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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the main emphasis in second language instruction continues to be on linguistic form rather than on meaning or content. In a review of literature, arguments are reiterated supporting the idea that meaning can be transmitted without having all the linguistic means of the target language at one's disposal. These arguments submit that first and subsequent languages are learned effectively only within a framework of meaningful use. The implication of "meaningful use" in the classroom context is then explored, drawing on transcripts of the language used in three content classes (history, religious education, and economics) and three language classes (one in French and two in German). Evidence suggesting much less meaningful use of language in the language classes is presented. Some of the problems arising in purportedly communicative classrooms are considered, and a possible solution to some of these problems, designed to be attractive to administrators and parents and to enable teachers and pupils to achieve explicit objectives of language syllabuses is offered.
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for language learning

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**CLASSROOM DISCOURSE:
ITS NATURE AND ITS POTENTIAL
FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING**

by

Seán M. Devitt

0 Introduction

Until recently it was a widely held belief that in the early stages language learners could not express real messages in the target language, simply because they did not have the linguistic means to do so. According to this belief, learners had to go through the process of acquiring vocabulary and the rules of grammar (especially morphology and word order) in order to be able to produce correct utterances. In audio-visual methodology utterances were learned as part of a basic dialogue, and to this extent were contextualized; nonetheless such dialogues were constructed to illustrate a particular structure or set of structures. Emphasis was almost totally on form, and accuracy of production was paramount. It was accepted as a basic principle that learners' output should be correct; and incorrect output was to be corrected immediately lest the errors ingrain themselves in the learners' subconscious.

In the past few years there has been a move away from such rigidly constructed dialogues and from overemphasis on form; nowadays the meaningful use of language is at the centre of focus. Learners are encouraged to participate in

discourse about topics of interest to themselves, to *do* things through the target language, to exercise choice both in what they say and in how they say it. Language teaching and learning have been brought closer to the natural use of language.

Yet in spite of greatly increased learner involvement in communicative language classrooms, and in spite of the attention that is paid to learners' needs and interests in the selection of the notions, functions and topics that comprise world-be communicative syllabuses, it remains the case (as I shall argue in this paper) that the main emphasis in language teaching is still very much on linguistic form - what Widdowson (1978) terms language "usage" - and that we are still a considerable distance from having genuine meaning and natural use of language in the language classroom. Language teachers seem to be convinced that content and meaning are subsidiary to form and can be transmitted only *after* the forms have been acquired. This preoccupation with linguistic form usually means that there is little if any real content in language classes.

In the first part of this paper I shall reiterate arguments used elsewhere (see Devitt 1986) to show that meaning (in all senses) can be transmitted without having all the linguistic means of the target language at one's disposal; that both first and subsequent languages are effectively learned only within a framework of meaningful use; in other words, that we are actually blocking the language learning mechanism if learners are not encouraged to use language from the very beginning to transmit meaning; that the learner understands and can produce much more than we suspect, provided he is working with meaning; that the "incorrect language" produced by learners is often far more correct than we realize.

In the second part I shall seek to explore what exactly is meant by "meaningful use of language" in the classroom

context. Transcripts of three "content" classes, in History, Religious Education and Economics, and of three language classes, one in French and two in German, will be analysed at different levels to see if language is being used meaningfully by teachers and pupils, and if so, how. It will be seen that in all the content classes language is used in a meaningful way, in spite of a fairly traditional structure. On the other hand, only one of the language classes shows any genuinely meaningful use of language; and despite its very interesting and apparently communicative nature, despite a high level of pupil involvement, even this language class suffers from a more deep-rooted problem which greatly diminishes its meaningful content, namely a basic lack of overall coherence and direction.

In the third part of the paper I shall consider some of the problems that have arisen in avowedly communicative classrooms. Finally, in the fourth part I shall offer a possible solution to these problems, along lines suggested by Widdowson (1978) but with important modifications which may not only make the proposals themselves more palatable to school authorities and parents, but which also go some way towards enabling teachers and pupils to meet some of the explicit objectives of language syllabuses that have hitherto been more or less neglected.

1 Frameworks of knowledge

In Devitt (1986) I argued that three different types of knowledge underlie linguistic communication: (i) knowledge of the world, shared in some way with the other participant(s) in the communication; (ii) knowledge of the vertical structure of discourse (following Scollon 1976); (iii) knowledge of how words are combined correctly within and across individual utterances (the horizontal structure of

utterances). I drew on the findings of language acquisition research to show that the third type of knowledge is in fact the last to be acquired; before the child learns how to combine even two words ("horizontally") it already possesses at least a partial knowledge of the world and a basic knowledge of how discourse is organized. These two types of knowledge act as the framework within which syntax is learned.

The following conversation, taken from Snow (1978), between an 18-month-old child (C), an experimenter (E), and the child's mother (M) was used as an illustration.

C: Bandaid.

E: Where's your bandaid?

C: Bandaid.

E: Do you have a bandaid?

C: Bandaid.

E: Did you fall down and hurt yourself?

(Mother enters)

C: Bandaid.

M: Who gave you the bandaid?

C: Nurse.

M: Where did she put it?

C: Arm.

The child is at Brown's (1973) First Stage - "one-word and two-word combinations"; in fact she cannot yet put even two words together "horizontally". Yet she takes part in a meaningful conversation with her mother. The shared knowledge of the world and the knowledge of how conversation works were both necessary for the conversation to develop; the conversation had aborted three times because the experimenter had not shared the experience with the

child. Once the mother entered, shared knowledge could be exploited and the child was able to conduct the conversation without difficulty. Although she could not put two words together horizontally, the child knew how to put them together vertically; her contribution is a fully integrated part of the discourse.

How did the child reach this stage of development? Bruner (1977), in a study involving the analysis of the interaction between mothers and children from three to fifteen months in the game of "Give and Take", shows how the very first stage involves the mother simply in trying to get the child's attention by manipulating an object in front of him. At this point "the burden of the exchange rests heavily on the mother" (p. 283). The mother's manipulations of the object are frequently accompanied by questions with a strong intonational contour. Over the next few months the child gradually becomes involved in the now familiar interaction, first physically, then with babbling, then with words. Bruner concludes:

The regularized pattern of a task within a format and its rules enable the mother to mark important segments or juncture points in the action gesturally and/or vocally [...] in time, the child comes to do so. An established, familiar context is then available for the child to first use his initial babbling sounds (as part of the action pattern), later his more differentiated vocalizations, and finally his standard lexical words - all prior to the "linguistic" period. (p. 287)

De Lemos (1981) details a series of similar phases in the acquisition of completion markers in Brazilian Portuguese as a first language. De Lemos (like Bruner) illustrates how the mother begins by "performing" the child's utterance. There follows a period in which the child participates linguistically in the interaction by incorporating the mother's utterances, in a reduced form [*bó*] which is the most com-

mon marker of completion on verbs. This incorporation by the child of the mother's previous utterance into its own "slot" in the interaction seems to be a regular strategy used by the child in order to participate in the discourse. However, at the point where the child begins to do this, the mother introduces a new element into the discourse - yes/no questions. The child responds by the same all-purpose marker [bó], showing the beginnings of independent contribution, - using the old form for a new discourse function. The mother then begins to ask wh-questions (who? what?), at first answering them herself. When the child begins to perform this new discourse role for itself, it does so initially by incorporating an element of the mother's previous utterance, but then moves on to contribute its own reply. De Lemos (1981, pp.63f.) gives the following "reasonable or plausible interpretation" of the adult's role in the first phase in similar terms to those used by Bruner (1977):

By the use of completion markers, the mother frames those among the child's behaviours to which *terminal points are possible to be ascribed* and *intentions are possible to be attributed* [...].

The incorporation of the child's action - *one person structure* - into an interactional format - a *two-person structure* - can, thus, probably be taken as having some role in the segmentation of events in the world and in the shaping of intentions.

The child is thus seen to move gradually from non-linguistic participation in an activity which is linguistically structured by the adult, through a series of steps in which both child and adult incorporate elements of one another's utterances in the discourse, to joint structuring of discourse with minimal but independent linguistic contributions from the child. Throughout this developmental period the child gradually structures both its knowledge of the world around it and its knowledge of interaction and discourse. These are

in place before it begins to learn the formal aspects of language, so that language is laid down within these two previously acquired frameworks. A child communicates before it can talk, it continues to communicate as it learns to talk. Communication is not learned through language, but rather the reverse; language is learned through communicating. Consequently we miss a major part of the picture if we confine our examination of the language acquisition process to the successive stages in the acquisition of forms - the child first learns single words, then two words together, then the means of combining words through morphosyntax.

Pupils starting to learn a second language in school have (i) a developed knowledge of the world and (ii) some knowledge of the vertical structure of different types of discourse. What they have to learn is (iii) the "horizontal structure" of the language - words, and the means by which words are combined to create meaningful utterances. I argued in Devitt (1986) that it makes sense for teachers to look for ways of exploiting the two types of knowledge that second language learners bring with them, rather than ignoring them as too often tends to happen. I suggested, for example, that second language learners are capable of understanding and even creating meaningful texts in the target language, even though they possess only minimal knowledge of the linguistic system, precisely because they possess two of the three types of knowledge on which linguistic communication depends. And I concluded that second language teaching, even in a classroom situation, can be made to promote rather than hinder the natural processes of acquisition of the horizontal structure, if the teacher and learner recognize and make use of the supporting frameworks of knowledge already in place. I should like to add further support to this position by giving some concrete examples .

Some twenty years ago Corder (1967, p. 166) drew attention to the fact that the language of the learner might be systematic. The learner, he said, was using

a definite system of language at every point in his development, although it is not the adult system in one case, nor that of the second language in the other. The learner's errors are evidence of this system and are themselves systematic.

Corder has generally been interpreted as referring to the system of syntax and morphology. He goes on to explain that what the teacher "puts in" in the classroom is not necessarily what is "taken in" by the pupil. Many teachers still find it hard to accept that the linguistic output of their learners may be systematic in any sense, especially at the earlier stages of language learning. However, the systematicity of the learner's language at any given point is now more or less universally accepted by researchers. Various terms have been used to describe this learner language. Corder (1971, p. 151) calls it "an idiosyncratic language":

It is regular, systematic, meaningful, i.e. it has a grammar and is, in principle, describable in terms of a set of rules, some sub-set of which is a sub-set of the rules of the target social dialect.

Others refer to it as an "approximative system" (Nemser 1971). The most common term is, however, the one coined by Selinker (1972): "interlanguage", which he defines as "a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL norm".

