text
(ii) his understanding of the instructions relating to the task
(iii) his ability to carry out the task.

A great deal of testing (including some of that carried out by the APU) is vitiated by conflating some of these variables.

Dr Michael W Stubbs
Senior Lecturer in Linguistics

1. I found the paper very persuasive in many of its points, particularly in its repeated emphasis on the many functions of language, on the need to extend pupils' functional competence in English, and in its recommendation that conscious knowledge about linguistic structure and function is valuable.

My critical points should therefore be taken within this broad agreement with the main position.

2. My main criticisms are that you have missed opportunities to relate the teaching of English and other languages, and to provide justification for teaching about language; and that you have underestimated the complexity of some of the topics you propose teaching, and have therefore underestimated (not mentioned, in fact) the need for associated teacher training.

3. The proposal to teach about language is an interesting one: and I agree with it. But I do not think you provide any strong arguments in its favour. This is serious, since, as you admit, it is your most contentious proposal. It therefore requires to be more solidly argued.

I do not think that it is very difficult to support, although I am not sure that I could support it in the form in which you present it. Basically, I think your version of teaching about language is too narrow: some of it does look like a reversion to teaching grammar in the parts-of-speech tradition. Even this could be given more plausibility if you had argued for its relevance in foreign language teaching; but you do not mention that.

But really I think you would be in a stronger position if you were proposing teaching about a language as a whole: its structures, its functions, its varieties, and its place in the modern world- an obvious topic for a language such as English. Teaching about structure surely is sterile, unless it is only part of a larger picture. You do, of course, mention structure plus function plus variety (eg p3). But what is lacking is the overall view and the demonstration that they are related. I do not think that many teachers could make explicit what these relations are (though I do not doubt that they could point them out on specific occasions).

4. I really was very surprised that there is no mention of foreign language teaching in the paper. Much recent thinking has tried to find genuine links between teaching the mother tongue and foreign languages. And the distinction itself is drawn into serious question in the context of both English as a second language and also the community languages of linguistic minority groups in the UK.

5. Furthermore, I was surprised that there is no mention at all of the Language Awareness movement. The now large body of documents on language awareness (eg from NCLE) provides a great deal of discussion of the value of teaching about language in general (and cf therefore point 3 again).

6. The point about complexity is harder to document, but here are a few points.

- There is a casual reference on p 8 to 11 year olds knowing "the rules of spelling": well, these rules are very abstract indeed, and very few teachers know them.

- Page 9 implies that there are three tenses in English (past, present and future): this is very misleading, at least, and is reminiscent of bad old sterile grammar teaching.

- And how can you justify teaching children to speak "pleasantly", p10, in the context of your basically non-prescriptive attitude to language?

As I say, the complexity argument is difficult to state succinctly - because it is complex. But I think the lack of an overall model of language structure, language function and language variation is visible in these details, which seem at odds with your overall approach.

7. I have written these comments as an individual. I am, however, chairperson of the Committee for Linguistics in Education, a joint committee sponsored by the Linguistics Association of Great Britain and the British Association for Applied Linguistics.

Dr J M Channell
Lecturer in English as a Foreign Language
University of Nottingham

May I make a contribution/suggestion to BAAL's response to the HMI report? I approve generally of the aims and objectives, and I think the report makes a lot of sensible points. However, there is one major confusion which I think the BAAL response should draw attention to. Perhaps it should also suggest ways to clarify the confusion.

This concerns Standard English, and the general question of which variety/varieties of English are appropriate for use in school. There are only two or three passing references to this issue: on page 10 "Standard Spoken English" is referred to, but not defined; and on page 15, 3.12 and 3.13, "the language children bring with them from home" and "accent" are referred to, but not enlarged upon.

I am certain that one of the major current difficulties for practising English teachers in UK schools concerns the definition of the language varieties which should be the pupil's target. Teachers have been severely criticised for being too prescriptive, so now they are unsure about what they should aim for.

This report as it stands will do nothing to help them out of their difficulties. It makes no sense at all to make detailed proposals on how to develop "pupils' competence in English" (p7) without defining which varieties of English they are to develop competence in.

I think we could suggest to HMI that they can clarify this quite simply with a short section in their introduction entitled "Different kinds of English". This should state, in simple terms, for example:

1. There are different kinds of English used in different settings, eg legal English, business English, home and family English, regional English.

2. Education also uses a particular kind of English, (especially in writing) and that this can conveniently be termed Standard English.

3. That if pupils are to succeed in the system, they will have to be able to use SE for educational purposes.(especially in their written work). Hence teachers need to teach it.

4. Acquiring competence in SE does not imply losing competence in the home variety if it is different. Pupils can use both, as appropriate.

5. SE is recognised mainly by its grammar and lexis. It can be spoken with any accent. Hence it is not the aim of school English teaching to change accents.

Jenny Cheshire
Department of Applied Linguistics, Birkbeck College

Like the Secretary of State, I welcome this initiative towards establishing a consistent policy for English teaching in schools. A coherent and consistent policy is urgently needed.

There is a great deal in the paper that I support very strongly. For example, there is the inclusion of TV, video, radio and cinema in the school curriculum; the recognition of linguistic diversity and the attempt to incorporate it into the curriculum; and the recognition that whilst no one accent or dialect is linguistically superior to another, it is vital that all children should have the ability to use standard English as part of their linguistic repertoire.

