

PAPER 8

RELATION BETWEEN LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Linguistics is a science and teaching is an art yet they are closely related to each other especially in the case of the L2 teaching. The process of any foreign language teaching includes 'selection', 'grading' and 'presentation' as the major steps. Linguistics plays an important role in the whole process of teaching.

A process of limitation must be undertaken since the 'whole of English' is neither teachable nor appropriate. There are two parts to the process, first, the restriction of the language used to a particular dialect and register; and secondly the selection from within the register of the items that are to be taught according to criteria such as 'frequency of occurrence', 'teachability' and classroom needs. The whole process must be applied at all levels of language, so that unlike conventional vocabulary selection, which deals only with items labeled 'words' but in fact having no clear linguistic status, the inventory of teaching items is reached by considering phonology, grammar, lexis, context (semantics) and extra linguistic situation at every point in the process.

The process of arriving at an inventory of teaching items we have called 'limitation' the process of putting these into the most appropriate order for practical teaching purposes is generally called 'grading'. Grading is sub-divided into two distinct operations. The first of these takes the list of teaching items and arranges it into blocks of the right size for the various years, terms, months, weeks, days and classes of the teaching course; while the second operation deals with the problem of the sequence in which the items in the blocks are to be taught. It is useful to use a separate label to each of these sub-division of the total process of grading, and so we shall use the term 'staging' to refer to the division of the course into time segments, and sequencing to refer to the problem of deciding the order in which the items should be taught.

The subject of staging takes us squarely into the field of language teaching methodology, suppose a course has been divided into three years, each of two terms, each term of fourteen weeks, each week having four classes, each class lasting 45 minutes. These are non-linguistic factors, imposed upon the teacher by the practical and administrative needs of the situation in which he works.

Such practical matters might appear to have nothing to do with linguistics, but in fact linguistics has a dual contribution to make here, firstly and behind and throughout the whole task, linguistics provides the description of the language being taught and shows the teacher what the place of each component is in the sum total of what is being taught; secondly and specifically in this area of grading, linguistics reminds us that the items being subdivided into units of teaching time belong to four different skills (understanding speech, understanding comprehensibly, reading and writing). This remainder affects the process of staging in a number of important ways.

To begin with, the different skills do not make equal demands on the different levels of language. A learner who has acquired mastery of all four skills must have made the acquaintance of all levels. But for certain purposes one may learn and even teach a language without acquiring all skills in it, and therefore without necessarily coming to grips with all levels of language. Courses exist in spoken English and in spoken French which make no use of whatever of written forms of the language, while other courses have long been taught which set out to impart only a reading and writing knowledge of

the language. In such cases either the phonological or the graphological may be ignored or at least played down. In courses of the more conventional kind where both the spoken and the written forms are in use it is common practice for the one to tag behind the other and for the introduction of the spoken forms to precede by some margin, which may be either very small or quite large the introduction of written forms of the same language items. All these considerations affect the total grading of the course. Staging will be affected because the teacher must divide the point in time, measured from the beginning of the course, by which a given standard of attainment in each skill must be reached but sequencing is also affected because he must decide to introduce items from one aspect of language before or after items from another.

Staging, then is a task affected especially by two factors; first, by the number of lessons that constitute the course and the intensity of the teaching measured in classes per-unit time, in which turn depend on the average length of the lessons and the frequency with which they are given; and secondly by decisions about the skills which the course sets out to teach.

Sequencing is that section of the total task in which the teacher decided to teach item "x" before item "y". In fact for an intelligent approach to sequencing it is almost essential to have practical teaching experience with the pupils for whom a given course is intended.

The criteria of sequencing with some alternation are the same as those of selection.

In sequencing, also, objective criteria help the teacher much. At one place, the teacher's intuition and experience will produce no special reasons for preferring one sequence rather than another. But in other places, some of them is of strategic importance for the course as a whole, the experienced teacher often feels that he prefers one particular sequence rather than another "because it works better." In these circumstances, when there is a firm professional judgment that the sequence x-y-z is preferable to a sequence x-y-z which have been indicated purely on the basis of objective criteria, the teacher should have the final say.

Objective criteria can give a general idea of where in the total sequence a given item should appear, but for final detail the teacher's classroom experience should be followed.

There are, however, several interesting examples of linguistic theory dictating in broad outline the sequence of linguistic items. Thus teachers of English who make use of transformational grammar sometimes maintain that 'kernel sentences' should always be taught before sentences regarded as involving a grammatical transformation: for example, attribution, passive (voice) and interrogative (mood) must in this view come later than prediction, active and affirmative respectively.

The next stage in the process is one which we call 'presentation'. This is chiefly a matter of practical classroom teaching and corresponds closely to what is meant by methodology. Methodology combined with applied linguistics or linguistics is more effective than methodology without linguistics or linguistics without methodology.

The contribution of linguistics to a process that is chiefly methodological in its nature is twofold. In the first place, and pervading the whole task, linguistics provides both the description of L2 and an understanding on the part of how the components make up the whole of how the language works, in fact. Secondly, reference back to linguistic

categories will ensure that, in the planning of a teaching program all aspects of language that need to be are included. This does not imply that phonology, graphology, lexis, grammar and context need to be taught as separate levels: these are linguistic categories, concepts for the description of language, not teaching procedures. Besides there is strong evidence that the more closely the teaching items that fall within these categories are integrated and presented as total language behavior in a real situation the more effective the teaching is.