

Syllabuses then, very much reflect the subjective judgement of their creators whether they are functional or structural. Most these days are to some extent both functional and structural and, at least at the beginner level, show great similarities with one another. Widdowson (1979, p. 250) suggests that 'the work on notional syllabuses can best be seen ... as a means of developing the structural syllabus rather than replacing it'.

#### 4.2 Case study: two courses compared

*Contact English* (Granger and Hicks, 1977) has a structurally-based progression. This is clear from the contents page and introduction even though it is never stated explicitly in the Teachers' Book. *Starting Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1977), as we have seen, takes communicative acts, or language functions, as its starting point.

If we compare the language items taught in the first ten units of each course, we find that the following items are taught in both courses:

What...?  
to be (present simple)  
Indefinite and definite articles  
possessives  
numbers  
imperative  
Would you like ... + noun? (formula)  
Informal greeting and leave-taking

In the second ten units of each course there are still many similarities (present simple, demonstratives, count/non-count nouns, prepositions of place, *would you like* + infinitive) but the differences are more numerous.

The main differences between the first twenty units of each course are that *Contact English* teaches the present continuous whereas *Starting Strategies*, surprisingly perhaps, does not. On the other hand *Starting Strategies* teaches the past simple relatively early, in unit 16, whilst *Contact English* only introduces it in unit 22. The introduction of the past simple in *Starting Strategies* is in no way systematic and does not claim to be so. Quite simply, a few common verbs are given in the past simple form and have to be learnt as individual items: there is no attempt to teach any rule for past tense formation. Although systematic presentation occurs in the next book in the series, *Building Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1979), this kind of procedure does seem to come uncomfortably close to the kind of phrase book learning that is arguably not true language learning, because the grammatical structure of the language is not being internalised by the student, with the consequence that he is unable to produce sentences of his own making.

#### Summary

It is important to evaluate the approach to syllabus design adopted by a course-book. Generally speaking a structural syllabus with a linear progression will be suitable for students who are to pursue a prolonged period of study leading to a high level of performance and accuracy. Secondary school and university courses often fall into this category. On the other hand, a functional syllabus with

a cyclical progression is more suitable for adults who are learning English for particular purposes and expect to put what they learn to practical use in the near future.

Structural syllabuses and functional syllabuses need not necessarily be considered as alternatives and the two approaches can be combined by a process of compromise. In certain cases the actual language items taught and their sequence may not differ a lot between a structurally-based course and a functionally-based course. In other cases, however, the differences may be considerable, reflecting different emphases in the books. Identifying the extent of such differences is part of the task of materials evaluation.

### Exercises and activities

- (a) Look at the way the content of your coursebook is organised (the contents page should be a good indication of this) and decide whether it follows a mainly structural or a mainly functional syllabus. (See section 1 in this chapter.)
- (b) Do you feel that the needs of your students/pupils are best met by a structural syllabus or a functional syllabus? (See sections 1 and 2 in this chapter.)
- (c) Examine the progression for teaching new language items in your coursebook. Does it follow a linear or a cyclical pattern? Which do you feel is most suitable for your classes? (See page 26.)
- (d) Take two coursebooks at the same level (elementary or intermediate), one functional and one structural in approach, and list the language items taught in each book and in what order. What are the main similarities and differences?

## 4 Presentation and Practice of New Language Items

In this chapter and the next we shall be focusing on some methodological criteria for use in the evaluation process. The methodological views underlying teaching materials may not be explicit, but they will become evident when the materials are examined. Just as a teacher may not expound his methodological procedures when teaching a class, or even when discussing work with colleagues, so a coursebook writer may not discuss in the Introduction or Teacher's Book all the rationale which underlies his approach. Indeed so far as the writer is concerned some of the procedures may be more intuitive than explicit.

Whilst I would agree that, as in so much to do with the teaching of language, the whole of a lesson or of a piece of teaching material is greater than the sum total of its parts, it can nevertheless be useful to adopt an analytical approach and identify what methodological assumptions have been made. The analysis of the methodology of a course, whilst not claiming to account for every aspect of that course, does provide valuable insights which allow prospective users to gauge whether the approach of the coursebook writer accords with their own approach and whether in their judgement it is suitable for their students.

### 1 The Influence of theories of learning

#### 1.1 Behaviourist and cognitive views

Language learning had for many years up to the 1960s been seen, albeit in a fairly simplistic way, as a *cognitive activity*, that is to say as an activity which engaged conscious mental processes such as analysing and understanding, and involved learning and applying explicitly formulated rules. The grammar/translation method which was dominant at that time is essentially cognitive in that it requires a clear understanding of rules and the ability to apply the given rules to new examples of language. The weakness of this method, of course, lies in its too-limited concept of what is involved in learning and using a language. Being able to learn a rule, and then apply it to an academic exercise involving translating sentences (often isolated sentences) from the L1 to the L2 is hardly fully representative of real-life language use in normal situations.

Following grammar/translation in the 1960s, the influence of Skinner and *behaviourist theory* all but revolutionised foreign-language learning with the concept that language learning, like all other learning, is essentially habit formation in response to external stimuli. Thus with a simple stimulus-response-reinforcement sequence, it was claimed learners could develop habits of use in the target language (L2). According to behaviourist thinking it wasn't really necessary for learners to internalise rules; instead they should learn the right patterns of linguistic behaviour, and acquire the correct habits.

That a complex phenomenon like language learning and use should be explained away as a simple process of habit-formation, now seems hard to understand, but language learning and teaching theory in the 1960s was deeply influenced by behaviourism, although it must be said that some writers and

teachers, to their credit, remained more than a little sceptical.