Some of the points that are made in the paper, however, may make it difficult for this latter objective to be achieved. The four comments below explain why this is so.

1. I agree that by the age of 16 pupils should be able to recognise differences between standard and dialect forms of the language (page 12). It is important to recognise, though, that even specialists in the subject admit that our knowledge of these differences is limited, and that the knowledge that is available has not yet percolated through to the majority of school teachers. Work is in hand to attempt to remedy this (the ESRC have commissioned four booklets on regional varieties of English, for example); but in the meantime there are two recommendations in the paper that may lead teachers to unwittingly discriminate against dialect speakers:

(a) Page 9, para 2.6
It is recommended that by the age of 11 children should know "that a sentence has a subject and a verb, and that the two must agree". In SW England and some parts of S England (and possibly elsewhere) present tense verb forms have an -s suffix with all subjects, eg besides he and she goes, there is I goes, you goes, we goes and they goes. In East Anglia, on the other hand (and perhaps elsewhere) there is no -s suffix with third person singular subjects e.g. besides I go, you go, we go, and they go, there is he and she go.

Teachers will not necessarily be aware that such forms are dialect features, and may conclude that pupils who use them are failing to show agreement between the subject and the verb.

(b) Also on page 9
It is recommended that pupils should "be aware of differences between tenses, and recognise when the past, present or future tense is being used." In many dialects the past tense form of certain verbs is the same as the present tense form, e.g. I see her last night; we come here yesterday. In addition, some past tense forms have the same form as the past participle e.g. we done it; or vice versa, e.g. I've forgot it. Teachers, educationists and examiners frequently misinterpret the use of such forms as showing that children do not understand the difference between verb tenses. (Quite apart from the question of dialect differences, the relationship between verb tenses and time reference is not straightforward in English; and I am not convinced that this recommendation is a sound one.)

2. Some of the references that are made in the paper to 'accent' are potentially confusing.

In particular, on page 10 it is said that 16 year old children should "speak clearly, audibly and pleasantly, in an accent intelligible to the listener(s)". It is well known to linguists that some accents are considered to be more aesthetically pleasing than others and that this is because of their associations rather than for any linguistic reason. For example, a Birmingham or London accent is considered to be more pleasing than a West Country accent by British people, but not by Americans. Accents that are perceived as less pleasant are likely to be perceived as less intelligible.

Again, on page 15 (para 3.13), it is said that "pupils should learn to speak clearly and intelligibly; and if their accent is difficult for those outside their speech community to understand, they should be able to modify it when necessary". No guidelines are given, however, as to how this is to be achieved. Whilst I agree, in principle, with the objective, it is very important that teachers are aware that overt correction of a pupil's accent is extremely unlikely to achieve the desired effect; it would, in fact, be counterproductive.

3. Several references are made to the objective that children should be enabled to use the grammar and vocabulary of spoken standard English (for example, page 15 para 3.12, page 10 para 2.8). This does not seem to take proper account of the views of many linguists that the grammar of standard English is best taught with reference to the written language rather than the spoken language, ie. as one part of the differences that need to be learnt between the spoken language and the written language.

It is highly unlikely that children can be trained to systematically substitute standard English forms for dialect forms in their spoken language, because of the strong symbolic function that dialect features have. Any attempt to 'teach' them to do so is likely to be counterproductive. The best method of helping children to use standard English grammar and vocabulary is to provide, as far as possible, a school environment where they feel socially at ease and that they can perceive as relevant. Their language then may converge towards that of their teachers.

4. There is a further problem with reference to spoken standard English. On page 19, concerning the assessment of spoken English, it is said that one of the elements to be borne in mind is "the clarity and coherence of the syntax". In fact, however, very little is known about the syntactic structure of spoken English, other than it appears to be very different from that of written English, particularly in conversational style. Still less is known about the syntactic structure of English dialects.

Given the present paucity of knowledge of the structure of the spoken language it is particularly inappropriate to use this as a method of assessment. This 'element' seems to be incorporated in two other elements given in this section ("the appropriateness of the organisation and sequential structure of what is said" and "awareness of the listener and sensitivity to whether he or she is 'getting the message'.") and could, therefore, be omitted.

5. A further point concerning assessment is that whilst it is true that it is not possible to arrive at a precise, objective measurement of success in a piece of English work (para 4.5), it is very important to be aware of the dangers involved in subjective assessment. This applies particularly to assessment that takes the form of 'correction' of written work that is returned to pupils. There is evidence to suggest that teachers are inconsistent in their marking (usually with the best of intentions) and that this results in children being confused about the differences between standard and non-standard forms.

In conclusion, the few criticisms that I have made seem to point to the need to consult linguists about educational policy. Linguists could not only provide factual information about the differences between standard English and regional varieties, but could also help with the problem expressed in para 3.8 concerning the choice and extent of terminology that should be taught to children. There are at least two possible channels for consultation: BAAL and CLIE.

One further, minor, comment: I do not understand what is meant by the objective given on page 9, that 11 year old children should know "that word order determines meaning". This statement opens the way to all kinds of misunderstanding.

Pam Czerniewska
School of Education, The Open University

The DES have provided a consultative document suggesting the aims for English teaching (para 1.6) and proposing 158 objectives that children should achieve at 7, 11 and 16 years of age. In addition, some suggestions are made about the ways of teaching and of monitoring progress.