However, there is also ample and growing evidence for more or less invariant routes of development for certain aspects of language, especially morphosyntax and word order. In other words, not only is the learner's language systematic at a given point, but over time it follows a

systematic route which is generally the same for all learners both in natural and in classroom settings, a route that is not necessarily that dictated by the teacher. (See, for example, Ellis 1985, Chapter 3, for an overview of this research. Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, Hatch 1978, Wode 1981, Meisel et al. 1981, Meisel 1982, and Devitt 1984 all give details of this development for individuals or groups of learners in natural contexts; Ellis 1984 and Harley and Swain 1978 give details for learners in classroom settings. See also, however, Little and Singleton 1988, p.16, for a warning against overemphasizing and overextending such findings.)

But even before we can find evidence of a morphosyntactic system in the learner's output, there may be evidence of deeper, more fundamental systems. Much of what we tend to reject as output from learners may in fact be evidence of a quite sophisticated knowledge of how discourse works and of an earlier level of linguistic organization than we are used to recognizing. Consider, for example, the following "text":

Crow Cheese
Fox Crow
Fox Crow Voice
Crow
Crow Cheese
Fox Cheese
Fox

It is constructed with just four nouns. If you are familiar with Aesop's fable, you will perhaps have recognized the story after the first three lines: you will have had knowledge of the topic, a shared space with the writer. Whether you knew the fable or not, you will accept that the "text" has a certain structure. How was this structure created?

The different combinations of the four elements create

certain relationships. It is the ordering of these relationships that gives the text its structure. This structure is in two directions: vertically it is almost complete; horizontally it is minimal. To use Givón's (1984) terms,² individual words have been used to give *meaning*; they have been combined vertically and horizontally in discourse to give a message, while still not combining very well horizontally to form *propositions* and give *information*. The missing pieces of information are compensated for within the more global discourse framework. But if the text has vertical structure, what about its horizontal structure?

It would appear at first sight that we have managed to create discourse with nouns only and that we have bypassed the horizontal structure, the proposition level altogether. This is not quite true, however. What we have done at proposition level is to juxtapose words, much as a child learning its first language would do at Stage 1 (see Brown 1973, referred to above). We have used what Givón (1985) calls the pragmatic/paratactic mode of communication. This mode, he argues, is prior to the syntactic mode

ontogenically, diachronically, and probably also phylogenetically [...]. The two [communicative modes] can be contrasted in the following way:

Pragmatic mode

- (a) topic-comment structure
- (b) loose coordination
- (c) slow rate of delivery
- (d) small chunks under one intonation contour
- (e) lower noun/verb ratio in discourse, with more simple verbs
- (f) no use of grammatical morphology

Syntactic mode

- (a) subject-predicate structure
- (b) tight subordination
- (c) fast rate of delivery
- (d) large chunks under one intonation contour
- (e) higher noun/verb ratio in discourse with more complex verbs
- (f) extensive use of grammatical morphology

The survey of available evidence shows, among other things, that:

- (i) all complex syntactic constructions arise from the syntacticization of paratactic constructions of the pragmatic mode;
- (ii) children acquire first the pragmatic mode of communication, then gradually syntacticize it; and
- (iii) adults retain a whole range of modes from the pragmatic mode upward, and under appropriate conditions use them appropriately. (Givón 1985, p.1018)

Our text, therefore, has a horizontal structure of a primitive kind, as well as a fairly well elaborated vertical structure. How might the development of the horizontal structure proceed? What stages might be involved in the gradual *syntacticization* of the text, to use Givón's terminology? Possible stages of development are as follows.

Stage 1: A more acceptable paratactic mode is created by adding verbs and lexicalizing the remaining concepts.

Crow find cheese.
Fox see crow.
Fox praise crow voice.
Crow sing.
Crow drop cheese.
Fox pick up cheese.
Fox run away.

Stage 2: The beginnings of syntacticization: reference elements are introduced.

A crow find some cheese.
A fox see the crow.
The fox praise the crow voice.
The crow sing.
etc.

(The reference components which have been introduced operate both at discourse and at proposition level. "A" and "some" introduce new elements. Once the elements are

introduced, they are "known"; they must then be referred to by the definite article.)

Stage 3: The further syntacticization of the text involves introducing the elements of morphology, such as verb forms (e.g. *found, saw, praised, etc.*), noun endings (e.g. 's to indicate possession), pronouns, the choice of which is again at the double level of discourse and proposition.

I have tried by this example to show precisely how Givón's first claim about the gradual syntacticization of paratactic constructions in the pragmatic mode might work out in practice in the case of a learner of English as a second language. While the example is obviously fictitious, it nevertheless serves to illustrate that learners' texts may exhibit two important features which are frequently overlooked: (i) discourse organization or vertical structure; (ii) syntactic and morphological development at some stage along the continuum from the paratactic/pragmatic mode to full syntacticization. A positive and, I believe, productive viewpoint on the part of language teachers would recognize and build on these features. The negative viewpoint would see only those elements of the text which are not "correct".

Two texts produced by beginning learners of French are given below. The first text was the joint product of a group of four girls in second-year French in a Dublin school; the second was produced by a 12-year-old boy in his first year of French. In both cases the pupils had been given a jumble of French words derived from a newspaper article and had had to sort them into semantic clusters before being asked to create their own account of what might have happened.

Text of the 4 girls

James Dean Septembre 1955: Il habite en Bakersfield. Il aimé le cinema et à 24 ans Il a allé en Californie et il entré le cinema. Il astrès bien. Il ne porter pas uniforme, mais Il preferè blue jeans

et t-shirt. Les adolescents adorent James Dean et ses films, par exemple *A l'Est d'Eden* et *Géant*. Les années 80 le film "*La Fureur de Vivre*" tres populaire. 1987 dans le Ford Modèle 50 il a eu accident et il mourit. Il a eu trente-deux ans. Aujourd'hui il a symbole et célèbre salles de cinema et les adolescents et les adultes moderne aiment James Dean.

Text of the 12-year-old boy
Hasard de mortel

Le Martine et Jean-Luc dans un caveau. Commencer un glisser et s'affalser un caveau. "Il faut échapper" dire Martine. Voir homme vieux le glisser. "Il faut donner l'alerte" il dire. Arriver police. "Ils faut être mort" dire un. Enlever le police le glisser. Etre Martine et Jean-Luc être dans un état grave. Aller Jean-Luc et Martine hôpital. Ils être mort le lendemain. Le lendemain être ensevelir.

These two texts show the same range of features as have been noted for the Fox-Crow text above: (i) there is a clear vertical structure - indeed, we cannot but be amazed at the ingenuity of the learners in transmitting very interesting accounts respectively of James Dean and the accident in the quarry; (ii) the syntactic and morphological development is at different stages - the twelve-year old boy is at an early stage in the paratactic-syntactic continuum (roughly matching our illustration of a possible Stage 1 for the Fox-Crow text), while the authors of the James Dean account are obviously somewhat more advanced.

It is arguable that in this type of activity the teachers are creating just that type of context of learning which has been found for first language development - getting learners to use their world knowledge and (in this case) their knowledge of how narratives are structured.

In the early years of second language acquisition research, researchers focused mainly on the development of linguistic forms. In more recent times, however, they have begun to take a more complete view, examining language

development in all its aspects. The points made above in relation to the two written texts have been made by a number of researchers in relation to spoken language. It is worth examining in some detail one particularly interesting study of spoken discourse which shows minimal syntacticization, but yet has a clear vertical structure. A further similarity to our texts above is that the subjects of this study were asked to tell a story.

The study was conducted by Dittmar (1981). He examined how Spanish immigrants in Germany marked tense in a story involving dialogue which they had to translate orally from Spanish into German. It was found that on the basis of the data, subjects could be grouped into three major categories. Group 1 were those who used no tense marker; frequently they omitted verbs altogether. Group 2 were those who expressed the concept of tense either by *schon* ("already") or by a surface form with *ge-* (the marker of the past participle). In this group there was also a much more frequent use of verbs than in Group 1. Group 3 had a rule for realizing the concept of tense: an auxiliary or the ending *-te* on the verb or copula. Verbs always appeared in the utterances of this group.

However, a further analysis of Group 1 showed that while they did not express tense *syntactically*, they used other means to express time change or temporal relations: (i) adverbs or particles (e.g. *auf, raus, darüber*) to indicate an action or change of state (see Table 1, Speaker B, utterances 2 and 21); (ii) expressions such as *wieder zurück* to give past perspective to earlier utterances (see, for example, utterance 5 of Speaker B in Table 1, which indicates that the events in (i-iv) happened earlier); (iii) the simple linking together of propositions, indicating that the second one was subsequent to the first (for example, utterance 8 of Speaker A in Table 1, and utterances 21 and 22 of both speakers).

In Table 1 on pp.16f. the utterances of the two speakers have been brought together from various places in the article where they were used to illustrate different points Dittmar wished to make. The number in brackets after each utterance is that given to it by Dittmar in his article. The full English version of the text the subjects had to translate is given as a reference point and serves to put their utterances into context.

This example of the oral output of learners again illustrates the need for an analysis that takes account of the positive aspects of learners' output - or rather, that takes account of all aspects of learners' output and not simply the defective ones. Dittmar concludes:

The analysis of the oral production data shows that surface realizations in L2 [...] are governed by basic semantic and pragmatic aspects rather than by exact correspondence, meaning of the target feature, frequency of occurrence, etc. A pragmatic framework for the analysis is necessary for several reasons. One reason is that purely grammatical description is unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the data produced by the informants illustrate that they attach less importance to correctness than to communicative effectiveness by means of various verbal strategies. (p.154)

The examples given by Dittmar and the written examples from beginning learners of French provide evidence of creative and meaningful use of language with minimal linguistic means. They have a clear vertical structure, while their horizontal structure is in the "pragmatic/paratactic mode": the level of syntacticization is elementary, but the beginnings are there.