In the 1970s there was a gradual moving away from behaviourist-based approaches and a reassertion of cognitive values together with a greater concern for the learner as an individual with well-developed mental faculties and a pre-disposition to learn in an active, searching way. Caleb Gattegno, the initiator of the somewhat controversial Silent Way approach to language teaching, made a very valid point when he expressed his belief that the human being was the most efficient learning organism ever devised (Gattegno, 1976).

The return to a more cognitive approach did not herald a resurgence of grammar/translation based teaching, but did reassert the importance of the psychology of the individual as an autonomous, thinking being worthy of and entitled to respect from his teacher. Indeed, to a considerable extent the emphasis has shifted from language teaching to language learning, the teacher now being seen as the manager of a learning situation. In parallel to this movement, teaching materials have become more sensitive to the individual's learning process and instead of bombarding him with batteries of mechanical drills they now tend to stimulate the learner, to encourage him in his problem-solving activities and to guide the learner in seeking out and putting into use the rules that he is learning.

A full discussion of the behaviourist/cognitive divergence of views is beyond the scope of this book, and is in any case becoming of largely academic interest as the influence of behaviourist psychology wanes. Those who wish to pursue the issue further are referred to Dakin (1973, chapter 2) and Rivers (1968, pp. 71-80).

So far as teaching materials are concerned, those heavily influenced by behaviourist thinking are likely (a) to have been published before 1973, (b) to contain considerable numbers of mechanical drills, many of which could be done by students without understanding what they were saying, (c) not to provide any explanation of the grammar being taught, (d) not to tell the students what they are supposed to be learning and (e) to concentrate heavily on oral work, even to the extent of preventing learners from seeing the written language during the early stages of the course.

## 1.2 Inductive and deductive language learning

It is useful to distinguish between these two different learning strategies, although it would be wrong to suggest that an individual learner uses only one or the other, or indeed that one is inherently better than the other.

In both types of learning we are concerned with rule formation and use by the learner. The difference springs from the point of entry and the processes involved. In *inductive* learning the learner is presented with a number of examples which embody the rule and by identifying similarities between the examples he hypothesises what he thinks the rule might be and tries it out, seeking confirmation of the hypothesis. This is the way children are thought to acquire their native language, although children, unlike the foreign language learner, will be exposed to fairly random bits of language. The L2 learner is more fortunate in this respect as the examples presented will (or should) be systematic and fully representative of the rule which is to be learned. The essential point here is that, from examples of language, the learner *induces* the rule and then uses it.

In *deductive* learning, the process works in reverse: the learner is given an explanation of the rule in an analytical way and is then expected to apply the rule and provide his own instances of language, perhaps guided by an example or two.

The desired end product is the same: the ability to use the rules of the language both productively and receptively. It is only the route taken in attaining this objective that differs.

Let us suppose that you wish to teach negative question tags in the present tense on the model:

You like oranges, don't you?

Teaching inductively, or to be more precise, getting your students to learn inductively, you would present several examples which followed the same model, e.g.

You live in Brighton, don't you?

You travel to school by train, don't you?

You study in the mornings, don't you?

You have lunch with your friends at the Cat & Fiddle, don't you? etc.

and then encourage your students to produce their own examples based on the model. You hope that your students will have worked out for themselves, perhaps intuitively, the rule for this particular structure, and that they will be able to use it, given sufficient practice. So you may ask members of the class to say things about what their classmates do regularly (therefore using the simple present) and to add a question tag seeking confirmation.

Using a deductive approach, you would first explain the rule in an explicit way along the lines 'To form a question tag, you must use the auxiliary verb *do* in the same tense as the main verb in the sentence but in the interrogative form. If the main verb is affirmative, the tag verb is negative, and vice-versa.' Then you may give a couple of examples to make the rule clearer. This would be followed by some sentences without question tags and the students would be required to provide the correct tag in each case. Essentially this kind of exercise is a test to see if the students can operate the rule that they have (or are supposed to have) learnt. From the rule, the students are meant to *deduce* correct instances of language.

Either route to learning is acceptable, and often the sequence of inductive learning reinforced by deductive learning (i.e. trying to work out the rule first and then having it given) proves to be the most effective, particularly with adults. Children learn inductively better than adults, whilst adults, having better developed analytical capacities, can better understand and use abstract rules. We should never hinder our students' learning by holding dogmatically and exclusively to one strategy or the other. Teaching is a pragmatic process and we should use whatever method brings the best results.

What we must ensure is that a real language-learning process, in the full sense of the word, is taking place when our students go through the motions of learning sentences, dialogues etc. They must be able to use creatively the rules that they have learned so as to meet their own needs and satisfy their own purposes.

## 2 Presentation and practice of grammar items

### 2.1 Presentation of new structures

The way in which language items are presented in a coursebook can vary

considerably, and so far we have looked at the difference between an inductive and a deductive learning strategy. We are now going to look at how course material actually presents and gives practice in using grammar items (structures).

How are new structures presented? To what extent is the presentation related to what has been previously learned? Is it meaningful (in context), systematic, representative of the underlying grammar rule, appropriate to the given context, relevant to learners' needs and interests? Are the practice activities for new structures adequate in number, varied, meaningful?

**Presentation** is the initial stage of learning a new item. The teacher provides the new information, the new piece of knowledge, and the learner concentrates on understanding it and remembering it. Although he may not seem to be doing very much overtly at this stage, the learner is in fact very active mentally as he seeks to understand and internalise the new rule which is being presented.

At the **practice stage**, the second stage of learning a new item, the learner starts to use the new language item, at first in carefully controlled exercises, which give a good deal of help and prevent the learner from making too many mistakes. The degree of control can be lessened as the learner becomes more confident.