Given that the document is only 22 pages in all, it is, inevitably, a shorthand version of the aims and objectives of English teaching and as such hard to criticise. For instance, highly truncated expressions such as "16 year olds should know the main parts of speech" might, if more fully explained, reflect an acceptable pedagogy based on a full understanding of the grammatical system; on the other hand, beneath the phrase there might be nineteenth century, prescriptive ideas against which many arguments could be made.

Another general difficulty lies in the 'shopping list' approach adopted in the document. Such an approach provides a number of suggestions about what to do, but fails to suggest how such objectives might be taught. Furthermore, without a clear set of criteria for the selection of one objective rather than another, it is difficult to see how these guidelines can be used productively by classroom teachers. A narrow interpretation of the document may presume that some skills are viewed more highly than others and that a curriculum should consist of a checklist of critical English skills. A broader interpretation, on the other hand, may view the objectives as examples of the appropriate focus of English teaching and attempt to draw up a curriculum promoting the use of a variety of language functions, and the exploration of language forms.

These general reservations about (i) the lack of specificity of expressions used, (ii) the lack of criteria for the selection of objectives, and (iii) the lack of guidance on how the objectives might be achieved seem critical to discuss before detailed comments are considered. Perhaps I can sum up my general feelings best by saying that, while I agree with many of the aims and objectives, my main reaction was "I wouldn't have started here!".

However, given that this consultative document is the only starting point presented, a few specific comments should be made. In particular, some major criticisms are needed on the proposed fourth aim of English teaching.

The general aims for language teaching in paragraph 1.6 seem highly acceptable, following closely the aims presented in the Bullock Report which received widespread support. The fourth aim, on the teaching about English is, as the document admits, likely to be more controversial. The controversy is already being voiced in the educational press and I trust that a serious examination of the issues will now take place. Unfortunately, the lack of discussion in the document of the issues may serve only to arouse emotions and the setting up of camps rather than to promote considered debate. In summary, some points that I would wish to make on this topic include:

(a) Teaching about language goes on in every classroom, though the explicit and conscious nature of that teaching varies. For example, most early reading lessons include teaching five year olds about words, letters, sounds, punctuation, etc. Such teaching is not usually divorced from the primary function of the lesson, ie learning to read; however it does play a major part in the success of early reading attempts. Some children are clearly confused by concepts of print (eg Reid, 1984) and their introduction to language structures seems crucial to their reading performance. Teachers need to be aware of the terms they use, and the meaning of those terms, and to be able to monitor their pupils' understanding of those terms.

(b) It is certainly not clear, from the limited research in the area, what children of different ages can understand about language forms. Research such as that of Karmiloff-Smith (1979) suggests that is is not until around 9-10 years of age that children can talk about language and treat it as an 'object'. The objectives for what 11 and 16 year olds should know about in English from 5 to 16 seem to be selected rather arbitrarily and are not tied to either developmental or curriculum-motivated (see below) criteria.

(c) The way in which English from 5 to 16 separates "knowing how to use" from "knowing about" language suggests (perhaps unintentionally) that the objectives for learning about language should be achieved out of the context of other language learning tasks. Echoes of former grammar lessons are here, in which knowledge of, say, the 'parts of speech' or the 'rules of spelling' is left totally unrelated to the child's current experiences in writing or reading.

There are two related issues here: one concerning how language rules can/should be taught and the other concerning why rules should be taught. Taking the why question first, there is little or no evidence to suggest that knowing about language directly affects performance. Those pupils receiving explicit training in grammatical rules do not show any improvement in their writing abilities than those lacking such explicit instruction. However, there is a current feeling (I don't think that it is more than a 'feeling') that knowledge about language may indirectly improve performance by providing pupils not only with a way of talking about language but also with an interest in its workings and, perhaps, an increased motivation in becoming an expert on their own language.

The how question follows from the why. If the effects of knowledge are of this indirect kind, then 'rule learning' is likely to be less productive than 'discovery procedures'. Exploration and experimentation are going to be more appropriate than rote learning of rules, drills and exercises.

(d) There is only brief mention of what the teacher needs to know in order to teach about language. At present, it is doubtful that many teachers have themselves considered the forms that language can take and the systems of linguistic organisation. I doubt that many teachers could talk about the "difference between vowels and consonants". If anything, their responses would be limited to a classification of letters into 21 consonants and 5 vowels. As to more complex areas such as the "rules of spelling" or the "main parts of speech", I would doubt if many could offer more than a few rules of thumb.

This seems to be a major point and perhaps the main cause of the angry letters in the TES and Education Guardian. If the "rules of spelling" are properly understood as a highly complex set of interrelated systems (e.g. see Stubbs, 1979) then helping children become aware of such organisation seems a worthwhile task. However, if the "rules of spelling" are seen as a few prescriptions about silent e's and doubled consonants before ing - rules with many exceptions - then it is not surprising that some foresee a return of unproductive busy-work. In other words, whether one welcomes or dismisses the teaching of language per se to young children depends on the provision of adequately trained teachers. Attempts have been made to teach children about language (e.g. Language in Use materials and recently published introductions to language for children). Whilst I know of no formal evaluation of the success of such programmes, I suspect that the major factor determining success is the teachers' knowledge of linguistics.