It would be very easy to dismiss these texts, both oral and written, as simply jumbles of words. Indeed, the immediate reactions of the Dublin pupils' own teachers was quite interesting in this respect. One threw up her hands in horror; another wrote at the top of the second text: "Still

TABLE 1 Utterances of two non-native speakers of German taken from Dittmar 1981

| English version of story to be translated. | Speaker A (Sp.21) | Speaker B (Sp.22) |
|--|---|--|
| 1: Carmen and Juan spent their vacation in Madrid. | | |
| 2 They were there three weeks | 2: <i>Drei Woche España</i> (14) | 2: <i>Drei Woche darüber España</i> (30) |
| 3 and visited their families. | | |
| 4 They spent one week at the beach | 4: <i>Eine Woche Schwimmbad</i> (15/64) | |
| 5 Now they want to return to Heidelberg | 5: <i>Wieder zurück Heidelberg</i> (32) | |
| 6 because Juan has to work. | | |
| 7 The trip is long by car. | 6: <i>Juan (es?) arbeite</i> (47) | |
| 8 In two days they reached the German border. | 8: <i>Zwei Tage (es?) kommen a Deutschland</i> (48) | |
| 9 "Please give me your passport," | | |
| 10 Juan says to Carmen. | | |
| 11 I have to show the papers to the border guard. | | |
| 12 Carmen looks all around the car for the passport. | | |
| 13 It's not there. | | |
| 14 She has forgotten it. | | |
| 15 "We can't go back," | | |
| 16 she says to Juan, | | |
| 17 "You have to work tomorrow." | | |

18 "We have to cross the border anyway."
19 Just then the German border guard
approaches the car.
20 He wants to check the luggage.
21 Juan opens up a suitcase
very fast.
22 The guard finds five
bottles of cognac.
23 "You'll have to pay duty on this,"
24 he says.
25 "It will cost you twenty marks."
26 "Do you want to take the cognac?"
27 asks Carmen.
28 "Yes, I want to take cognac
to my colleagues.
29 I promised them."
30 Juan has no choice.
31 He has to pay.
32 So they are able
to cross the border.
33 "Thank heavens the guard
forgot to check the
passports,"
34 says Carmen
35 "It's a good thing we
had the cognac in the
suitcase.
36 German customs are
very strict.
37 You always have to pay."

20: *Gucke die Koffer* (53)

21: *Juan Koffer gucke* (54)

22: *Polizei gucke vom Flasche*

Kognak (55)

28/29: *Sagen Kognak ... Kognak*

pa (bei?) Kollege (29/69)

31: *Du bezahlen* (77)

32: *Sprechen alle fort* (74)

33: *Immer Polizei niks gucken*

Pasaport (56)

34: *spreche:*

35: *Kognak Koffer danke Herr*

ich Kognak Koffer (38)

36: *Duani Polizei immer*

gucke (57)

21: *Juan eine Koffer*

22: *Eine Kollega Polizei*

gucke (62)

28/29: *Spreche Kognak bei*

dir. Ich komme Kognak (70)

36: *Zoll Deutschland*

nicht gut (51)

using infinitives!" A third, however, exclaimed about the first text: "Isn't that fantastic?" She had not believed that her pupils, considered by her and her colleagues to be very weak, could produce even two sentences in French.

The negative reactions were sparked off by the fact that the texts seemed to show little beyond the basic stringing together of a few words with no attention to syntax or morphology. Many teachers would be seriously concerned about the ultimate effects of accepting so many errors in the learners' output. They would feel that there was a strong possibility of such errors ingraining themselves and becoming fossilized.

The question, therefore, that must be answered is: How far can one go in permitting learners to express themselves in such defective language? How can teachers help learners to move from this paratactic/pragmatic mode to a level of syntacticization that might be acceptable? The answer is to be found partly by referring back to the child learning its first language. The child received the model of the horizontal structure, syntacticization, from its mother or caretaker, but always as an element of meaningful discourse. There must be discourse, and it must be meaningful, if the child is to learn. The learners who produced the French texts reproduced above needed to be provided with a model of the horizontal structure at this point, but in a meaningful context. In this instance the model was furnished by the original newspaper article from which the basic elements of vocabulary had been culled in the first instance. After going through the process of creating their own texts the learners found the original newspaper texts easy to understand. When they read the originals they did not work through them word by word, but got the meaning and reacted to it, comparing the journalist's text with their own. It is important to note that they were not disappointed in their own

efforts.

However, this activity was not enough to make them focus on the horizontal structure or even be aware of it. What they had been involved in earlier was the task of composing. We are not always aware as language teachers that this is only part of the process of creating a text - the most important part, perhaps, and the most difficult, but it must be followed by the task of editing. Widdowson (1983, pp.45f.) suggests that it may be extremely difficult to persuade school learners of a foreign language of the need for editing:

The first task in the learning of writing, then, relates to the production of text as a reflection of the discourse process. The second relates to the production of text as an acceptable well-formed artifact. Here again, I think, we have a difference between mother tongue and other tongue situations. The social pressure to conform by producing correct text in one's own language is familiar to anyone who has been subjected to formal schooling [...]. In the L1 situation correctness of text has the character of correct social comportment [...]. But in the foreign language these social constraints may have little or no force since they do not belong to the learner's own society [...]. It therefore becomes extremely difficult to eradicate those errors in written text which do not reduce its effectiveness as a discourse record.

The task may not be quite as difficult as Widdowson suggests. The authors of the two French texts were aware that what they had produced was seriously deficient at the level of morphosyntax; indeed, much of the discussion that took place between the four girls as they created their version of the James Dean story had to do with points of grammar and syntax. Their teachers, therefore, in both cases provided them with simplified versions of the original articles as models for the syntacticization of their own creations. These simplified versions were alternative (not necessarily better) accounts, and used the same vocabulary.

The learners were invited to edit their own texts on the basis of the simplified version and later on the basis of the original article. They were told that their final product would be used by other learners as reading material. The force of "social acceptability" was thus used discreetly to give them the motivation to edit what they had written. In the process of this editing they should have got a better (though still very incomplete) understanding of the horizontal structure of French. Their learning of the horizontal structure was thus embedded in a meaningful interaction with potential readers. These examples show that it is not impossible to create contexts in the language classroom which mirror the context of natural language acquisition.

To summarize: the acquisition of both first and second languages takes place within a framework of knowledge of the world and knowledge of how discourse is structured. It is not simply that these frameworks support the acquisition process; they are essential to it. Language teachers should take account of them in setting language learning tasks. To ignore them is to risk thwarting the language learning process. There must of course be a certain focus on the horizontal structure of language in the language class, but in focussing *exclusively* on horizontal structure teachers are in serious danger of removing the lifeblood from language. Meaning and meaningful interaction are essential if language learning is to succeed.

Note that the examples given here in support of this position have all been from a very narrow range of discourse types; both written and oral examples were narrative, for which discourse structure is fairly readily discernible. There are, however, many other possibilities for meaningful interaction and for the provision of input within the classroom which can provide the type of frameworks we have been discussing. These are the subject of the next section.

2 Frameworks of knowledge in the language classroom

If it is the case that language learning best takes place within the frameworks of knowledge of the world and knowledge of the structure of discourse, it is appropriate to examine in detail the context in which second language learning normally takes place for young people, namely the classroom. The questions to be asked are: What is the nature of classroom discourse? In what way does it/can it contribute to second language learning? What type of world knowledge is available/exploited in language classrooms as a starting point or as a framework for language learning? I shall answer these questions by looking at the discourse of classrooms generally and then considering in what ways language classrooms are the same as or different from other classrooms.

2.1 Discourse patterns in the classroom

The verbal interaction that takes place in the classroom has received a great deal of attention over the past two decades. The work of Sinclair and Coulthard and their colleagues (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard 1975, Coulthard 1977, Coulthard and Montgomery 1981, Sinclair and Brazil 1982) has provided some of the most interesting insights into this interaction. For the purposes of this paper I have chosen to base my analyses of classroom interaction on their model, not because it is necessarily the best, but rather in order to have a consistent point of reference. The arguments advanced in this section do not depend so much on the precise model being used to describe the data as on the comparison of different lessons described by the same model. There are, however, certain features of these lessons which models such as theirs fail to capture. These will be discussed in the latter part of this section.

Coulthard (1977, p.105) argues that the special nature of

classroom interaction results from the “asymmetrical status relationships” of the participants:

Verbal interaction inside the classroom differs markedly from discul-tory conversation in that its main purpose is to instruct and inform and this difference is reflected in the structure of the discourse. In conver-sation topic changes are unpredictable and uncontrollable [...]. Inside the classroom it is one of the functions of the teacher to choose the topic, decide how it will be subdivided into smaller units and cope with digressions and misunderstandings. (p.101)

The system used to describe classroom interaction was designed “in terms of five ranks, with each related to the one above by a ‘consists of’ relationship” (p.101). The following figure is used by Coulthard (1977, p. 102, Figure 2) to show how the discourse levels of a lesson relate to its non-linguistic organization on the one hand and to its grammatical organization (or “horizontal structure”) on the other:

| <i>Non-Linguistic Organization</i> | <i>DISCOURSE</i> | <i>Grammar</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| course | LESSON | |
| period | TRANSACTION | |
| topic | EXCHANGE | sentence |
| | MOVE | clause |
| | ACT | group |
| | | word |
| | | morpheme |

It is at the level of *exchanges* that classroom discourse has received the most attention from Sinclair and Coulthard. They found that, unlike normal conversation, where ex-changes might be made up of two moves, e.g. a question followed by an answer, a very high proportion of classroom exchanges are made up of three moves: (i) the teacher asks a question, (ii) the pupil answers it, and (iii) the teacher gives

evaluative feedback. Coulthard (1977, pp. 103f.) explains:

It is suggested that the three-move eliciting structure is the normal form inside the classroom for two reasons: firstly, answers directed to the teacher are difficult for others to hear and thus the repetition when it occurs may be the first chance some children have to hear what their colleague said; secondly, and more importantly, a distinguishing feature of classroom discourse is that many of the questions asked are ones to which the questioner already knows the answer and the intention is to discover whether the pupils also know. Often answers which are 'correct' in terms of the question are not the ones the teacher is seeking and, therefore, it is essential for the teacher to provide feedback to indicate whether a particular answer was the one he was looking for.

This type of discourse is almost ritualistic in structure: normally only very tightly defined exchanges are permitted; the moves of pupils are strictly controlled by the teacher (pupils rarely have the opportunity of initiating moves, for example); and the range of speech acts that pupils can perform is tightly constrained. This three-phase exchange structure occurs across the board in all types of classes.

I will illustrate this with an extract from Coulthard (1977) as well as from six lessons recorded and transcribed as part of a project for students in initial teacher training at Trinity College, Dublin. Three of the lessons in question were "content" lessons - Economics (boys, 18 years), History (girls, 15 years), Religion (boys, 14 years); and three were language lessons - French (16 boys and girls, 18 years; 6 years of French; non-native teacher), German (30 girls, 16 years; 3.5 years of German; non-native teacher), German (3 University students, two female, one male, first year, beginners. Native German teacher). The Appendix gives details of the three lessons which are dealt with in this paper.

2.2 Discourse patterns in content lessons

Coulthard's example (1977, pp.94f.) is from a Science class:

- T: Where does it go before it reaches your lungs?
P: Your windpipe, Miss.
T: Down your windpipe ...
Now can anyone remember the other word for windpipe?
P: The trachaea.
T: The trachaea ... good ... After it has gone through the trachaea where does it go to then?
... There are a lot of little pipes going into the lungs ... what are those called? Ian?
P: The bronchii.
T: The bronchii ... that's the plural ... what's the singular? What is one of these tubes called?
Ann?
P: Bronchus.
T: Bronchus ... with "us" at the end ... What does "inspiration" mean ...?