The free **production stage** is the final stage and here the student is helped to use the language that he has learned in uncontrolled activities which are modelled on those of real life. The student is now being prepared for using English in the world outside the classroom. Free production will be covered in Chapter 5.

Learning a new item is facilitated if the learner can relate it, through similarity, comparison or contrast, with what is already familiar. In the foreign language learning situation this relationship could be established with the native language (L1) or with what is already known of the foreign language (L2), or it could be established with something non-linguistic, such as a picture, an object, an action or a sound. Course materials may use any or all of these procedures to structure and contextualise the learning process.

Let us consider the relationship with what is already known of the L2. Obviously this is impossible with complete 'zero' beginners in which case a link with a non-linguistic element is more likely. (Most courses at the beginner level begin by presenting a number of vocabulary items linked to pictures and occurring in simple declarative sentences with the verb *to be*.) However, once the learner has even a limited competence in English it is possible and desirable that new language items should be presented in relationship with what is already known. The relationship is usually one of contrast or of comparison, where similarities and differences are noted.

As language is a highly-structured, inter-related system it is imperative that language items should be learned not in isolation but in relation to each other. This applies equally to grammar and vocabulary. Presented in a relationship of comparison, language items tend to define one another in terms of what they do mean and what they do not mean, and of where they can be used appropriately and where they cannot be used. It is after all just as important to know what a structure or a word doesn't mean as to know what it does mean. In point of fact one cannot know the full range of meaning of an item without also knowing the limits of that range of meaning.

The teaching of verb tenses often relies on comparing the form and meaning of a new tense with the tenses which have already been learned. For instance, the present simple tense, used to refer to a regular or habitual action, can be

compared with the present continuous used to describe an action taking place now, e.g.

The 7.30 train to Manchester is now leaving platform 3.  
The 7.30 train to Manchester always leaves from platform 3.

Similarly the meaning of the present perfect form of the verb (usually a big difficulty for students) can be taught in a context which contrasts it with the past simple (see p. 69 for a practical example of this).

In vocabulary teaching, let us consider the word *cottage*. Now, one way of teaching *cottage* would be to show one or more pictures of cottages, and I suppose that most of us would opt for a chocolate-box thatched black-and-white building for an example. This is not an unacceptable procedure, but one could teach the meaning of *cottage* more fully by relating it to other words already known by the students which refer to different kinds of buildings. If we do this we will be using for teaching purposes the lexical patterning, or semantic structure of the lexicon of English and consequently providing our learners with insights into this structured system.

Supposing the students already know the following lexical items: building, house, palace, castle, flat, hotel, town-house, then *cottage* can be presented as a kind of house which in its turn is a kind of building. A *cottage* however is unlike certain other kinds of building: it is not a palace because it is too small and too modest; it is not a castle because it is not defensive and again it is too small; it is not a flat because it lies on its own patch of ground; it is not a hotel because it is used as a private residence and is, again, too small; it is not a town house because it is usually situated in the country either in an isolated position or in a village. We have thus established that a *cottage* is small, modest, and usually situated in a rural environment. In this way our learners have developed a concept which they can link to the word, and which is not limited to the one visual instance of a thatched black-and-white building that we may have been tempted to show them. If students were only shown the standard picture of a cottage, one wonders what they would make of references to rows of miners' cottages in a pit village in Nottinghamshire. The visual images conjured up could be quite bizarre!

We should therefore look very carefully at our course material and see what sort of relationships are established between the familiar and the new.

The presentation of structure should be coherent and systematic so that the learners can readily perceive the pattern and hence the rule underlying the models given. The models, or examples, themselves should of course be typical of and representative of the rule being taught. Presenting the comparison of adjectives in such a way that the following five examples occur – *dimmer*, *greyer*, *freer*, *prettier*, *more exciting* – will have the effect of teaching the student five individual instances of comparatives but will not allow the student to perceive the underlying rules with any certainty because in the written medium five different forms are being presented and in the spoken medium two different forms. The examples are not presented systematically enough for the student to be able to generalise from the individual instances given.

Presentation models should be appropriate to the context in which they occur. Without demanding total realism, we have a right to expect the presentation models to be acceptable as exponents of communicative functions. In other words we need to be able to believe that what is presented could be used for a

communicative purpose and is not included as language for language's sake. Many coursewriters experience difficulty in realistically contextualising the very early stages of learning English, and sequences such as the following are commonplace:

Bob	This is a fish.
Mrs Gray	Is this a fish?
Bob	Yes, it is. And that's a fish too.
Bob	This is a cat.
Mrs Gray	Is this a cat?
Bob	Yes, it is. And that's a cat too.

(Benhamou and Dominique, *Speak English* (Nathan, 1972))

Bob, a small boy, has drawn pictures of two fishes, two cats etc. which are well represented visually in the coursebook, and he is talking about his drawing with Mrs Gray.

Such an exchange is not wholly authentic, and is perhaps not quite realistic enough to be acceptable. The following drill from a coursebook in use in China also seems to me to be less than acceptable because, as a piece of practice material, it generates sentences which would simply not occur. Even in China mothers are not employed as soldiers and coal miners, and the implied expectation that husband and wife probably do the same job in each case is unnatural. The lexical items in lines 5-8 are, of course, supposed to be substituted for the items in *italics* in lines 1-4.

- |   |
|---|
| - What does your father do?             |
| - He's a <i>doctor</i> .                |
| - Is your mother a <i>doctor</i> , too? |
| - No, she isn't. She's a <i>nurse</i> . |

a soldier, a barefoot doctor;
a cadre, a bus driver;
a school teacher, a steel worker;
a coal miner, an office worker.