I have spent some time discussing the fourth aim of the HMI curriculum proposal, partly because that is where most published criticism has been centred and partly because that is where the objectives have specific measurable outcomes. One can measure an 11 year old's knowledge of the differences between vowels and consonants more easily than say an 11 year old's ability to "listen responsively to poetry and verse". This is a further problem of the objectives-listing approach of the document. The objectives can too easily become "skills" to be taught and lead to exercises designed to teach them. While the HMIs clearly state that they do not feel that exercises are appropriate for achieving the objectives (para 2.1) without more specification of the "schemes of work" that they recommend (para 3.4), it is hard to predict how the objectives will be turned into practice.

There are other minor points that could be made at the level of individual objectives - for example, "recognised differences between standard and dialect forms of the language" makes the implicit assumption that standard English is not a dialect. One could also point out omissions and imbalances - for example, why is there so little mention of language varieties within any one classroom and the possibilities of exploring such variety? Should literature get so little attention? Should grammatical knowledge be given so much attention as opposed to knowledge about semantics or discourse features of the language? Should the use of a telephone be a stated objective while use of a word processor is not? And so on.

I feel, though, that it is best not to focus on the details of the objectives but instead to concentrate on questions about the best approach for teaching and assessment in order to achieve the objectives, and on the level of understanding that teachers need such that adequate knowledge of English can be passed on to pupils.

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C.J. Brumfit

1. General comments

It is excellent that we have a document of this kind and length to discuss and use as a basis for development. In spite of criticisms that may be made of details, the general intentions are most worthwhile, and the role of such statements in establishing a common language for the discussion of curriculum issues, and an agreed agenda of key questions, is crucial.

A few general criticisms may be appropriate, before looking at details. Although it is clear that among English teachers there is disagreement about the role of language, this paper is inexplicit about the context of language development, both in relation to other language work in schools (how does it relate to the consultative document on modern languages, for example?), and in relation to teaching literature. It does not appear obvious from the document that literature teaching is conventionally regarded as a central part of 'English from 5 to 16'.

It is clear that difficulties in defining objectives for English teaching are acknowledged (p 3), but in fact the bulk of the text appears to present lists of realisable objectives for particular stages of teaching in a rather confused manner, as recent discussion in the TES has pointed out. I think the purpose of the document would be clarified if two changes of approach were offered on objectives. First, it should be made clear that objectives of this kind are best seen as a kind of post facto checklist, rather than an advanced planning guide. That is to say that integrated activities may be monitored, and subsequently examined for coverage in terms of a number of features that should not be treated necessarily as separate elements for specific lessons, or as topics in apparent isolation. Second, the document suffers particularly from the desire to present identifiable final performance behaviours at different stages in

educational development. Thus we have a combination of general, and unhelpful, objectives which reappear without clear advance in difficulty ("converse confidently in social situations" at 7; "converse confidently and pleasantly in social situations" at 11), and of very specific objectives ("Know the alphabet..." at 7) which could constitute realisable goals. This organisation lays the analysis open to charges of theoretical and practical confusion, and also of undue optimism, particularly on issues like motivation to read. The whole exercise might look more coherent if basic areas were identified for sustained development across the curriculum: instead of referring to particular ages, constellations of objectives would be identified for development by all learners with an order of expected activities, where appropriate on the basis of teaching experience, but no demand for specific performance at a particular age except where the task is relatively straightforward, as with the alphabet example. Complex developmental abilities, like use of language appropriate to specific situations, cannot usefully be equated with relatively simple and trainable tasks.

Nor, in practice, do I think that the division into the traditional four skills (even defined as "four modes") is helpful, though I appreciate that this may have been primarily as a way of slotting into the most convenient conceptualisation used by teachers. Even in its own terms this classification is confusing, and needs to be replaced by something like: conversation/discussion, interpretation, extensive reading, writing, and (possibly) extended speaking. But for the purposes of analysing language development, with the kinds of categories outlined here, general categories like 'Talk', 'Speaking in front of an audience', 'appreciation', 'interpretation of argument', 'study and reference abilities', 'understanding of language' would be more appropriate. And most of these could be subdivided into target abilities, like 'Put a point of view and sustain it in discussion' (p 7), and facilitating abilities, like 'Make appropriate use of eye contact', etc. Once such categories were agreed in discussion, an approximate order of activities could be suggested, based on teachers' experience, and trial and error, so that objectives at particular stages in the school could emerge. But again, it is the approximate order, rather than the timing which is important, for more complex operations must be seen to grow out of simpler operations. The language acquisition literature indicates very clearly that a linear sequence of discrete objectives cannot reflect language development.

Another area, less well researched, but still contentious, is that of testing. The paper could usefully distinguish between testing and evaluating progress, and monitoring. It is my own belief, though it is difficult to prove absolutely, that over-frequent evaluation in language work inhibits risk-taking by learners, and prevents effective development. This does not mean that teachers should not be aware of how learners are progressing, but it does mean that learners should not feel they are being judged too often: they need to be able to risk error in order to learn from the process of reacting to communicative failure and trying to improve. This risk deserves brief consideration.

Finally on general points, there are a great many teacher development and improvement implications in this document. In subsequent versions, advice on reading matter, courses and other means of gaining further understanding, would be very helpful in an appendix.