The following example from the Economics lesson shows a very similar structure to that evidenced in Coulthard's example (bold type indicates heavy emphasis):

- T: What are the advantages the eh Mediterranean have countries have in the production of citrus fruits?
P₁: Climate.
P₂: Climate.
T: Climate. What advantage do Third World countries or less developed countries have in producing goods?
P₁: Large labour force.
P₂: Large cheap labour force.
T: **Large cheap labour force.** And that is what they are ... that's their comparative advantage.

The three-phase exchange is not, of course, the only type of exchange that takes place in classrooms. It is most typical of the instructional component of the lesson, but there are also other components, e.g. a fairly important structuring or classroom management component, as well as a social component. Furthermore, the frequency and distribution of the three-phase exchange within the instructional component may differ from class to class. It is interesting to note that the Religion lesson showed a high proportion of pupil-initiated exchanges, with responses coming from other pupils or from the teacher. Feedback moves were almost totally absent in these exchanges. The teacher in question had deliberately relaxed the social structure, encouraging more pupil initiative in order to involve them more in a subject which was not an examined one. In the History lesson, which was dealing with Parnell, a very consistent pattern of three-phase exchanges was markedly interrupted at the point where Parnell's relationship with Kitty O'Shea was being dealt with. The initiative was taken over by the pupils and the exchanges became two-phase and the questions (asked by pupils, answered by the teacher) changed from being display to referential. Once the main line of the instruction was resumed, the three-phase pattern was restored.

While the three-phase exchanges may seem artificial if considered in isolation, nonetheless they are perfectly normal within the classroom context; they are a particular manifestation of language being used meaningfully within a certain social framework.³ This social framework and the discourse that it created in it are accepted as normal by pupils within our educational system and are, in fact, expected by them. Whether we approve of it or not as a vehicle for instruction, the discourse in many, if not most, classrooms in these islands is made up of a high proportion of these three-phase exchanges. Pupils very early on acquire a

knowledge of this social framework and of its appropriate discourse structure as part of the "hidden curriculum" (Barnes 1976).

"Content" classrooms, therefore, would seem to have both elements of the scaffolding required for language learning: knowledge of the world and a clear discourse structure. Does the same situation hold for language classrooms?

2.3 Discourse patterns in language classrooms

The following two extracts come from the French lesson and the German lesson with the class of 30 girls:

French lesson

(The teacher has just played the television advertisement for the cleaning product, *Mr. Propre*.)

- T: O.K. euh, les questions. 'Que le premier produit est meilleur de deux façons.' Quelles sont les deux façons?
- P: C'est plus frais.
- T: C'est plus frais? Oui, c'est plus frais. Et?
- P: Plus musclé.
- T: Plus musclé.
Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire "musclé"?
- P: Euh ... fort. C'est plus fort.
- T: C'est plus fort.
Plus ... un autre mot, un autre adjectif ... plus fort ... plus ...?
- P: Euh ...
- T: Qui travaille mieux ... Qui est plus ...?
- P: Effectif.
- T: Efficace. Très bien. Moi, j'ai essayé de faire la pause sur l'image, mais il n'y a rien. O.K. C'est très bien. Il est frais. Il est musclé. (*Falling intonation.*)

German lesson

(The teacher is dealing with car-repairs.)

- T: Ist gut na O.K. Auf Seite 51 und 52 haben wir zwei Gespräche oder nicht ... Ich bring' Ihnen ein Auto und wenn man ein Auto zur Werkstatt bringt, was muss man dazu machen ... Man muss das Auto ... Wie heißt das Verb?
- P: Anmelden.
- T: Anmelden oder nicht ... das wird angemeldet. Gut. Und was tut man dort? Was tut man dort in der Werkstatt? Was tut man dort? Man tut was?
- P₁: Die Bremse.
- T: Die Bremsen.
- P₂: Das Öl.
- T: Das Öl. Und?
- P₃: Benzin.
- P₄: Die Reifen
- T: Reifen-was? Nicht nur die Reifen, aber den Reifen- ... (*rising intonation*)
- P₄: Pannen.
- T: Nein. Druck. Reifendruck. Man muss alles eigentlich prüfen.

It is clear from these brief extracts that the same clear discourse structure is present here as in the "content" lessons. In the French lesson there were, for example, 125 three-phase exchanges, in the German lesson 92. This compared with 61 in the History lesson. These occurred almost exclusively within the instructional transactions. Within the three-phase exchanges the questions were invariably of the "display" type, where the questioner already knew the answer.

However, there is a notable difference in the nature of the display questions: a very high proportion of them relate to *form* rather than to *content*; the teacher is asking the pupil to display knowledge, not of content, but of the correct linguistic form. They are what Butzkamm and Dodson

(1980) term "medium-oriented" as opposed to "message-oriented". In the French lesson the proportion was 70.4% form to 29.6% content questions; in the German lesson it was 85.9% form to 14.1% content. This fundamental difference between "content" lessons and language lessons in the instructional components means that here at least one of the two essential elements of the scaffolding - knowledge of the world - is missing. Learners are not interacting about meaning.⁴

It should be stressed, however, that these language lessons, like the content lessons, had other components which were not strictly instructional. Some of these other components had to do with the management of classroom activity, where meaning was central; in these lessons they were conducted entirely in the target language (for example, *Auf Seite 51 und 52 haben wir zwei Gespräche* at the beginning of the extract from the German lesson above, and *Moi, j'ai essayé de faire la pause sur l'image, mais il n'y a rien* from the end of the extract from the French lesson). Of the 157 declarative utterances in the French lesson, 47 related to structuring components of the lesson and to focussing learners' attention; of the 123 declarative utterances in the German lesson, 42 performed these functions. Similarly, the teachers' echoic questions, concerned with establishing whether pupils had understood, were in the target language. In the German lesson the formula tended to be: *Ist das klar?* In the French lesson there was a long transaction in which the teacher and a pupil tried to establish exactly what the pupil meant by his answer. In all these cases meaning was central.

There was also a certain social component - greeting, commenting on the visitor who was doing the recording (*Il ne faut pas avoir peur de X; il est très gentil. - Er wartet auf einen Stuhl*), or comments like the following when the video

did not work properly: *C'est dangereux d'être professeur*. This social aspect was much more evident in the French lesson than in the German. In both lessons it was again conducted in the target language, and again meaning was central. In those parts of the language lessons where meaning was important the full support scaffolding was present, providing ideal conditions for language learning.

In examining the instructional components we have so far concentrated on the three-phase exchanges - teacher's question, pupil's response, teacher's feedback. If we look briefly at the declaratives produced by teachers, the vast bulk occurs in the instructional component. A high proportion (45% in the French lesson, 43% in the German lesson) was closely linked to the three-phase exchanges, giving background to or elaborating on the question, or elaborating or commenting on the pupil's answer, rather than simply repeating it. These declaratives could, therefore, focus on content or on form, depending on the teacher's questions. Where they focused on content they were providing a different type of linguistic input to the learner. In reality, however, it is obvious from a study of the breakdown given in the Appendix that most of them focused on form and accordingly are likely to have had little value as input.

In the language lessons, therefore, the focus on form within the instructional components far outweighed any focus on meaning. This situation has been found in other studies of language lessons. For example, Long and Sato (1983) in a study of ESL teaching in the US examined the form and function of teachers' questions. In the classroom corpus (six lessons by six different experienced teachers to elementary level students of English) they found a total of 938 questions; of these 34.4% were echoic, 13.6% were referential and 52.4% were display. They did not break down the display type according to form or content orientation, though

they suggest that the bulk of the display questions were related to form. They compared this situation to that which pertained in a series of interviews with ESL students conducted by these same teachers outside the classroom. Here they found that there was also a very high proportion of questions; however, in this case all but 2 of a total of 1,320 questions were referential. They conclude:

From the evidence here [...] ESL teachers continue to emphasize form over meaning, accuracy over communication. This is illustrated, for example, by the preference for display over referential questions, and results in classroom NS-NSS [native speaker - non-native speaker] conversation which differs greatly from its counterpart outside classrooms, even when the non-native speakers there are of equally low SL proficiency. Indeed, on this evidence, NS-NNS conversation during SL instruction is a greatly distorted version of its equivalent in the real world. Further research is needed to determine whether, as one suspects, this difference is important, and if so, how the interactional structure of classroom NS-NNS conversation can be changed.

(pp. 283-4)

Gremmo et al (1978) make this point even more strongly:

[...] when we analyze classroom discourse, it becomes clear that the very presence and participation of the teacher distorts the interaction to such an extent that it no longer provides even the basic raw materials from which a learner can construct his competence. (p. 63)

It is possible, however, to construct a different argument on these findings. Perhaps the problem lies not so much with the teacher's presence, or with the *type* of exchange that takes place in the language classroom, as with the *content* of the exchange. Language lessons differ from other lessons in that language is both the medium and the content of instruction. Much of the interaction that takes place in the language classroom inevitably focuses on language itself. For this reason real meaning is generally absent; or if it is

present, it is very much subsidiary to linguistic form. It is this lack of meaning that constitutes the major difference between language classes and "content" classes, not the structure of the discourse or the type of question deployed by the teacher. This difference may not be considered by many teachers of languages to be an important one. However, it arises from a more fundamental difference: in language classes focussing on form, the learners' knowledge of the world is not used as a framework for learning. This means that one of the two fundamental factors of the natural learning context is missing. The familiar discourse framework is present: the world knowledge framework is missing.

It is accepted as a basic principle of good teaching that teachers start from the point pupils are at. Boekaerts (1979), for example, stresses the need for teachers to analyse the ways individual learners in the classroom have organized their knowledge in a particular topic area; this allows individualized objectives to be set and appropriate teaching strategies to be devised:

The main emphasis throughout this chapter was put on individual differences in cognitive structure and it was extensively argued that in order to get a pupil to learn anything the teacher must take his idiosyncratic cognitive structure into account rather than try to enforce his own cognitive structure as a norm. (p.66)

In any subject area it is normal for pupils to be encouraged to relate the information they are receiving to their existing knowledge of the world, but this tends not to happen in language lessons.

Let us imagine that the Economics and Science lessons referred to above were being taught to classes of adolescents learning English. In this case we would have a normal, if restricted, use of English. We would have a discourse framework that was consistent, predictable, recurring with

high frequency - a clear vertical structure. As it is, the learner's knowledge of the world in general and of this topic in particular is a crucial factor in enabling the discourse in these lessons to proceed.

If language lessons focussed on content rather than on form, the learning context for the pupil would alter radically. For one thing, it would become much more like the natural context of language learning, precisely because of the concern with meaning. For another, focus on content would allow the learner to activate his or her knowledge of the world, something which (as I have insisted) simply does not happen in traditional language lessons. Furthermore, the pupil's own participation would be limited to short utterances within the strictly limited range of speech acts. Finally, as in the case of the discourse between mother and child, the horizontal structure of the language would be modelled naturally by the teacher at the very point where it would be most relevant to the learner.