*English 1* (Beijing Languages Institute, 1979)

It has become fashionable to criticize the teaching of the present continuous form of the verb by associating it with a number of simultaneous actions such as '*I'm sitting down*', '*I'm standing up*', '*I'm walking to the door*', on the grounds that if the students can see the activity they do not need to be given a commentary on it, and therefore the model is presented in a context which could never occur in real life. Ingenious teachers have overcome the difficulty by blindfolding a student and then getting other students to give the commentary! This, it is claimed, overcomes the difficulty and makes the language used communicative. Such contrived situations however could hardly be called authentic and although the interaction may be communicative, the context of situation could hardly be called realistic.

So long as it is evident that the instances of language being taught have a communicative potential, it is, I suggest, of relatively lesser importance whether



or not, at the presentation and practice stages, activities are actually and genuinely communicative and realistic. We have to accept the fact that any teaching or training situation will be artificial to some degree, and necessarily so. In the language classroom, the language items to be learned are selected and presented in a structured and graded manner quite unlike any kind of real-life language use. This is not only acceptable but essential for effective language learning to take place. So long as the final objective is communicative ability and this objective is not lost to sight, then we should not worry too much if some of the learning processes, which are after all only a means to an end, seem a little artificial.

I am not of course arguing for artificiality for its own sake and would prefer realism where it is possible to achieve it. A good example is this neat presentation of the present continuous:

Helen	Who's in the bathroom? Is that you David?
David	Yes.
Helen	What are you doing? I'm waiting.
David	I'm brushing my teeth.
Helen	Quick, please. We're late.
David	All right!
Helen	David, please! What are you doing now?
David	I'm washing my hair.
Helen	Now? You're not washing your hair now!
David	My hair is dirty.
Helen	It's half past seven! Mummy!
Mrs Gray	David! Open that door! Quick.
David	Yes, Mummy.
Mrs Gray	David! What are you doing?
Helen	Look! He isn't washing his hair, he's playing with his boat! And, I'm waiting!

(Benhamou and Dominique, *Speak English* (Nathan 1972))

Here we have a realistic dialogue set in a perfectly acceptable context: a situation where one speaker does not know what the other is doing and wants to find out. Moreover the purpose in using the present continuous here is not simply to elicit information. Helen is trying to get David to do something and is using language to that purpose. It is therefore an example of language use presented as purposeful behaviour, and as such can be readily accepted as relevant to the learner's potential communicative needs.

## 2.2 Practice activities for new structures

Activities for language practice range from mechanical, automatic drilling at one extreme to guided role-play at the other. One characteristic of practice activities is that they provide the learner with the opportunity to use what has already been presented and to use it in a controlled learning situation where the likelihood of error is reduced. Under the most tightly controlled conditions the possibility of error is almost nil, as in this example of a drill (the left-hand column is the prompt and the right-hand column the student's response):

some bread	-	May I have some bread, please? -
some fruit	-	May I have some fruit, please? -
a little ice	-	May I have a little ice, please? -
a little butter	-	May I have a little butter, please? -
some salt	-	May I have some salt, please? -
a little wine	-	May I have a little wine, please? -

(J.A. Barnett, *Success with English Tapescripts 1* (Penguin, 1968))

In this particular drill, so long as the student substitutes the new item accurately, he is in no danger of making a mistake. Such drills are useful for developing quick, automatic responses, particularly where formulaic expressions are involved or where there is very limited syntactic choice, as in the formation of question tags. The danger is that they can be done quite accurately by students who have no understanding of the meaning of what they are saying. Another, more insidious, danger is that the students will understand what they are saying in literal terms but will not grasp the value of the sentence as a communicative act. In other words they will understand the structure but not its function. In the example given above the student may well believe that he is asking a question, as the sentence is in the interrogative form. There is nothing in the drill which indicates that he is in fact making a request.

It is of course unfair to consider an individual drill in isolation: it should be viewed as part of a teaching/learning sequence and if it is appropriately used it can be perfectly acceptable. If this drill is used, the meaning and function of the sentence should have been taught beforehand and afterwards one would expect to see a progression to less controlled exercises which allow the student more freedom of choice.

Open dialogues or one-sided dialogues give the student a certain amount of choice, within a structured activity. In the example below each student is given one part of a dialogue and practices it with a partner who has the other part. The dialogues, although fairly fixed, do offer some scope for individual choice, such as the selection of items from the menu, a copy of which is given to each student in the pair.

## 10

### One-sided dialogue: at a restaurant

Read the following dialogue with Student B.

Unfortunately, you can only see your part, so you will have to listen very carefully to what Student B says. Use the menu on the next page.

Before starting, read through your part to get an idea of what the dialogue is all about.

You: It's a nice restaurant, don't you think?

Student B: .....

You: No, not really. What about you?

Student B: .....

You: Oh, I see. Now, let's have a look at the menu. (slight pause)  
What would you like to start with?

Student B: .....  
 You: Yes, I think I'll have the same. No, on second thoughts, I'll have..... (name a dish).  
 Student B: .....  
 You: Well, I don't like..... (repeat dish) very much, actually. I think I'd prefer..... (name another dish). I had it the last time I was here and it was really delicious.  
 Student B: .....  
 You: Yes, good. And what about some vegetables with the meal?  
 Student B: .....  
 You: Yes, let's see. (slight pause) I think I'll have..... (name two vegetables).  
 Student B: .....  
 You: Right. Now, where's the waiter?

## 10 One-sided dialogue: at a restaurant

- Read the following dialogue with Student A.  
 Unfortunately, you can only see your part, so you will have to listen very carefully to what Student A says. Use the menu on the next page.  
 Before starting, read through your part to get an idea of what the dialogue is all about.

