LINGUISTICS IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

PATEL BHAVIKABEN M

Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities, A. D. Patel Institute of Technology,

New Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, India

ABSTRACT

This paper is to help students/teachers acquire the basic language skills: speaking (selection of appropriate sounds and their organization), understanding (identification of sounds; decoding sounds as meaning), writing (selection of appropriate graphological symbols and their organization) and reading (identification of symbols; decoding symbols as meaning). In every language teaching and language planning situation we set up certain objectives in terms of which we decide which of the skills (active/passive) are to be given the highest priority. Language teachers have begun to feel that linguistics has failed to provide them with the help they seek for improving both content and methodology in their chosen field. The real fact is that linguistics is a science. It seeks to study how language works. Linguistics per se has different aims from language teaching. It is surely not concerned with providing evidence about the most effective procedures for language teaching. It does not have any techniques of language teaching to offer; it has no 'do-it-yourself' kit of classroom procedures to display.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic, Language Teaching, Phonetics, Pedagogy, Psychology, Socio-Cultural Contexts, Syntactic

INTRODUCTION

"It should be noted that the various linguistic insights that emerge do not determine any particular teaching method or methods. Too often in the past assumption was made that a linguistic technique (for example, "minimal pair" technique) or that apparent insights into linguistic structure achieved by linguistics had to be communicated directly to learners…. Generative – transformational grammar provides language teachers with new insights into language. However, it gives them no way of teaching these insights". (Wardhaugh, 1970). In his paper on "Linguistic Theory" read at the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages(1965), Chomsky expresses his doubt whether there can be any direct application in language teaching of the insight achieved in linguistics and psychology. "…. I am frankly, rather skeptical about the significance, for the teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics and psychology. Certainly the teacher of language would do well to keep informed of progress and discussion in these fields, and the efforts of linguists and psychologists to approach the problems of language teaching from principled point of view are extremely worthwhile, from an intellectual as well as a social point of view. Still, it is difficult to believe that either linguistics or psychology has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a 'technology' of language teaching" (Chomsky, 1971).

This is the quintessence of the problem. At present neither the linguist nor the psychologist knows enough about the process of second language acquisition to tell the language teacher what to do. Fundamental insights about language should certainly help us understand how language works but a description of a language is not in itself a set of directions as

to how to learn or teach that language. Fragments of grammar and flashes of bright ideas cannot replace teaching grammars. "Whatever the place of phonetics and linguistics may be in language teaching, the formulation of linguistic statements is by no means essential to language learning" (Halliday, et al 1964).

Linguistics is getting more and more involved in the metaphysical aspects of language. Another important aspect of their activity is their anxiety to use a highly abstract formalism for externalizing their insights. This anxiety has made them explore the fields of symbolic logic and mathematics. Language teachers, on the other hand, are interested in presenting the facts of language they are teaching in socio-cultural contexts and thereby helping students increase their competence to use and understand different registral and stylistic varieties of their language.

This does not, however, mean that language teaching simple process of pouring "language" into empty vessels. All effective language teaching is process of helping students move on from the level of context-governed performance to that of context-free competence. It is not enough to have our students perform well in doing simple, context bound exercises. They must be helped to use the language in non-classroom situations, communicating with a variety of speakers in a variety of contexts. Language teaching is cooperative enterprises in which teachers help their students internalize the system of the language they are learning. In acquiring their native language, students do not depend on any special tutoring. All they seem to need is sufficient exposure to their language. Their built-in language learning mechanism helps them abstract the basic rules of the language and formulate a mini grammar, which they go on refining and expanding in course of their interaction with their native language. "A child who has learned a language has developed an internal representation of a system of rules that determine how the sentences are to be formed, used, and understood…. He has done this on the basis on the basis of what we may call Primary Linguistic Data" (Chomsky, 1965). One of the main reasons why linguistics is worth doing is that it can help us understand the nature rather remarkable aspect of the psycholinguistic development of the human child.

How does a child acquire his second language? This is a question which has not yet been answered satisfactorily. Our understanding of the concepts of "habit", "analogy", and "rule-formation" in the context of second language acquisition is so very limited that we cannot come out with any definitive statements about second language acquisition. We do, however, have some idea of the problems involved in the organization of second language teaching. It is not possible to teach students the whole of a language. It is equally obvious that no teacher can teach his/her students the whole range of register-based utterances they may be expected to use. Every teacher uses his/her own intuition, experience and training to select, stage, and grade his materials. Every teacher has his/her own way of reducing "tokens" to "types", of showing the interrelatedness of the "types".

Grading is a complex process of grouping and sequencing interrelated patterns in terms of increasing complexity. "Gradation answers the questions: What goes with what? What comes before what?" (Mackey, 1967). Linguistics can come in here and offer linguistically graded phonological, syntactic, and lexical patterns. This does not mean that what is linguistically 'complex'. All means that linguistic insight into language can be used to group related patterns and formulate productive rules. By 'insight' mean linguistic notions that increase one understands of the nature of language and of language learning.

A linguistically-oriented grading word bring together such interrelated patterns as declarative and interrogative, affirmative and negative, active and passive, causative and non-causative and so on. And then combine these features to

move in the direction of complexity. For example, a negative interrogative is more complex than a simple interrogative, and a passive, negative, interrogative, more complex than a negative interrogative.

In a traditional substitution pattern a particular sentence pattern is held constant and new vocabulary items are substituted into the pattern. The idea is to 'establish' the sentence pattern. The new transformationally-oriented drills trend to hold the principal content vocabulary constant and change the sentence patterns to different but related patterns.

The idea is to make students familiar with a group of related sentence patterns such as: questions and statements, affirmatives and negatives, combining two related sentences into a complex sentence with an embedded relative/complement clause in it and so on.