There is, however, another level at which the language lessons differ from the content lessons. An inevitable consequence of the lack of focus on meaning is a lack of coherence both within and between lessons. Let us ignore for the moment the distinction made between form and content in display questions and compare the language and content lessons at the level of topic coherence. What were the areas of meaning within which the questions were being asked?

The History lesson dealt with Parnell's rise to power - the securing by the Parnellite Home Rulers of the balance of power in Parliament, his subsequent turning from the land question to the question of Home Rule, his growth in popular opinion, his use of the balance of power. There is a digression (started by one pupil) about his eventual fall, brought about by the Kitty O'Shea affair and the Piggott for-

geries. The topic of Parnell may not be such as to enthuse thirty 16-year-old girls in 1988, but at least the lesson is coherent. To a large extent it is involved with the transmission of facts - there are also some higher-order questions dealing with generalizations and concepts, but they are few and far between. The facts that are transmitted are all related to one another, and the lesson as a whole is part of an overall programme. There is, therefore, an internal coherence within the lesson and a coherence between this lesson and other lessons in the syllabus. The lesson can thus be said to have *direction*. The same was found in the case of the Economics and Religion lessons.

The language lessons, on the other hand, are markedly different at this level. The university German lesson began with an examination of addresses for letters; within this topic there was some discussion of town size in relation to the post-code. The second major topic was "rooms in a house" and included family members and their relation to these rooms. From this the lesson moved to "directions within the house". The school German lesson covered the topics of (i) cars, including garages and car construction; (ii) jobs - description of and application for; (iii) holidays. The French lesson began with the advertisement for the cleaning product *Mr Propre*; went on to discuss who the advertisement was aimed at and how it influenced people to buy the product; and then passed on to other types of advertisement, both commercial and non-commercial, in each case beginning with some time spent on getting the meaning of the advertisement and going on to discuss its purpose.

There is an obvious difference between the two German lessons, with their fragmented content and lack of clear direction, and the content lessons. In itself the French lesson seems to have much more overall coherence, with a single main topic, "advertising". However, the overall

French course is not structured around advertising or the media, so that this particular lesson existed in isolation. In point of fact, it was one of a series of lessons designed not so much to sensitize learners to the effects of advertising as to improve their listening comprehension, so that in terms of longer-term goals the content of the lesson was relatively unimportant. Furthermore, there is a real sense in which the lesson itself is fragmented: its direction was dictated more by the television than by any of the participants in the discourse.

To sum up: while the three language lessons had many very interesting components which could each be related to pupils' interests and prior knowledge, and while they were conducted entirely in the target language (except for some small elements in one German lesson) and were lively and up-to-date in their presentation (especially in the case of the French lesson), nevertheless in terms of their content they were all characterized by a lack of internal coherence, a sort of internal fragmentation, as well as by a lack of external coherence in relation to the overall pedagogical programme.

Is such external coherence possible within a language syllabus? Widdowson and Brumfit (1981) hint at the type of solution we suggest later. Having discussed the principles on which the elements of a language syllabus might be sequenced, they propose as a "cautious procedure" that a syllabus should have a *core* of structural or grammatical items, "recognizing that some parts of the syllabus can be systematized", and a *spiral* of "important but essentially nonce items" which cannot be systematized but which "will be selected as needed". Functions and notions are put into the spiral, as well as "items of appropriate cultural information".

The spiral thus operates as a check list which feeds into the core. The core has an internal structure while the spiral has none. Thus, it is

possible to sequence the content of the core, but not of the spiral.
(p.208)

All of this seems to run counter to the argument that we have been rehearsing so far, and seems to reject the possibility or need for topic coherence. However, they go on to say:

It should be noted that in the teaching of other subjects in the curriculum the core/spiral dependency is altered. In language teaching the syllabus core contains the linguistic structures for expressing the varied curricular content found in the spiral; in other disciplines just the opposite seems to be true. The core is the curricular content and the spiral consists of language-related ways of dealing with that content. *It might be beneficial, therefore, to investigate how language course design could parallel the core/syllabus relationship found elsewhere in education.* (p.209, my italics)

The argument so far has been concerned with showing that language lessons which focus totally on form are fundamentally unsound because they lack the essential ingredient of meaning. This lack vitiates the potential benefit of the clear discourse framework by removing its very foundation. Restoring meaning to the language lesson is essential if language learning is to be based on solid foundations. While the content classes were used as illustrations of potentially powerful contexts for language learning, it is by no means proven from the arguments rehearsed so far that content classes provide the only, or indeed the best or most appropriate, vehicle for meaning for the learner. That issue will be dealt with a little later. The point that has been established is simply that "content" teaching has many of the features that have been shown to facilitate the language learning process, and that we do not *necessarily* have to change the nature of classroom discourse or of the underlying social structure that helps to create it in order to improve the context of this process.

3 The communicative language classroom

The issues raised above in relation to meaning and coherence in language classrooms have been illustrated by reference to lessons that were fairly traditional in their orientation (though the teachers involved might not consider themselves traditional). How are these issues tackled within the communicative approach to language teaching, in which meaning rather than form is held to be central? To answer this we must first look at the basis of the communicative approach.

Wilkins (1977) distinguishes three types of meaning involved in language use: (i) *cognitive* or *ideational meaning*, dealing with propositions, "our perceptions of events, processes, states and abstractions" (p.21) - the "what" that is transmitted by language; (ii) *modal meaning*, which gives the speaker's or writer's attitude towards his perceptions; (iii) *functional meaning*, which indicates what the speaker is doing with an utterance - "When it is uttered, [a sentence] performs a role both in relation to other utterances that have been produced and as part of the interactive processes involving the participants" (p.22). The second and third types of meaning are sometimes brought together under the heading of "function", whereas the first is usually termed "notion". Syllabuses which take this analysis of meaning as their central organizing principle are termed "notional-functional" or "functional-notional". Communicative competence, which is the goal of communicative syllabuses, involves the ability to transmit these three types of meaning appropriately, using whatever means the language in question associates with each type. To this ability must be added that of managing discourse, or as Widdowson (1979, p.248) expresses it, "an ability to make sense as a participant in discourse, whether spoken or written, by the skilful deployment of shared knowledge of code resources and rules of

language use”.

In order to decide what notions and functions the learner should be able to transmit, it is an accepted procedure for syllabus designers to begin by analysing the learners' needs, interests and expectations. Yalden (1987, pp.86f.) gives the following list of components which must go into the make-up of a syllabus “if we now wish to make up the deficit in earlier syllabus types and ensure that our learners acquire the ability to communicate in a more appropriate and efficient way”:

1. as detailed a consideration as possible of the *purposes* for which the learners wish to acquire the target language;
2. some idea of the *setting* in which they will want to use the target language (physical aspects need to be considered, as well as social setting);
3. the socially defined *role* learners will assume in the target language, as well as the roles of their interlocutors;
4. the *communicative events* in which the learners will participate: everyday situations, vocational or professional situations, academic situations, and so on;
5. the *language functions* involved in these events, or what the learner will need to be able to do with or through the language;
6. the *notions* involved, or what the learner will need to be able to talk about;
7. the *skills* involved in the ‘knitting together’ of discourse: *discourse or rhetorical skills*;
8. the *variety* or varieties of the target language that will be needed, and the levels in the spoken and written language which the learners will need to reach;
9. the *grammatical content* that will be needed;
10. the *lexical content* that will be needed.

As is obvious from the terms in which this list is couched, the various components of the communicative syllabus should be based on an analysis of the learner's needs. Yalden is careful to point out that communicative requirements in the school context “could include both classroom needs (class-

room language) and those which may come in future vocational or recreational pursuits" (p.103). In other words, at least some parts of these components should have an immediate surrender value. Furthermore, needs analysis is seen not as a once-off activity, but as an on-going process of negotiation with learners.

The dual perspective established by taking meaning as the basic organizing principle of language teaching syllabuses and using learners' communicative needs as the chief source of information about which items to include has profound implications for the social organization of language classrooms. Sheils (1988) lists some of these implications as they affect the teacher and the learner. The teacher changes from being "the dispenser of knowledge, the one who decides who will speak next, the distributor of sanction and judgements" to being (among other things) "a facilitator of learning, a co-participant in the learning process" (p.3).

Learners are expected to take their share of responsibility for their learning, to negotiate and cooperate with each other and the teacher in selecting objectives and ways of achieving them. (p.4)

Texts (in whatever medium) will be chosen which reflect learners' interests and prior knowledge. Inevitably, most of these will be authentic, produced not for language teaching purposes but for real communication among native speakers of the target language. Learners may even be encouraged to negotiate about these texts and about the tasks associated with them. Grellet (1987, p.41) shows how learners may be allowed to exercise freedom in the choice of texts and activities. The effects of this change in social organization may even be seen in the physical arrangement of pupils: they will have opportunities for working on their own, with partners or in groups.

This new social organization must inevitably lead to fundamental changes in the types of discourse that can occur in the classroom. The rigid three-phase structure of instructional exchanges will be greatly reduced, and in some cases may even disappear. Pupils will have instead a much wider range of functions that they will be allowed to perform; they will have the right (and will be encouraged) to take control of the discourse. The learning of formal aspects of the language will take place within this general framework.

What we have, then, in the communicative classroom is a situation which seems ideally suited to language learning: the framework of world knowledge is present in that topics are generally related to pupils' own experiences; the structures of discourse may be more varied than in traditional lessons, but they are those that pupils are familiar with in their everyday lives.