Student A: .....  
 Yes: Yes, very nice indeed. You come here often, then?  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Oh no! I've only been here once before, actually. That was..... (say when it was).  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Well, I wouldn't mind..... (name a dish). What about you?  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Right. And what shall we have for the main course? The ..... (name a dish) sounds rather nice.  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Oh, in that case, I'll have..... (repeat the dish) too.  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Well, let's see what's on the menu.  
 Student A: .....  
 You: Yes... that sounds good for me as well. I'll order the same.  
 Student A: .....

Fig. 4. (Watcyn-Jones, *Pair Work* (Penguin, 1981))

The main principle to bear in mind when using controlled practice material is to select exercises which exert sufficient control over the student's production to avoid excessive error, but to use no more control than is necessary. Course-books should ideally contain a variety of exercises with different degrees of control, beginning for each new language item taught with tightly controlled

exercises and progressing through a gradual relaxation of control until the student is given a good deal of freedom in making his individual choices. The student should ultimately be brought to a point where he can select appropriately and accurately from the options open at any point in the formulation of discourse. The student should be aware of the options which are open to him and of the implications for future options of each choice that he makes, since as one progresses through a conversational exchange the number of options tends to diminish and later options are largely determined by earlier choices.

### 3 Presentation and practice of lexis

I have already referred to ways in which we can exploit the lexical patterning which occurs in English. We will now look briefly at ways in which new lexis (vocabulary) can be presented. It can occur in word lists, in association with visuals and in a text (usually a reading passage, although it could occur in a listening text).

Lists of words, unless they are related words, are difficult to learn because the words appear in isolation and, lacking any context, do not appear to the learner to have any meaning. Meaning could possibly be supplied by translation, but this is often impracticable unless course material is designed with speakers of a particular language in mind. In any case, translation tends to give learners the false impression that there are exact one-to-one equivalents between words in English and in their native language. Many learners approach a foreign language believing that it is a coded version of their own language and that all they need to do is to learn the words in the foreign language which correspond to those in their own language and then string them together in the same way. To base one's teaching on translation, unless it is done in a very sophisticated way, risks reinforcing this basic misconception about the relationships between languages.

Presenting new lexis in association with visuals, or in a text, has the built-in advantage that the words are encountered in a context, whether non-linguistic (visuals) or linguistic (texts). Context makes meaning clearer and in many cases allows students to deduce the meaning of new and unfamiliar words by informed guessing. Therefore in our course material we should look for the presentation of lexis in a meaningful context of one sort or another.

A word is not learned as soon as it has been met and understood. It should be recycled by being introduced subsequently in a number of different contexts, productively as well as receptively.

The amount of new lexis to be taught in any one unit is a debatable point, but as a rule of thumb, the number of new words in a text should not amount to more than about five percent of the total. So in a 300 word text up to fifteen new words could be introduced.

### 4 Phonology

Many general courses tend to ignore *phonology* (the sound system) altogether, or else just teach *pronunciation* in an incidental fashion, perhaps as an offshoot of a structure drill. I have earlier pointed out the difficulty of integrating a graded presentation of the sound system into a general course, which also has to be carefully graded in its grammar and vocabulary. Nevertheless, in a general course one would expect to see some attention paid to the teaching of pronun-

ciation in its own right.

Out of four of the most widely used beginners' courses at the time of writing, only two deal explicitly with any aspects of phonology. *Kernel One* (O'Neill, 1979) provides models for stress and intonation in the Teacher's Book and contains practice exercises. *Starting Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1977) provides material in the teacher's notes and in the tapescript for both articulation of individual sounds and for stress and intonation. *Contact English 1* (Granger and Hicks, 1977) and *Streamline English-Departures* (Hartley and Viney, 1978) do not make any explicit reference either to the articulation of sounds or to stress and intonation.

*Intonation* is an extremely powerful device in speech and usually overrides grammar and vocabulary so far as meaning is concerned. Consider for example how a declarative sentence such as *You're coming* can be assigned the value of a question simply through the use of an intonation pattern with a rising tone. The grammatical structure remains unchanged yet the meaning is completely altered. Similarly yes in answer to a question, spoken with a fall-rise tone, will normally have the meaning *no* as in this example:

A John's a nice fellow, isn't he?

B Yes, but don't you think he's a bit moody?

In view of the evident power of intonation as a device in speech, it may seem a little odd that some very reputable courses do not attempt to teach it, except in the most oblique way.

If you should find yourself using such a course, all is not lost, as you can turn to some of the excellent supplementary material for teaching pronunciation which is now on the market and integrate it into your teaching programme. For *sound production and recognition* there is *Sound Right!* (Mortimer, 1975) and for teaching *stress*: *Stress Time* (Mortimer, 1976). Some of the commoner intonation patterns of English can be taught with *Using Intonation* (Cook, 1979). Another useful book for pronunciation teaching is *Ship or Sheep?* (Baker, 1977). These books are suitable for use with lower intermediate level students and above.

One feature which is shared by these books is the presentation of phonological features, whether they are individual sounds, stress patterns or intonation contours, in a systematic way. Additionally, the presentation and practice material consists largely of dialogues which provide context and consequently meaning. This is particularly important where intonation is concerned. It is as pointless to learn the form of an *intonation contour*, such as *rise-fall*, without learning its meaning, as it is to learn the form of a word such as *tablecloth* without knowing what is referred to. Where the articulation of individual sounds, or *phonemes*, is concerned, there is little to motivate the student if he is asked to intone apparently meaningless sounds in isolation. However, when they form part of an interesting or amusing dialogue, the learning process comes alive as it takes on meaning and acquires a purpose.