2. Specific comments (I have left out a number of niggling points of detail)

Page 3:
Should not one of the aims of writing be to give pupils confidence in writing as a means of clarifying their own ideas, and of communicating these to other people? Also, the omission of any reference to imaginative or artistic writing seems rather excessively Gradgrind. It is very pleasing to see teaching pupils about language given such prominence. But, since - as 1.7 acknowledges - this is still contentious, the justification on p3 could be strengthened somewhat. In this area the whole document looks half-hearted and inconsistent.

Page 6
Why no section 'About language' for 7 year olds? There is a great deal about communication in society, children learning, and human versus animal language which can be made relevant and which would provide the necessary social context for later work in this area.

Page 8
'The rules of spelling' - unhelpful, and anyway presumably needed under 'Writing' rather than 'About language'. But this needs to be more explicitly analysed: which rules?

Page 9
'About language'. This section would benefit from sympathetic discussion with applied linguists. Perhaps the Committee for Linguistics in Education could be asked to comment particularly on this, as they have given more particular thought to this problem. I shall comment myself in more detail later, through the British Association for Applied Linguistics. Meanwhile, at least a minor correction should be added: word order affects (not determines) meaning.

Page 13 3.2
There are substantial implications for teacher education in this statement which need spelling out in more detail. I am about to conduct a survey of provision in this area (for the National Congress on Languages in Education), but it should be recognised that there is a widespread impression that provision in this area has actually declined over the past decade. Bullock notwithstanding.

Page 14 3.7
It is a pity to undersell learning about language, which can be justified as an end in itself as much as biology or history. Would it not be better to argue that teachers should be aware that learning about language has some indirect value in improving ability to use (as you acknowledge in 3.8), and can also be justified as interesting in its own right - in the experience of

many teachers, children like learning about it. The crucial point, surely, is that teachers should not confuse the two processes, and should clarify what activities contribute to improvement of language performance (understanding mistakes, etc.) and what activities are justified for their intrinsic interest.

In general, this is a very welcome document. It would, of course, be possible to discuss all the points made here in much more detail, but I hope the comments will assist clarification of the major points of the paper.

Greg Brooks, NFER

These comments are devoted exclusively to the sections of the document which concern oracy.

1. The general aims for 'education in the spoken word' (p 2) seem to me unexceptionable, though they are noticeably less full or specific than those for reading and writing. But problems arise as soon as the general aims are translated into objectives for listening and speaking (age 7, p 5; age 11, pp 6-7; age 15, pp 9-10). Of course the authors are here attempting the impossible, namely listing objectives which are neither so general as to be vacuous, nor so detailed as to be trivial. Even so the objectives are a mish-mash, for several reasons:

(a) there is a systematic confounding of levels of description. For example, among the speaking objectives for age 7 (p 5), the first two are
'In all oral activities, speak sufficiently clearly and audibly to be understood', and
'Narrate simple experiences and series of events'.
The second is a worthwhile and sensible purpose for speaking that should (at an appropriate level to be determined partly by investigation and partly by teachers' expectations) be within the capacity of most 7 year olds. But the first 'objective' isn't one: it is a prerequisite to all effective oral communication. Or perhaps HMI are aware that some 7 year olds are shy? But putting this 'objective' at the head of a list might only encourage some insensitive teachers to make their pupils' diffidence worse.

(b) there is also a fairly systematic confounding of abilities which it might be reasonable to expect children to be taught in school and those which are probably beyond the school's reach; e.g. (p 7)
'Participate courteously and constructively in discussions', preceded by
'Converse confidently and pleasantly in social situations'.

(c) among the objectives labelled 'about language', supposing there should be any at all, the spoken language is almost entirely neglected.

2. I have a particular aversion to the objectives about reading aloud, except at age 7 (p 5) when it is likely that most children will still need to read aloud from time to time. A minor cause of my aversion is the illogicality of including reading aloud among the reading objectives at age 11 (p 7) but among the speaking objectives at age 16 (p 10). My main objection is based on the communicative uselessness of this task for most people most of their lives. The persistent attachment of CSE oral examiners to reading aloud seems to be to arise from a mistaken idea of oracy as a social accomplishment. The positive side of the idea is enshrined on page 20 in the comments about expressive reading: but this form of reading aloud should be seen as a form of drama, and as a skill possessed in a high degree by only a few people, and not as a method of teaching or assessment that should be applied to every pupil. The 'social accomplishment' model also seems to me to underlie the mistaken objective that 11 year olds should be able to 'converse confidently and pleasantly' in social situations' already cited, and similar notions in the age 16 list.

3. I also find the separation of listening from speaking objectives artificial for native speakers, ie. 96% or more of British schoolchildren. There are some important non-reciprocal listening situations, e.g. listening to radio, television, speeches and lectures: but the most natural use of listening is between speaking turns in conversation, discussion, etc. The heavy stress on listening in this document, and the placing of listening objectives first at each age level, threatens to reinforce two bad tendencies. The first is the tendency to treat listening as if it can be separated off and taught and tested separately; the second is the tendency to treat listening almost as a disciplinary matter, as if children should spend 70% of classroom time listening, supposedly with attention, to teachers.