3.1 Problems associated with the communicative approach

(i) Problems of misinterpretation of principles

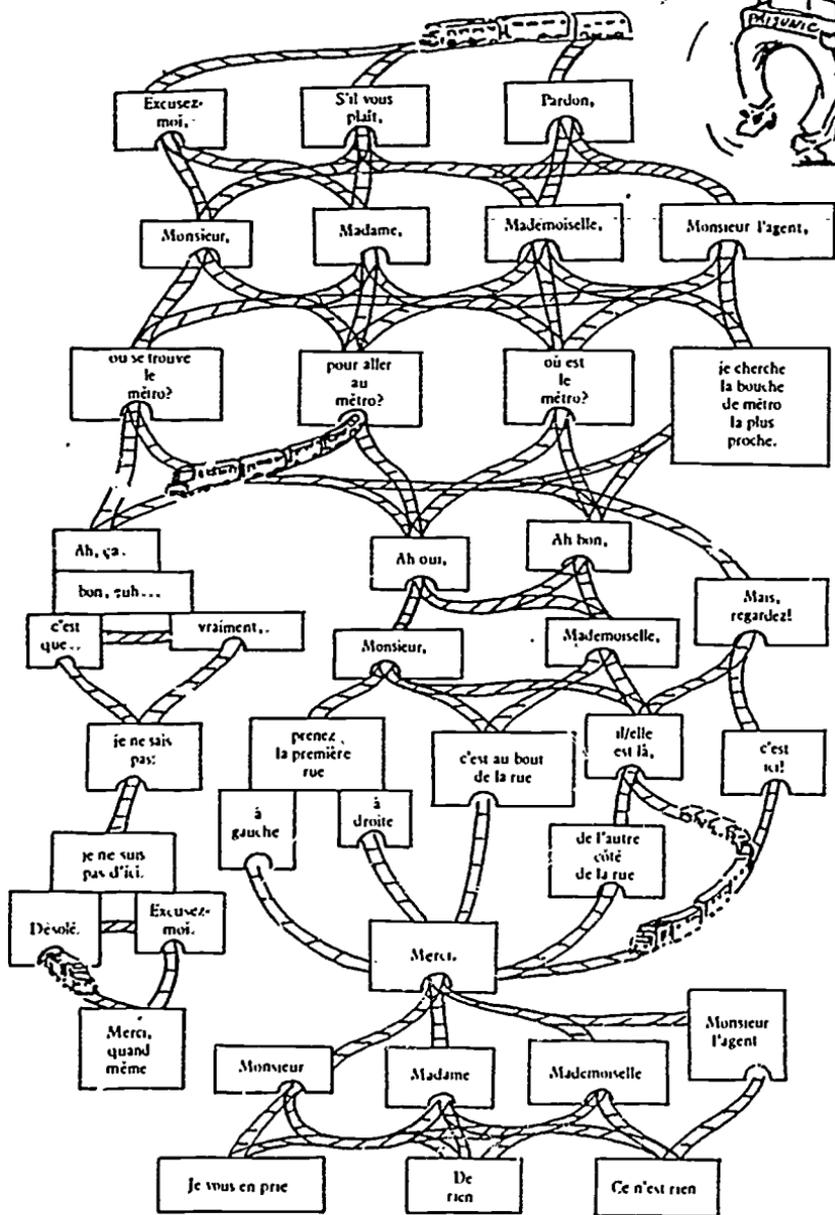
Does the reality of language classrooms correspond to these ideals and basic principles? Unfortunately, it must be admitted that in many cases it does not. There are a number of problems associated with the communicative approach as it is now perceived which can seriously undermine its effectiveness for learners. Some of these are the result of misinterpretation by teachers of the basic principles. What has happened in many cases is that teachers have fastened onto certain superficial features of communicative teaching without grasping the underlying concepts; they have altered their teaching to take this feature on board, believing thereby to be making their teaching communicative. Frequently they have been disappointed in the results and have been

tempted to reject the whole approach.

This type of problem is serious but can be remedied quite easily. Two examples will serve as illustrations. Many teachers feel that group work or pair work is in itself communicative, so that if their pupils are involved in group work, their teaching is necessarily communicative. But this is not so. Getting pupils to practise a dialogue in pairs or to ask one another questions is not in itself communicative. Pairs or groups are simply contexts in which communication *may* take place. It is the nature of the task that pupils are given which will determine whether or not they communicate meaningfully.

A second problem caused by misinterpretation relates to the use of discourse chains. In most communicatively oriented language courses emphasis is no longer on individual utterances and their correctness but on combinations of utterances through which learners can perform certain communicative acts. An example of such communicative acts might be "asking for and understanding directions". The schema reproduced opposite illustrates the range of possibilities open to learners in a communicative classroom in which pupils learn how to ask for and understand directions. It is taken from one of the most stimulating French courses available today - *Salut!*

The schema allows not just for different combinations of utterances, but also for choice of different levels of linguistic complexity and even perhaps for different levels of sociolinguistic appropriacy. The learner has an opportunity at each point in the discourse to exercise this choice; his participation can, therefore, be individual and creative. The underlying purpose of this type of activity is to give learners the linguistic means to participate in meaningful interaction or transaction. They are encouraged in the classroom to use such discourse schemas to create their own distinctive dis-



(Reproduced with permission from:
Salut! III, Unité 3, p.28)

course chains.

However, while this schema clearly illustrates a move away from preoccupation with linguistic form at sentence level, there is a danger that form may still be central - the form(s) of the vertical structure(s) of discourse. The pupil has to learn not the individual sentences, but rather a larger pattern within which there is a range of combinations of sentences. Even though these discourse chains are related to familiar situations in his life, there is still a serious risk that the different combinations will be simply practised in imagined situations, not used meaningfully within the classroom. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how it could be otherwise. If what the pupils are doing is acquiring or practising the means of coping in a situation that may arise outside the classroom at some future date, there is no immediate message being transmitted. Form, not meaning, is still paramount.

For this reason, much of the role play activity that takes place in language classes is likely to be only marginally more effective than its equivalents in earlier approaches. This is particularly the case where learners are asked to script their dialogues in advance, or are simply told: "You meet a friend on the street. Make up a conversation."

It should be stressed that misinterpretation of basic communicative principles is not confined to teachers in classrooms. Many course writers, syllabus designers, and examination boards have also been prone to misinterpret.

(ii) Problems in the principles themselves

There are, however, other problems associated with the communicative approach as it has been presented to date, problems that have to do with the very principles on which the approach is founded. These problems relate to the earlier discussion of the role played by knowledge of dis-

course and knowledge of the world in providing essential scaffolding for language learning to take place.

One of the effects of well-organized, task-based group work in any classroom is a range of discourse similar to the one that occurs in the learners' everyday life out of school. Learners can take the initiative, are allowed to perform a wider range of functions (e.g. arguing, suggesting, agreeing etc.), and are encouraged to manage their discourse. In language classrooms teachers seek to provide opportunities for this type of discourse with the wide range of functions to be expressed. It is believed that only in being *allowed* to do these things in the target language will pupils learn *how* to do them. It might even be argued that teachers are providing contexts like the one described by Hatch (1978), in which the young child learner of the foreign language gets "controlled input with vocabulary made clear from context in conversations with adults" (largely through wh-questions - "What? Where? What doing?") but the opportunity for a totally different type of discourse with a wide range of functions from other children. According to Hatch, the child has "the best of both worlds in terms of language learning opportunity" (p.153).

Learners, however, must have appropriate input at the right level of frequency if they are to master the linguistic means of expressing the different functions in the appropriate contexts. The input must provide information about the horizontal structure of the language, without which they will remain at the pragmatic/paratactic stage described above. In the language classroom the source of this input is the teacher. If learners are simply taught the forms in pre-communicative activities, are they likely to use them? How different will their situation be from that of pupils in the past to whom we may have taught correct past tense forms, for example, but who continued to use an infinitive, even though

they "knew" the correct forms? Simply teaching the forms is not enough; the functions must be performed naturally and frequently in the input - provided principally by the teacher. This means that the teacher must personally be involved in argument and discussion, disagreeing, criticizing, putting forward suggestions, to mention but a few items in a potentially very long list.

(iii) The reality

Evidence that this does not happen in practice and that learners have, therefore, great difficulty in learning or acquiring the correct linguistic realizations of "non-classroom" functions comes from a study by Ó Ciaráin (1988) of an immersion class in Irish. Ó Ciaráin examined the acquisition of the formal realization of certain functions in Irish in a number of classes of primary school children. The social structure of the classes was very learner-centred, with pupils performing a wide range of their general learning in groups. Ó Ciaráin found that those forms which showed development related to functions within the discourse which the children performed with the teacher rather than with other members of their groups. This discourse was in turn dictated by the social role which the child played within the classroom in relation to the teacher. While the social structure seemed to be much less restrictive than in traditional classrooms, the teacher was nevertheless considered to be central. In interaction with the teacher the traditional discourse structure was still found. The three-phase exchange might not have occurred frequently, but the limited range of exchanges related to classroom management which would have occurred in traditional classrooms still predominated in these classrooms. Thus in interaction with the teacher the child would never nominate a topic, assert, inform, etc.; he would initiate moves only in relation to functions like seek-

ing permission or asking for clarification. The result was that the only forms which showed substantial development linguistically were those which related to functions within discourse involving the teacher. The range of functions needed to interact within groups seemed to develop only marginally, remaining at a very basic linguistic level; sometimes the functions were performed in English.

Similar findings are reported by researchers who have examined the acquisition of the French verbal system in immersion classrooms. Harley and Swain (1978), for example, did an in-depth analysis of verb use by five students in Grade 5 (about age 10) who had been in an immersion programme for over five years. Their findings are summarized by Harley (1987, p.76):

Students appeared to be operating with one past tense per lexical verb, generally using the *passé composé* for actions even in habitual and progressive contexts where the imperfect was required, and reserving the imperfect for stative verbs of inherent duration (e.g. *être, avoir, vouloir*).

Harley suggests that the *input might not have been intensive enough*, and that pupils had reached a type of plateau where they were happy with their use of verbs in the classroom and had accordingly fossilized. She goes on to describe an experiment in which the input of the imperfect tense in the classroom by teachers was greatly increased for an experimental group. The results were that in the short term pupils in the experimental group showed greater improvement in their use of the imperfect than the control group, but that this disappeared after a few months and they reverted to their "fossilized forms". Teachers had apparently reverted to the simplified and restricted input which had been characteristic of their earlier classroom language.

These findings support our view that simply changing the

social structure of the classroom to make it more learner-centred does not solve the problem of how best to promote acquisition of the horizontal structure of language. The gradual syntacticization of the pragmatic/paratactic mode of discourse will only take place within those elements of language for which a model is frequently and meaningfully supplied.

(iv) Lack of pedagogical coherence

Another serious problem associated with communicative language teaching is the question of pedagogical coherence. The typical communicative syllabus says nothing either about the sequencing of elements in a teaching programme or about course materials. Rather it provides organizing principles of a general kind. The tendency has been for designers of language materials to organize them around elements of functional meaning, or around specific topics, or around both. It is common, therefore, to find courses which have units on "Introducing yourself", "Expressing likes and dislikes", "Talking about your home and family", "Asking for directions", etc. There may well be coherence within such units, but it is difficult to see what coherence exists between units. There is no clear direction. While it is true that such units may have direct relevance to the learner as an individual and as a social being, so that pupils can relate directly to their content, the question may be asked: Why this in the classroom? Is school the appropriate place for learning such things? (I am presuming that learners will be involved *meaningfully* in such activities as asking for directions or discussing what they like or dislike and why, and will not simply be rehearsing discourse chains.) The answer is: "Yes, this must form part of the language programme." The question to be asked is rather: "Why *only* this in a language classroom?"