In integrating this pronunciation-teaching material into a general course, particularly at elementary level, great care must be taken not to use pronunciation exercises which include structures or vocabulary which are too difficult for the learners. We should, as far as possible, only teach one thing at a time and we should avoid at all costs finding ourselves in the position of having to teach in an ad hoc fashion a new grammatical structure that happens to crop up in a pronunciation exercise.

### Summary

At the presentation stage, great care has to be taken to present examples of English which are fully representative of the underlying rule which is to be learned. At the practice stage, drills and exercises should be controlled so that students do not make too many errors, but the amount of control should be the minimum necessary to avoid excessive error. As the students progress, greater scope should be allowed for them to make their own choices. In both presentation and practice, language items should be meaningful. Meaning can be taught through context, both linguistic context and non-linguistic context.

We should look for systematic, ordered presentation and practice not only of structures, but also of vocabulary and pronunciation. Where the sound system of English is not taught, or only sketchily dealt with in a general course, then the teacher should look for suitable supplementary material and integrate it into the teaching programme.

### Exercises and activities

- (a) Take a reading passage or dialogue in your coursebook and count the number of new vocabulary items in it. Express the number of new words as a percentage of the total number of words in the passage. Do you consider this to be a high or a low percentage? (See page 40).
- (b) Choose three exercises giving controlled practice in a structure of English. The exercises can practise the same structure or different structures. Put them in order according to the degree of control which is exercised over the students' choice and identify how that control is achieved (e.g. by the use of a substitution table, by visual cues, etc.). What sort of communicative activities do you think that the exercise could be used to prepare the student for? (See question 4.2.2 in Chapter 10.)
- (c) Does your coursebook include material for teaching intonation patterns? If YES, how is it done? Are you satisfied with it? If NO, can you find supplementary material which can be integrated into your teaching programme? (See question 4.4 in Chapter 10.)

## 5 Developing Language Skills and Communicative Abilities

Being able to communicate effectively in English means being proficient in the various language skills involved in the communication process, but it means more than being able to perform in each of the four skills separately. It also means being able to use the skills effectively in various combinations depending on the nature of the interaction. Conversation, for instance, involves speaking and listening skills, not independent of each other but in very close combinations.

### 1 Free production of spoken English

By free production of spoken English I mean the use of English in an uncontrolled situation. This must be the goal of language teaching and by the gradual reduction of control in exercises we should bring our learners to the point where they can use English in an autonomous fashion for their own purposes. It is clearly not enough to stop the learning process when the student is able to perform adequately in controlled drilling. The student must be given practice in (and be exposed to models of) the communicative strategies necessary for effective communication. In a conversation, for instance, it is not sufficient simply to produce grammatically correct sentences. The sequence of sentences used must link together and show a coherent development. The speakers need to be able to communicate their attitudes through choice of vocabulary and structure and use of an appropriate tone of voice.

At present not enough is known of the patterns of interaction involved for us to be able to provide an explicit and analytical description of the processes. Research work in progress in fields like ethnomethodology (the study of how people take part in conversations in everyday settings) and discourse analysis may in the future give us a much clearer understanding of what is involved. In the meantime however we can make a very useful practical contribution to our learners' communicative abilities by reproducing, or simulating, in the classroom the sort of situations that students will encounter in the world outside.

There are various techniques for doing this, including role-play, simulation, dramatic activities and games of different kinds. Some general courses include suggestions for these activities at the end of each unit, but others do not. There is, in any case, a good range of specialised materials available in published form, which can be used with students of different levels.

It is important to look at the relative proportion of material for *presentation*, *practice* and *free production*. Too much emphasis on presentation and controlled practice means that the coursebook will not adequately prepare the student for the real world, whilst lack of attention to clear presentation of grammar in favour of lots of communicative activities may mean that the student will never get a firm grounding in the basics of English.

We should be looking for a balance and a clear progression towards independence on the part of the student. It should be clear that the coursebook ultimately brings students to a point where they can use English on their own and for their own purposes.

## 2 Materials for reading, listening and writing

Teaching material for these activities is, again, sometimes integrated into general courses and sometimes not.

### 2.1 Reading

There is plenty of reading material available on the market and many publishers include series of carefully graded readers in their lists. The *Longman Structural Readers* series, for example, has readers graded in terms of grammar and vocabulary into six stages; stage one containing a limited range of structures and a basic vocabulary of some 300 words and stage six containing a wide range of structures and a basic vocabulary of about 1,800 words. The principles of using graded readers are well set out in the *Longman Structural Readers Handbook* and the *Longman Guide to Graded Readers*.

The *Heinemann Guided Readers* series involves control not only of structure and vocabulary but also of information content. The length and complexity of the stories; the number of characters and the background setting are all carefully controlled. As the handbook to the series explains:

In order to read a book successfully, students are involved in a process of absorbing a stream of information from the printed pages in front of them. In the *Heinemann Guided Readers Series*, the controlling of this stream of information – making sure that it flows smoothly and evenly and that it can be easily absorbed by the students – is given priority over all other forms of control.

(J. Milne, *Heinemann Guided Readers Handbook* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1977))

Some Readers have accompanying cassettes so that students can listen, or listen and read at the same time. This may appear on the surface to be a useful way of integrating listening and reading skills, and indeed up to a point it is. What must be born in mind however is that the language of these graded readers is written language, and if it is recorded on cassette it is really written English which has been read aloud and recorded. It will not display many of the features of spontaneous speech – such as hesitation, repetition and uncompleted sentences – and it will not incorporate the patterns of interaction which occur in conversation.