4. These notions need to be replaced by a model of oracy as the principal means of effective communication and learning. Within such a model, listening and speaking would be treated as almost inseparable. Also, it would lead to a clearer view of the relationships between aims and objectives. It seems to me that objectives cannot be read off from aims in the simplistic way that this is attempted in the document. Between aims and objectives needs to come at least an outline specification of what kinds of language we think pupils need to have a chance to master, e.g. narrative, problem solving, etc, and below that a description of the specific tasks on which particular skills can be displayed.

5. If the process of making broad aims operational by refining them through the levels of varieties or purposes of talk and specific tasks is valid, then the skills needed to achieve success in these areas begin to become clearer, as does their place within this theory:

AIMS

VARIETIES/PURPOSES OF TALK
e.g. narrative

SPECIFIC TASKS

e.g. retelling a story heard on tape
      making up a story based on a sequence
         of pictures
      telling a personal anecdote

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That is, the various oral/aural skills cross-cut the purposes and tasks because they are all needed in different blends and combinations in different circumstances.

7. This model also enables us to sort out why the document's objectives are so muddled: within them, (some) varieties and purposes of talk are intermingled with (a few of) the skills needed to achieve them, but without any indication of the specific tasks within which alone the purposes and skills can mesh. This seems to me to be what HMI should have done if they were going to include an objectives section at all.

8. A hint of a notion of this kind does break through on page 18 at the beginning of the suggestions for assessing the spoken word. In fact this section (pp 18-19) seems to me sounder than those on objectives. This may be because the principles of oracy assessment listed could almost have been copied from our reports, especially the 'elements to be borne in mind' (p 19). The only quibble I would have on this section is that the statement that assessment should be continuous needs to be repeated even more strongly in the context of oral assessment.

9. The only point about oracy in the document not yet covered is its attitudes to accent and dialect - see especially page 15 but cf also the objectives 'Use the grammar and vocabulary of Standard Spoken English where necessary or appropriate' and 'Speak clearly, audibly and pleasantly, in an accent intelligible to the listener(s)' on page 10. Despite the laudable statements that 'the language children bring with them ... should not be criticised,' etc, and 'No one form of English accent ... is inherently superior to any other' (p 15), the tone and assumptions of paras. 3.12 and 3.13 are off-key. There is the patronising tone of the reference to 'the rich and fascinating variety of English accents ... in the UK'. There is also the quite mistaken assumption, probably born of panic at the trumpeting of alarmists like John Honey, that pupils are not being taught Standard English and cannot modify their accents when necessary. Pupils are exposed to Standard Spoken English every day on radio and television, and above all on the lips of their teachers. Also, in the APU Language Monitoring Project's latest reports (Language Performance in Schools: 1982 Primary Survey Report, London, DES (1985), it is made clear that:

(1) the amount of identifiably non-standard usage we have been able to detect, in the relatively formal circumstances in which our one-off assessments are inevitably conducted, is vanishingly small.

(2) the percentage of children of these ages who cannot modify their accents so as to be intelligible to an outsider is very close to zero.

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7. TWO RESEARCH REPORTS

7.1 Tom Bloor reports on the CLIE research into Linguistics Students' Metalinguistic Awareness.

Student Linguists' Metalinguistic Awareness

Tom Bloor, Aston University

It is a long time since grammatical analysis was dropped from GCE English examinations and perhaps even longer since rhetorical terms like "paraphrase" or "metaphor" were prescribed elements of schools English syllabuses. Also, with the move away from grammar-translation in modern languages to the variety of approaches loosely termed "communicative", it seems that formal ways of looking at linguistic features may have disappeared from the inventory of skills and knowledge that successful school leavers are supposed to have at their disposal.

In recent years demands for more "language awareness" have been voiced by such bodies as NCLE (the National Congress on Languages in Education) see (NCLE 1985), LITE (Linguistics in Teacher Education) and CLIE (Committee for Linguistics in Education). The recent DES document English from 5-to-16 (DES 1984) suggests a return to more concern for teaching about language, and a number of new linguistics-oriented GCE papers are emerging. The LITE-RIHE Research Project investigating teacher-education entrants' awareness of sound-symbol relations, etc. indicates a disturbing ignorance of such matters (Morris, 1985). With all these facts in mind, CLIE decided to look into the question of what metalinguistic knowledge students entering higher education actually have.

As a starting point I was curious to know how much university students embarking on language or linguistics courses already know about the basics of formal analysis. I drafted a short test/questionnaire briefly covering the following:

a) familiarity with metalinguistic terms in general educated use (e.g. "metaphor", "ambiguous").

b) recognition of lexical correspondences across categories not necessarily requiring knowledge of terminology (e.g. "as die is to death, so divide is to _____").

c) application of traditional grammatical categories (noun, verb, etc.).

d) identification of traditional grammatical relations (subject, predicate, direct object, indirect object).

e) the ability to comment explicitly on features of spelling, pronunciation and morphology.

f) where the student learned these things.

g) the student's attitude to these things.

All of these were dealt with very briefly in the interests of getting a general impression of a "quick and dirty" kind.

The investigation is called the Students' Prior Awareness of Metalinguistics project, primarily to achieve the Pythonesque acronym SPAM.

At the beginning of this academic year, Dick Hudson administered the questionnaire to 19 entrants to the Linguistics degree course at University College London, and I administered it to 44 entrants to the Modern Languages Department at Aston, the latter doing joint degrees in two of German, French, Linguistics. (I also administered it to 175 second year Aston students who had chosen to learn a foreign language as a Complementary Studies option. These students come from all faculties and have very varied subject backgrounds. The ensuing discussion does not include these students, however, except for a comment near the end.)