This is also true of classes in which authentic language texts are used. One of the objectives for learners in communicative language courses is to be able to read authentic texts such as newspapers and magazines in the target language. Some very interesting approaches to the learning of foreign languages are based on frequent use of such texts, even for beginners. In Devitt (1986), for example, I have developed exercise models which help to make such texts accessible to beginners, and which at the same time promote the learners' productive skills; in other words, authentic texts can be made to provide the contexts in which the learner can gradually syntacticize his output. The illustrative texts I used were from Italian newspapers and dealt with an incident in Rome in which the caretaker of a school was shot and a number of children were taken hostage. However, the question may again be put: "Why this in the classroom?" Teachers have in fact begun to put this question. What is the pedagogical value of this largely ephemeral type of content? This can become a very serious issue when a whole year's programme is built around the use of such texts.

Wilkins (1974, pp.68f.) suggests that such texts might best be used by learners outside the classroom:

Once sufficient classroom time has been devoted to reading to establish a sound pattern of reading technique, the major portion of reading can be done out of class time, so that effectively encouraging reading is one way of increasing the pupil's language contact time.

Outside the classroom such reading serves its normal purpose; it becomes authentic not only in itself, but in the use that is made of it. The learner needs a wide range of authentic texts not only to provide him with models of the horizontal structure of the language - as Wilkins puts it (1974, p. 68), "continuing information about the grammatical systems with which he is already partly familiar" - but

also to give him information about "some of the distinctive characteristics of stylistic and sociolinguistic variation." This is a normal use of authentic texts, one that is very necessary for language learning.

This capacity to use media texts autonomously takes some time for the learner to develop. The classroom is, therefore, the appropriate place for him to get help in developing this autonomy. The use of media texts in the classroom can be justified on this basis. Furthermore, such texts can provide very useful cultural information to learners both about the target culture itself and about how members of that culture view other cultures. The question to be put once again, therefore, is not so much: "Why this in the language classroom?", but rather: "Why only this?" Instead of providing the core of a language programme, it seems that media texts can provide useful information, but not in a readily systematizable manner.

Language teachers and learners seem to be coming to a realization of this more rapidly than course designers. Teachers are apparently experiencing serious frustration in structuring their courses. Many of them (not always, it must be said, for fully worked out reasons) complain of the lack of content in language courses since literature was dropped or lost its position of central importance. Learners also seem to have great difficulty in knowing where to begin and how to proceed in preparing for the new-style language examinations.

What has happened, in my view, is that communicative syllabuses and the courses based on them have catered for the levels of meaning specified by Wilkins (1977), but only at the micro level. Functional meaning, for example, is well catered for at micro level and at the level of discourse; so also is modal meaning. Conceptual meaning, however, needs much more attention at the macro level, at the level

of the overall content of what we are teaching.

4 Towards a possible solution

The argument has already been made that content lessons provide many of the features of the context in which natural language learning takes place. There have been suggestions from a number of quarters that the direction language learning should take is precisely this: language should be taught through the teaching of other subjects. This is the solution suggested by Widdowson (1978, pp.15f.), though based on a somewhat different line of argument from the one put forward above:

The question now arises: which areas of use would appear to be most suitable for learners at, let us say, the secondary level, the level at which most "general" foreign language courses are introduced? I should like to suggest that the most likely areas are those of the other subjects on the school curriculum. It is a common view among language teachers that they should attempt to associate the language they are teaching with situations outside the classroom, to what they frequently refer to as "the real world" of the family, holidays, sports, pastimes and so on. But the school is also part of the child's real world, that part where familiar experience is formalized and extended into new concepts. Subjects like history, geography, general science, art and so on draw upon the reality of the child's own experience and there seems no reason why a foreign language should not relate to the "outside world" directly through them.

Ellis (1985, p.151) also argues that immersion classrooms, where L2 learners are taught through the medium of the L2 and where there is a focus on meaning and simplified input, show the strongest resemblance to natural settings. Krashen (1987, p.167) makes the same point:

Another class of alternatives to classroom teaching involves the use of subject matter in the language classroom, using the second language as a vehicle, as a language of presentation and explanation. I [...] mean

special classes for second language students, classes in which no native speakers participate as students, in which teachers make some linguistic and cultural adjustments in order to help their students understand.

Such programmes are not now uncommon.

However, the reaction of many teachers to proposals of this kind will undoubtedly be: "So what? Why teach history through French or geography through Russian? What is the point?" The reaction of parents is also likely to be negative. They would probably feel that the other subject areas are too important to risk having them taught through a new language, whatever the benefits for the language might be. These are very valid arguments. The teachers' reaction particularly is based on the same kind of reasoning being made throughout this paper: What is the point of doing something in a foreign language simply for the sake of the language?

The solution may be one which is so simple that it is amazing that it has not been put forward in a systematic manner before. It is one which can combine all the valid elements of Widdowson's and Krashen's suggestions with fundamental relevance. It consists in teaching (or having pupils learn) *those aspects of the culture and civilization of the target language community which have relevance to their language programme and to other subjects in their curriculum.* I am not suggesting teaching history, for example, in the foreign language class. I am suggesting, rather, teaching just those aspects of the history of the target language community which (i) are necessary for an understanding of the people and (ii) already form part of the learner's history programme. In this way the learner should acquire much information that target language speakers take for granted in communicating with one another and at the same time get the target language speaker's perspective on historical events that are normally presented to the learner from the perspective of his native culture. One might think, for example, in

the case of a Spanish course, of having pupils learn of the Voyages of Discovery or of the Spanish Armada through Spanish.

I have taken the example of history. This would, however, be only one of several components of the language course; others might be geography, music, art, civics. It is important to stress that only those aspects which are related to the target language community belong in a language teaching programme. But welded together into a coherent programme they would become the core of the language syllabus. The teaching of this core (carried out from the beginning through the target language) would have the following characteristics:

- (i) It would draw on *authentic pedagogical texts* for the different subject areas produced for native learners. These would not be simplified but would be supported by process materials of the kind used for other authentic texts (see, e.g. Devitt 1986). Pupils in Irish or British schools would, therefore, be using texts from course books designed for their counterparts in the target community.
- (ii) These texts would be used in a *genuinely authentic manner* - for the purpose of transmitting information, of providing the basis for comparing the target culture with one's own and of evaluating both, etc.; contexts would be created for pupils to perform an ever widening range of functions in relation to the texts and their content.
- (iii) Authentic media texts would be used as supplements to the basic pedagogical texts to provide further up-to-date information, to give differing points of view on issues raised in the pedagogical texts, and to make available a wider range of text types, thus giving learners more varied models of the horizontal struc-

ture of the target language.

The content material would need to be accompanied by the type of fixed support proposed by Little and Singleton (1988) - a manual for language learners giving information about (i) "learning in general and language learning in particular", offering learners "a number of strategies calculated to promote effective learning"; (ii) the specific "language system in question and the principal socio-cultural contexts in which the language is used"; (iii) "a battery of text-exploitation recipes designed to mediate between the first and second sections of the manual and the authentic texts that are our learners' principal input materials" (p. 20).

The argument for "content" language lessons may conjure up dull and boring history or geography lessons we have gone through ourselves in the past. It might be seen to lead to not just boring lessons, but ones in which the added difficulty of language will only lead to further frustrations on the part of learners. But this need not happen. Indeed, it is essential that it should not be allowed to happen. Language teachers must be aware that many changes have occurred in the teaching of other subjects as well as languages, and these would have to be incorporated into any programme of the sort proposed here.

Neither is there any suggestion that we should abandon all the exciting developments that have taken place in language teaching in the past twenty years. On the contrary; if what they learn in school is to be relevant to situations outside school, language learners still have to learn how to talk about their homes, how to express their likes and dislikes, how to agree and disagree. Not only is this desirable, but all the arguments that have been put forward for the inclusion of all aspects of meaning make this a necessary part of any language programme.

It is possible to combine all of the best elements from the

different sources to create a programme that provides the richest possible context for language learning. The components of a language programme proposed by Yalden (1987; see above, p.37) would remain the same. The social structure of the classroom can be changed to allow for the centrality of the learner in the learning process. The types of activities extensively illustrated in Sheils (1988) can still be carried on in the classroom. What needs to be added is a much richer element of conceptual meaning in the form of content related to the civilization and cultural aspects of the target language communities.

A brief example might help to illustrate more clearly what I have in mind. In a series of lessons dealing with the Voyages of Discovery, pupils would need to be able to discuss their own homes and their locality in order to have a point of reference for dealing with the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores in Latin America. Texts could be used which gave the necessary geographical detail for the first landings. Other texts would then describe the living conditions both of the native inhabitants and of the invading Spaniards. At early stages of language learning much of the information can be at a concrete level, allowing for frequent reference to the reality of the pupils' own lives. It is easy to see how one could move from basic information to more controversial issues. For example, it should be possible to provide two perspectives on the Voyages of Discovery, - that of the native inhabitants and that of the Spaniards - through texts from Latin American countries and from Spain. Alternatively, a teacher who wished to increase pupils' social awareness could provide the context for a comparison between his pupils' living conditions in the twentieth century and those of some of the less fortunate of their counterparts in these countries today.

This is a small example, but it should help to show the

potential that such an approach could open up. All the topics of interest to pupils, such as fashion, sport, music, etc. can be related to the target language community and to its history. Teachers would in this way be starting from the pupils' interests and knowledge frameworks, which they would go on to expand and develop in various ways. Such an approach would even give learners the means to probe the presuppositions on which their own culture and civilization are built. This could enable language teachers to do what all good teachers should do: not just provide facts and information, not just help pupils to develop skills, but help them to become independent, to learn how to learn, to question received opinions.

There are a number of possible objections to this approach. The first is: "Language teachers would now be expected to be experts in a much wider range of subject areas than the language itself." Why should they not be, when the content relates to the people whose language they are teaching? Most language teachers are already much better equipped in this respect than they realize. Future teachers may be better equipped still with the increase in the provision of "civilization" courses by university language departments as components of degree courses and in the development of interdisciplinary courses such as European Studies. However, just as teachers have faced up to the demands of communicative teaching and have where necessary gone to great lengths to improve their own linguistic performance, especially their oral performance, so it is likely that they will be prepared to take much more seriously the question of the culture and civilization of the target language community if it becomes central to language courses.

The second objection relates to the question of materials. A syllabus of the kind outlined here would require carefully designed materials, and a selection would have to be made

from pedagogical materials in other countries; these would have to be skilfully combined and sequenced. Advice would have to be sought from experts in the subject areas themselves and in the area of materials design for these subjects. This is likely to take a long time. If, however, the principle is accepted that this is the right direction to take, the work will simply have to be undertaken.