### 2.2 Listening

When looking at listening material we should ask ourselves what sort of listening practice our students need (monologue, dialogue, etc.) and what they are required to do in response to what they hear. Comprehension questions are useful for checking understanding, particularly if they are of the type which requires students to actively seek out the answer and formulate it themselves rather than simply repeat a section of the text. This of course applies equally to comprehension questions on reading passages. Another possible activity is to ask students to identify the purpose of the text and of various parts of it. An advertisement, for instance, will have the purpose of persuading people perhaps to buy a product or perform an action.



Listening activities are often under-represented in general courses and this is a pity because in our own language we almost certainly spend more time listening than doing anything else. Also, as we have seen, listening is an integral part of conversation. Oral skills without equally well-developed listening abilities are of little practical value. We should therefore look for a considerable amount of listening practice in a good course. If it is simply not provided, then we should supplement the course by using some of the specialised listening material on the market.

### 2.3 Writing

So far as writing exercises are concerned, we should be sensitive to the fact that writing has its own rules and conventions and we can expect course material to take that into account. Writing is not speech written down, and writing ability cannot be adequately taught by simply getting students to write down oral drills or do written grammar exercises. This may help them with their spelling but it will not equip them to produce coherent written text following the conventions of writing. We should look for specific writing exercises which in the earlier stages of learning are based upon given models of written English.

Learners can become aware of the nature of written text by reading and, as I have suggested above, we can help to develop their awareness by focusing their attention on significant features of the text. The next stage is to get our students to write a short, controlled text themselves, based on the model given but containing different information. Here is a good example of an integrated reading and writing exercise:

#### Exercise 6

Martin's friend, Tom, is a newspaper reporter. When he had been in his job for only one week, his boss told him to write a report about two ships. The news had just arrived to say that the two ships had gone down. The boss wrote a few words on a piece of paper and gave it to Tom with an old report to help him. Here is the old newspaper report and the paper Tom's boss gave him. When you have read them both, write Tom's report for him.

Last night there was an accident in the mouth of the Thames, when two ships went down. The smaller ship, the *White Rose*, had been going from London to Rotterdam. The other, the *Lady of Lisbon*, had been coming to London from Japan. The *White Rose* had been carrying bicycles and six passengers. The bigger ship had been bringing electrical equipment. Both ships had been travelling slowly and showing the usual lights. Before they went down, a third ship took all the people off, and later brought them to London.



From London to Singapore,  
carrying cars,  
going slowly.



From Abadan to London,  
carrying oil, going quickly,  
doing this for 5 years.

Both showing usual lights, all men safe.

Fig. 5. (From *Success with English, Coursebook 2* by G. Broughton (Penguin))

Note how the exercise becomes progressively more difficult as the new information is incorporated into the text. At the beginning it is a process of simple substitution, but by the end of the text some syntactic changes are necessary as well.

If we are evaluating a general course we should certainly ask ourselves, as in the case of phonology, to what extent listening, reading and writing are presented and practised; how thoroughly and systematically this is done, and whether the particular characteristics of each activity are adequately represented.

### 3 Integrated skills and communicative abilities

I have mentioned earlier that in actual language use we rarely use one skill in isolation. We may of course do so when we are listening to the radio or watching television or when reading a book or newspaper. However even when reading a newspaper or book it is by no means uncommon to read out or paraphrase a short article or extract, or comment on a newspaper story to someone sitting nearby. That person is likely to respond with at the very least a brief comment to acknowledge what has been said. So, a straightforward reading activity may well involve speaking and understanding speech as associated activities. A student reading a textbook may well make notes on the significant points of what he is reading, here combining reading skills with writing skills.

When listening to the radio or watching television I may turn to the *Radio Times* or *TV Times* and read a synopsis of the programme that I am watching. I may even read quite a long article about the programme which will provide me with background information helping me to predict and better understand what I am seeing and hearing. In this case listening skills are complemented by reading skills.

Numerous other communicative situations in real life involve integrating two or more of the four skills. Consider, for example, taking a message over the telephone, taking part in any sort of conversation, filling in a form, writing an abstract of an article, and taking notes from a talk or lecture. In all these situations, and in many more, the user of the language exercises his abilities in two or more skills, either simultaneously or in close succession.

Less obvious, because they do not fall into the category of observable behaviour, are the cognitive processes which relate, or mediate, between the language skills. In a conversation, for instance, speaking and listening are obviously not separate, unrelated activities which happen to occur at the same time and in the same place. What one participant in the conversation says will to some extent be determined by what he hears from the other participants and also by his purpose in joining in the conversation. The next utterance in a conversation is never wholly predictable, unless it consists entirely of an exchange of standard formulae such as 'Good morning' – 'Good morning' or 'Nice day' – 'Yes, isn't it?' We can predict up to a point what can come next or at least we can discount implicitly many unlikely occurrences such as, 'Shall I meet you at the station?' – 'Two coffees please.' This element of prediction of response to within a limited range of possibilities seems to be important in the ability to keep up a sustained conversation, but equally important is the ability to make real-time (spontaneous) responses to utterances which are not wholly predictable. This ability to receive, understand and process a message and respond to it without hesitation is perhaps what we mean when we talk about fluency in language use.

and it depends to a considerable degree on unseen mental processes.

When looking at course materials which claim to be communicative or to teach integrated skills, we might ask ourselves firstly to what extent the practice material represents real language use and secondly how far development of the cognitive processes referred to above will be helped by using the material.

If we consider a standard procedure for presentation and practice in course-books – the *dialogue* – we shall see that it practises integrated skills: listening, speaking, and, usually, reading. It also appears to be communicative, superficially, in that it involves two people in talking to each other in what seems to be a realistic way. Dialogues are certainly useful for presenting new items of language and for practising them in a mechanical fashion, but if we look at them carefully we shall see that they are not fully representative of real language use, nor do they require the student to engage in the same cognitive processes as take place in a conversation.