At what stage and at what point a particular pattern is to be introduced is a decision which has to be taken by the teacher; linguistics may help him take more informed decision. If, for example, he decides to teach the present perfect in English, he may find it useful to establish a link between the past and the present, for the present perfect represents a layering of time: "Past in Present". If he decides to teach the possessive constructions and constructions with "have" as their main verb, it may be productive and illuminating to link the two at some point. Once the basics of syntax are established, we can help them practice "topically and situationally appropriate varieties of language and develop a "feel" for not only what is acceptable but also for what is likely to be effective in a given situation". "Pedagogically this places a greater burden upon the teacher. What s/he must try to develop in his students is a highly sensitive feeling for language, an instinct for a situation and the language appropriate to it" (Marckwardt, 1966). If the patterns are studied only in isolation, their significance is the largely missed. "Today we not only require the student to discriminate between utterances which he has never heard, we also require him to go beyond the pattern which he has memorized, to vary the pattern and create new sentences of his own.

The development of production drills, in which the student is required to formulate and produce sentences in a controlled pattern instead of merely imitating them, parallels and perhaps results from the increasing interest which theoretical linguists have taken in a speaker's ability to produce new sentences which he has never heard before" (De Camp, 1969). The real contribution of linguistics is to increase the teacher's understanding of the nature of language and thereby make him more competent and therefore a better language teacher. Linguistically oriented teaching materials can produce satisfactory results only when they are used by teachers who are aware of the ideas and assumptions about language upon which they rest.

One possible view of the aim of second language teaching is that we are preparing the learner to perform a specific set of roles in a new language and new culture. There again linguistics can offer some guidelines in terms of registral analysis of language varieties and socio-cultural patterning. "Teaching a second language is a process of helping our pupils make appropriate register choice out of their total register range….. Register-shift, i.e., the ability to shift registers according to shifts in situation is one of the crucial conditions for success in handling a second language effectively. If you do not know your lines, you are no use in the play" (Verma, 1969).

Linguistic insights, as already said, can be used to organize the different facets of language teaching such as the teaching of grammar and composition, of spelling and reading, of literary and technical varieties of language. It is important to note here that "linguistics" represents only one of the parameters and its use is indirect. It may give language teachers, course designers, and producers of materials and insight into the organization of language.

What it should get in return is a feedback based on classroom tryouts. Applications, which are important sources of feedback, can be of tremendous help to linguists in recognizing their ideas and modifying their theory. There should, in fact, be a constant mutual feedback between theory and applications.

It may be useful to highlight some other areas of language teaching and language learning in which linguistics can offer help. In the present atmosphere in the world rife with linguistic prejudices, it can help people develop a sense a tolerance by telling them that folk tales such as language.

A is richer or more beautiful than language B are not meant to be taken seriously. Every language is adequate to the needs of the people who use it. It can also help them appreciate universal features underlying superficial diversities.

This leads us on to another area; translation. Our understanding of the universals of language and semantics can help us handle the problems of translation effectively, for translation implies transference of meaning, which can hardly be effected without a reasonably sophisticated knowledge of the language concerned on the part of the translator. The chief defect of the now almost condemned Grammar-Translation Method was that it used bad grammar and bad translation. "The main defect of the so-called 'Grammar-Translation Method' was not that it used grammar and translation, but it used them badly"(Catford, 1964).

All the linguistic evidence available today suggests that children are not born with a predisposition to learn any one language rather than any other. All children, regardless of race, culture, and parentage, are born with the same built-in ability for learning languages. The primary function of language teaching is not so much to shape their language as to activate the linguistic competence with which they are born.

Systems of syntactic and lexical analysis and scientific descriptions of language can be used for planning lessons, producing pedagogically oriented grammars, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, for analysis of literary texts, and for producing 'user' and 'use' based materials. Contrastive analysis does not have any remarkable predictive power but it does have an illuminating explanatory power. All these hints, suggestions, and guidelines can function as useful aids to teachers. In last analysis the teacher is the judge of pedagogical applications and is entitled to modify what he uses in the light of his different ends. "The place of linguistics is behind the classroom teachers" (Strevens, 1965). All that linguists can suggest is that our teaching programme be designed in such a way as to give free play to those creative principles that humans bring to the process of language learning (Chomsky, 1968).

CONCLUSIONS

It is true that linguistics cannot generate simple answers to all the problems that have been plaguing language teachers for ages. True too, that linguistics does not have any technique of language teaching to offer. The chief reason then why linguistics is worth doing is that it can shed light on the linguistic development of the human child and give us a picture of intra and inter language complexities. What is really needed today is a closer collaboration between linguistics and language teachers, a healthier partnership between linguistics and methodology.

REFERENCES

1. Strevens, P.: (1965) "Linguistics in Language Teaching Again: A British Point of View". Papers in Language & Language Teaching, Oxford University Press, p. 73.

2. Catford, J. C.: (1964) "Teaching English as a Foreign Language", the Teaching of English ed. by Quirk and Smith, Oxford University Press, p. 157.

3. Chomsky, N.: (1971) "Linguistic Theory", in Chomsky: Selected Readings, ed. by J.P.B. Allen and P.V. Buren. Oxford University Press, 1071, pp. 152-153.

4. Wardhaugh, Ronald: (1970) "Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: The State of the Art", (TESOL News Letter, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1970).

5. Chomsky, N.: (1965) Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, MIT Press, p. 25.

6. Chomsky, N.: (1968) the Listener, Vol. 79, No. 2044, p. 690.

7. Halliday, M. A. K. et al: (1964) the Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching, Longmans, London, 1964, p. 179.

8. Marckwardt, Albert, H: (1966) Linguistics and the art of Teaching of English, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 4.