There is, however, a short-term solution which can allow us to begin the process of shifting the emphasis of language courses towards meaningful content. Even within the resources available to teachers at the moment, and without necessarily creating fundamental changes in the social organization of the classroom, certain basic materials can allow learning about the target language communities to take place naturally through the target language. Why not, for example, have a blank map of the country as a permanent resource? As a town, department, or physical feature of the country is mentioned it can be added to the map, preferably in a removable form so that the information can be reinforced or checked at a later date. Similarly, an outline schema of the political framework of a country can be prepared; it would initially have no names or photographs, but simply the names of, for example, different ministries. The blanks can be filled in as the information comes to hand from whatever source. This can be particularly relevant at times of elections. Other possibilities are the educational system - both the way education is organized over a pupil's normal period of schooling, and the way the school year, week and day are organized. It is important, however, to use schematic outline support material, rather than material that has been worked out in full detail; for this encourages the pupils to use their own resources to fill in the missing information and thus to interact personally with the support material. This can be a valuable exercise in autonomy.

5 Conclusion

Most language syllabuses insist in their preamble on the importance of the cultural component of the syllabus, yet very little is ever done about it. Even books dealing with the importance of the cultural component and how to teach it normally only suggest odd items for teaching through the target language. We need to tackle this fundamental aspect of language syllabuses in a much more principled manner than heretofore and integrate it fully into our language teaching. I would argue that this component rather than the language itself should form the backbone around which the syllabus is built, and that until this happens language syllabuses will continue to lack real substance.

In a world where language learning is seen as increasingly important for international communication yet increasingly difficult to include in educational programmes because of cutbacks and an already overcrowded curriculum, it may just be that a syllabus of the type proposed in this paper may provide a partial answer. Instead of trying to fit in a language course beside other subjects, it might be possible to include a language in the curriculum by teaching elements of other subjects through it, - but only those elements that relate to the culture and civilization of the speakers of that language.

Notes

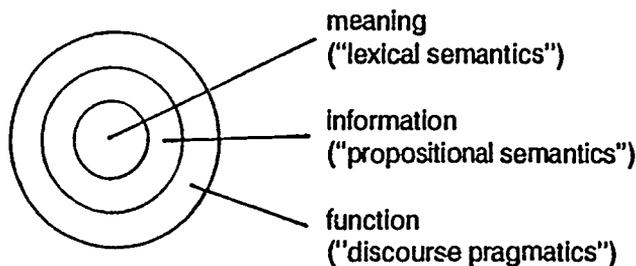
- 1 This is not the sense in which Ellis (1985) uses the term "vertical structure". His use is much narrower and misses much of the value of Scollon's concept. Ellis defines "vertical structures" as follows (p.306):

Vertical structures are learner utterances which are constructed by borrowing chunks from the preceding discourse and then adding to these from the learner's own resources. For example, a learner utterance like "No come here" could be constructed by taking "Come here" from a previous utterance and adding "no".

While it is true that one of the features of vertical structures in the early stages of linguistic development is that the child frequently fills its "slot" by incorporating elements of the preceding utterance (see below on Bruner 1977 and de Lemos 1981 for elaboration), nonetheless it cannot be said that either the process of incorporating utterances or the utterances themselves actually constitute the vertical structure. The child gradually develops an independence as it acquires the confidence to perform linguistically. When it finally creates its own utterances, it can be said to have acquired the basis of the vertical structure of discourse; part of the acquisition process involved incorporation of previous elements. In second language acquisition the learner to a large extent already possesses knowledge of the vertical structure of discourse. In incorporating previous utterances the learner is not re-acquiring this vertical structure, but attempting to use it meaningfully.

- 2 Givón (1984) outlines the major functional realms coded by human language as follows:

In a very definite sense, the three functional realms outlined above (lexical semantics, propositional semantics, discourse pragmatics) are concentrically hierarchized. One may refer to them in an abbreviated way as, respectively, meaning, information and function. Words ("lexical items") have meaning but carry no information by themselves - unless they are embedded within propositions. It is possible to characterize the meaning of words without reference to either specific propositions or specific discourses in which they are embedded. Propositions carry information once words are plugged into them, but they do not carry any specific discourse function unless embedded within discourse. And it is possible to characterize the information carried in a proposition without reference to discourse context. Finally, only within a specific discourse context do propositions carry discourse function [...]. This hierarchic organization may be schematized as:



- 3 In fact classrooms are more "natural" than is often recognized; the three-phase exchange occurs frequently in all discourse where speaking rights are distributed unequally - doctor/patient, lawyer/client, policeman/suspect, etc. (Little, personal communication).
- 4 This distinction between form and content display questions is not, however, always very clear in language lessons. In the French lesson, for example, the subject matter was advertisements on television, and many of the questions dealt with what was actually said in the advertisements. It is not immediately obvious whether vocabulary should be considered as content or form. In our

analysis such questions were termed "content/form" questions, but invariably the teacher seemed more interested in getting the correct word rather than in having pupils display knowledge of the subject matter. It is for this reason that the proportions given here conflate form and content/form questions. The proportions of the different types of display questions within the three-phase exchanges in the French lesson were as follows (total display questions: 125)

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Content | 29.6% |
| Content/form | 35.2% |
| Form | 35.2% |

In the school German lesson the proportions of display questions were as follows (total display questions: 85)

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Content | 14.1% |
| Content/form | 49.4% |
| Form | 36.5% |

APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF LESSONS

The "question-type" distinctions are based on those of Long and Sato (1983), their model is in turn an adaptation of Kearsley's (1976).

The "teacher's declaratives" are divided as follows:

- (i) those related to the instruction proper - what Ellis (1984) calls "core goals", after Black and Butzkamm (1978), subdivided further into those relating to the teacher's own questions, either giving background to the question or elaborating on it (DQ), and those relating to pupils' responses (DA); the latter are usually closely linked with the feedback move, but go further than the normal feedback, elaborating on the pupil's response, or commenting on it;
- (ii) those related to structuring activities - what Ellis calls "framework goals", again after Black and Butzkamm 1978 (ST);
- (iii) those that are purely social - what Ellis calls "social goals" (SO);
- (iv) those that constitute responses to pupils' questions (RE);
- (v) those that focus attention on the instructional activity that is to follow or that has just been completed, metatements called "focus" or "conclusion" by Coulthard (1977) - (FO).

Explanation of abbreviations

IRF Initiation, Response, Feedback

MOVES

C1 Comprehension check

C2 Clarification request

C3

MOVES (CONTINUED)

| | |
|----|---|
| C3 | Confirmation check |
| RE | Referential question |
| C | Display question focused on content |
| CF | Display question focused on content/form |
| F | Display question focused on form |
| EX | Expressive question |
| RH | Rhetorical question |
| DQ | Declarative elaborating on questions |
| DA | Declarative elaborating on pupils' answers |
| ST | Structuring declarative |
| FO | Focus; declarative giving focus to next section |
| RE | Response to pupil's question |
| SO | Social declarative |
| IM | Imperative |
| PD | Pupil's declarative, normally more substantial than simple response |
| PQ | Pupil's question |

TYPES OF TRANSACTION

| | |
|------|--|
| INS | Instructional sequence |
| SOC | Socializing |
| STR | Structuring the lesson or an element of it |
| T/EX | Exposé by the teacher |
| P/IN | Pupil-initiated sequence |

French lesson - summary of transactions

- 1: Structuring lesson; comments on pupils arriving late.
Frames used: *Alors..` Bon... Très bien, OK...Now...OK*
- 2: Getting vocabulary and meaning of first advertisement: *Mr. Propre.*
Frames used: *OK X 3 ... Bon.*
- 3: Public envisaged by first advertisement.
Frames used: *OK, bien... OK, now. OK*
- 4: Purposes of advertisements: commercial; other.
Frames used: *OK! X 2*
- 5: Advertisement 2: Children crossing road. Information and purpose.
Frames used: *Bon... OK*
- 6: Structuring next section; finding place on video.
Frames used: *OK*
- 7: Advertisement 3: *ANPE*: Information.
Frames used: *OK X 4.*

German lesson - summary of transactions

- 1: Structuring lesson.
Frames used: *OK, Right... Right.... Also...*
- 2: Parts of cars.
Frames used: *OK, right.... Ist gut.... Na OK*
- 3: Manufacture of cars, followed by resume.
Frames used: *OK, right....Right.... OK... OK, ist gut.*
- 4: Jobs.
Frames used: *Right, dann... OK, ... OK, right..... Right.*
- 5: Structuring next section.
Frames used: *OK, right.... Right.*
- 6: Holidays, sights, accommodation, activities.
Frames used: *OK, right. OK.... Right.... OK*

German lesson - schematic analysis

| | >>>>>>QUESTIONS<<<<<<< >>>>>>DECLARATIVES<<<<< | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TRANS IRFC1 C2 C3 RE C CF F EX RH DQ DA ST FO RE SO IM PD PQ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TYPE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SOC/ STR | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2: | | | 1 | 6 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | 3 | | | | |
| INS 24 | | | | 1 | | 15 | 2 | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | |
| 3: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| INS 12 3 | | | 4 | | | 12 | | | 2 | 12 | 8 | | | | | | | |
| 4: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| INS 33 6 | | | 6 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 22 | | 11 | 16 | 19 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | | |
| 5: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| STR | | | | 6 | | | | | | 1 | 7 | 1 | | 2 | | | | |
| [READING SEQUENCE] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| INS 23 1 | | | | | 11 | 9 | 7 | | 2 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 4 | | | 4 | | |
| TOTALS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 92 | 10 | | 11 | 19 | 12 | 42 | 31 | | 17 | 36 | 38 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 8 |
| | >>>>>>>125<<<<<<<< | | | | | | | | | | >>>>>>>>>>>123<<<<<<<<<< | | | | | | | |

History lesson - summary of transactions

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- 1: Structuring the lesson.
Frames used: *Alright.*
- 2: Irish Independent Party vs. the Irish Parliamentary Party.
Frames used: *OK.*
- 3: Explanation of British foreign policy at this time.
Frames used: *OK.*
- 4: Teacher's summary so far.
Frames used: *OK.*
- 5: Turning point in Parnell's career; he moves from the Land Question to Home Rule.
Frames used: *So.... OK.*
- 6: Parnell's growth in popularity; discussion of the National League.
Frames used: *OK..... So...*
- 7: Discussion of the Kitty O'Shea affair.
Pupils interrupt teacher and one another; they take turns naturally; they answer one another's questions. The teacher answers the pupils' questions naturally; there are no feedback moves, except in the two IRF exchanges.
- 8: Brief mention of the Piggott Forgeries. Parnell's use of the balance of power and his courting of the different shades of opinion within both parties in Parliament.
Frames used: *Alright.*
- 9: Reading sequences and questions.
Frames used: *OK..... So...*
- 10: Homework.

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