Although dialogues give practice in listening and speaking, the exchanges are fixed and predetermined as each dialogue has been written, and perhaps also recorded on tape, during the preparation of the coursebook. In taking part in a dialogue the students either read the parts from the book, or repeat them from a tape, or both. This process of reading or repetition, although useful for pronunciation practice and the psychomotor function of stringing sounds and words together in English, is not modelled on the processes that occur during a real conversation. There is little or no unpredictability, the direction and content of the conversation are determined in advance, and no genuine communication of any kind takes place as the participants are not using English in any purposeful communicative activity. They are using English in order to use (and practise) English, and, although this inward-looking, circular activity has its place in language learning, it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be accepted as the final objective or end-product of a language-learning programme.

The cognitive processes involved in reading or repeating a dialogue are equally unrepresentative of those which occur in real communicative situations. The process for a written dialogue is one of reading silently and understanding (fully or partially), perhaps listening to it read by the teacher or on tape, and then reading one part aloud, on cue. There is no real response to the other participant and beyond recognising the cue it is not necessary to understand what he says. The real-life sequence of processing a relatively unpredictable message and responding to it by formulating the response in real time (and in the case of conversation this means almost simultaneously) is lacking.

Some published dialogues offer the possibility of variation through the substitution of different vocabulary items or even short sentences either on cue from the teacher or at the student's will. Here is an example of this procedure. Having introduced different ways of making suggestions and given some relatively free practice, the author invites the readers to practise the following dialogue:

- |  |
|--|
| <p>A <i>Why don't we</i> get ourselves a new car? The old one's falling apart. (<i>Let's ...</i>)</p> <p>B Oh, what a good idea!</p> <p>A What kind shall we get?</p> <p>B <i>We could</i> look at an MG this time, if you liked. (<i>might</i>)</p> <p>A Yes, fine.</p> <p>B When shall we go and look?</p> |
|--|

- A *Why not sometime next week? (Why don't we go)*  
 B No, let's go on Saturday.  
 A O.K.  
 B Where shall we go?  
 A There's a car dealer down the road. *How about going there? (What about)*  
 B No, I don't like that place. *Why don't we try the garage Martin recommended? (I suggest...)*  
 A Fine. We'll do that.

(From *Survival English* by J. de Freitas (Macmillan))

However, despite the number of options open to the participants in the dialogue it really *makes no difference* which option is chosen and B's response is the same whether A says 'Why don't we get ourselves a new car' or 'Let's get ourselves a new car'. B still doesn't have to listen to A in order to perform adequately. De Freitas quite rightly points out that 'it should not be thought that the situation (in the dialogue) is any more than one of innumerable settings that could be used to contextualise the language. The learner will understand that he might have to 'defend' himself in all sorts of unforeseeable situations and that linguistic adjustments might be necessary.' Unfortunately the dialogues do not equip the learner to cope with unforeseeable situations because he is locked within the fixed sequence of the dialogue. If the learner has paid attention, he knows how it is going to end before he says the first word. Some suggestions on how to adapt dialogues to make them more representative of real communication will be given in Chapter 9.

This leads us naturally on to consider *discourse*: the combining and relating of sentences and utterances to produce units of language which are sequenced in a structured way. There are clearly rules and conventions by which sentences relate to each other and form larger units, such as a paragraph or a text. These rules are not the same as rules of grammar, and are the subject of continuing research. Course materials should, implicitly or explicitly, bring students to a point where they can operate in English above sentence level. In other words, the aim of a course should not simply be to teach the learner to write or say grammatically correct sentences, but also to develop an awareness of how sentences are organised together in English for communicative purposes.

A very good example of coursebook presentation at this level of sophistication, with particular reference to the development of academic reading abilities, is provided by the series *Reading and Thinking in English* (Oxford University Press, 1979) and in particular the third stage of the series, *Discovering Discourse*. Here students are taught how to recognise the functions of significant parts of a text, such as generalisation, description and classification, together with the formal features which identify them as such.

A description of some of the features of the organisation of English above the level of the sentence is to be found in chapter ten of *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (Quirk *et al*, 1972) and in chapter ten of *A University Grammar of English* (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973). Either chapter will repay study in whole or in part.

## Summary

Much practice material in EFL courses is tightly controlled and somewhat mechanical – necessarily so as learners cannot be expected to manipulate large quantities of language in the early stages of learning. What we need to look for in coursebooks is whether the practice material stops at the stage where language practice is there for language practice's sake or whether it is recognised that this is only a transitional stage before the learner achieves some degree of communicative competence: the ability to use language for his own purpose, appropriately and confidently.

In order to achieve a degree of communicative ability, the learner needs practice in coping with communicative situations involving the realistic integration of language skills and the development of cognitive strategies, e.g. how to deal with the problem of real-time responses and unpredictability in normal conversation. Communicative activities in the classroom do not have to be totally authentic, indeed any training or learning situation is to some extent artificially contrived, but they must be *representative of* and *modelled on* the processes that take place in real language use.

## Exercises and activities

- (a) Note the different skills and combinations of skills that you use in your own language over the space of a few hours. Compare your results with the patterns of skills represented in language production activities in your coursebook. Do you feel that the coursebook activities are a good preparation for your students to use English communicatively? (See question 5.3.1 in Chapter 10.)
- (b) Take a listening passage from a general course or a specialised book for teaching listening skills and look at the different kinds of exercises linked to it. What is the purpose of each exercise? Which do you think is most useful? (See question 5.2.2 in Chapter 10.)