There was no prescriptive intention in the investigation; we did not see this as an acid test of the efficacy of the secondary school system nor as a means of predicting the aptitude of the students for the course of their choice. It was primarily to find out what assumptions university teachers can make about students' basic awareness of these items and, en passant, what the students' attitude is to such things. There is little doubt that many lecturers take a great deal for granted, at least at the rather elementary level treated here.

In the case of the language and linguistics students, it turned out that the general performance was much better than we had feared and remarkably similar for both universities (6.3 and 6.4 mean errors from a possible 50 or so if we include open-ended items; individual scores ranged from 0 errors to 15 errors.)

It is clear from these results that students with A-levels in languages do have quite a lot of metalinguistic knowledge, and the evidence suggests that the ML classroom is an important source of such knowledge with the English classroom playing a markedly secondary role. However, it is interesting to look in detail at some of the responses to individual questions, particularly at deviant responses.

The "general educated vocabulary" section was a multiple choice test of 10 items with 4 alternatives for each and was well done. The maximum discrepancy was on the item native language, which over half the sample (37) took to mean "the most common language in a particular country", whereas the investigators preferred "the first language learned as a child". Seventeen did not know what paraphrase meant and 8 did not know synonymous (2 chose "having a different meaning"); 5 did not know metaphor (3 thought it was "a sort of rhyme").

The test on grammatical categories ("parts of speech") simply required the identification in a very short passage (23 words) of items matching 15 given labels. Labels ranged from noun and verb to more delicate ones such as auxiliary verb and countable noun. Everyone

spotted noun and verb but those two items had the only clear run. One student failed to find an adjective (there were two in the passage - "technical" and "right", both used attributively); 12 failed to find the adverb ("usually"); 11 had no idea what a definite or an indefinite article is; 20 could not find a finite verb and 21 slipped up on auxiliary verb.

Clearly, although sentence subjects are still in fashion at school (all correct), predicates are out (41 errors). (Interestingly, almost everyone identified the head word "Joe" rather than the whole noun phrase "Poor little Joe" as the subject.) Although only four students failed to identify the direct object in one sentence, 11 missed the indirect object in another, and, of the wrong choices offered as indirect object, 9 were actually the direct object and one was the subject, which makes the investigator wonder about the significance of their previous correct identification of subject and direct object.

Happily, all our language and linguistics students could underline the vowel letters in a given sentence. Even so, five of them claimed to perceive two vowel sounds in "stood". This could have been due to a careless reading of the question, but confusion of spelling and sound was openly apparent in the more open-ended questions asking for comment. A frequent claim was that the "o" sound in "goes" is longer than that in "go"; one student was very explicit; "goes has a longer sound than go because it has more letters." Of course, there were many perceptive and accurate observations about "go" and "goes", but some students had no idea of how to comment on the relationship at all. The fact that an acquaintance with technical terms does not in itself lead to accurate analysis is evident from this answer:

> "The word go possesses only one vowel sound and is monosyllabic whereas the word goes contains two vowel sounds, the stress being placed on the second syllable".

Students were more at home with discussion of grammatical usage of "go" and "goes" than with their spelling and pronunciation, and other questions on morphology were reasonably well done, but a request to specify a difference between English and another language elicited answers varying considerably in length, precision and truth. Given the widespread belief, occasionally found among ML teachers, that English has no grammar - or at least very little -, errors and gross overgeneralisations could be predicted, and they came, of course (though once more there were a lot of sensible and accurate answers too). Disturbing observations included:

> "English uses no genders". ("Doesn't she?" I thought.)

"In English there is no rule for the position of verbs in a sentence whereas in German the verb is the second part of the sentence and all the others go to the end."

There was some disagreement on this point. Rival hypotheses stated:

"In English the verb usually follows the subject whereas in German the verb is sent to the end of the clause"

and

"English differs grammatically from other languages in that its sentence structure is fairly rigid and on the whole consists of subject, verb and object in that order."

And perhaps most discouraging for the English grammarian was the statement:

"whereas German has a set of rules to which it generally keeps, English has many grammatical complications."

Harping on the aberrant in this way no doubt gives a false sense of the state of awareness and the opinions of these students. The general figures indicate a fair degree of familiarity with what might be regarded by many people as elementary common knowledge. But it must be borne in mind that these are highly successful products of the school system, who have opted to specialise in language studies and who presumably have a flair for dealing with such matters. I have not discussed the results of the investigation into non-linguists' metalinguistic capacities; the picture there is very different. As one management student commented:

"I never learnt grammer (sic) at school except perhaps a bit in Latin and this proves to you that most students just don't have a grammatical background."

It proves no such thing, of course, but here is a native English speaker with good A levels in Economics, Politics and History, who has an O level in French, and has studied Latin and English at school, who has opted to do more French in Complementary Studies and believes that knowledge of this kind is useful though boring, yet who makes 29 errors (or omissions) in an elementary test of this kind. There are many more like her. It is fairly predictable that the vast bulk of the population leaves school with very little explicit awareness of the kind considered here. Many people, including teachers of Modern Languages or English, would say "So what?" or even "A good thing too". My own view is that, whilst conceding that there are more important things to learn and that these items are not necessarily the best that linguistics (and such) has to offer, I would be happier to have students who can cope easily with these questions, and I can see no

good reason for not including this sort of work in the school curriculum. Hudson (CLIE 1984) and Walmsley (1984) have spelled out these issues in detail. (See also Bloor 1979, Stork, Doughty and Burgess 1980.)

To return to the language and linguistics students, it is noteworthy that, asked how they felt about the test, 31 out of the total sample of 63 chose the response "worried about my lack of knowledge" and a number of others said that they felt "thick", "stupid", "uncertain", etc.

More cheeringly, 44 of the 63 thought such matters both "useful and interesting", 15 judged them "useful but boring"; three said "interesting but useless" and none opted for "useless and boring". One student did not answer this question, but whether from boredom or a sense of futility it is impossible to say.

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NOTE: Tom Bloor is BAAL Representative on CLIE.

7.2   Duska Johnson gives an interim report on her work in
      progress, partially funded by BAAL, at the University of
      Surrey.

Error Gravity: Communicative effect of
Language Errors in Academic Writing

Progress Report

This project is based on an analysis of coursework assignments
and specimen examination answers written by university students
in several subjects. It covers both native and non-native
speakers of English whose writing has been assessed in terms of
academic performance by members of the teaching staff at the
University. The main aims of the project are to investigate the
criteria, both explicit and implicit, used in the assessment of
academic performance and to establish in what ways and to what
extent linguistic factors may influence such assessment.

Since the explicit purpose of assessment in this context is to
evaluate student knowledge of the subject matter, rather than
their communicative competence per se, the specific objectives of
his study are to find out:

   which aspects of student writing are seen by subject tutors
   as "errors"

   what kind of tutor response specific errors generate

   what effect different types of error have on grades

   to what extent can different types of error be attributed to
   language difficulties.

The data base for the project consists primarily of authentic
examples of student writing on topics in engineering, science and
social science subjects, with some constructed material used as
control. Altogether 274 essays written by 80 students and
assessed by 50 subject specialist tutors were collected in the
first stage of the project. In order to provide a representative
sample of writing tasks students are required to prepare in the
course of their study for degrees, the sample includes coursework
assignments, theses and dissertations, prepared over relatively
long periods of time, as well as examination answers and
laboratory reports written under time constraints. Student
informants include native speakers of English, ESL speakers
educated in this country or abroad through the medium of English
and EFL speakers educated in their countries of origin through
their native language medium.

Information about the criteria used in the assessment of academic
performance was provided by subject specialist tutors through
interviews and questionnaires, where they were asked to state in
principle the factors which influence their judgement of student
knowledge of subject matter and to rank in order of importance
those features of student writing which affect their judgement of
students' academic and linguistic ability. Error analysis, which
provided information about the ways in which these criteria are
applied in practice, thus included not only the errors which are
clearly caused by language difficulty, but also those that can
reasonably be attributed to students' lack of understanding of
the subject matter.

It is hoped that the study of such errors will contribute to our
understanding of both linguistic and non-linguistic criteria
which determine what the members of an academic community "must
know in order to communicate appropriately" in an academic
context and "what the sanctions must be for various communicative
shortcomings" (M. Saville-Troike: Ethnography of Communication,
p2, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1982).

The findings so far indicate that errors which are seen by
subject tutors to be caused by language difficulties do not
significantly affect assessment of academic performance, although
the degree of tolerance to such errors is generally rather low.
Such "language errors" include incorrect but comprehensible
structure, spelling and punctuation, and are usually accompanied
by tutors' comments about "bad English". The degree of tolerance
to such errors varies with the type of essay', in that language
errors are sometimes overlooked if they occur in essays written
under time constraints. It is also more likely that language
errors will be tolerated if they occur in the essays written by
non-native speakers of English.

The important errors, which significantly affect assessment of
academic performance in all subjects studied here, are those that
are seen to manifest student difficulties with the subject
matter. In the evaluation of student knowledge of the subject
matter two main factors are taken into account, namely the degree
of factual accuracy in student writing and the appropriate use of
factual information to support explanations and arguments, which
is often seen as evidence of student understanding of the subject
matter. Errors which affect accuracy are usually seen as "poor
content", whereas those affecting the presentation of student
understanding often generate comments about the structure of an
essay as a whole, logical development of ideas and arguments, and
clarity.

Since there is considerable agreement among subject specialists
from different disciplines as regards the relative importance of
content and structure (61.1% consider content to be the most
important, 38.9% consider structure to be the most important),
the work at this stage of the project is focused on linguistic
characterisation of content and structure errors identified in
student writing by subject specialist tutors.

The analysis of such errors has so far shown that, although they
may not necessarily be caused by language difficulties alone,
they are frequently associated with problems many students have
with structuring discourse. The results of a number of tests
carried out so far indicate that erroneous discourse is often
judged by subject tutors to be poor in content, illogical or
unclear. Furthermore, improvement in student ability to
structure discourse frequently results in a dramatic improvement
of academic performance. (Ref. D. Johnson "Home Students of
Foreign Origin", New Community Vol XII No 2, Summer 1985; D.
Johnson "Assessment of Communicative Competence in Academic
Writing", paper presented at SELMOUS Conference, Reading, March
1985).

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