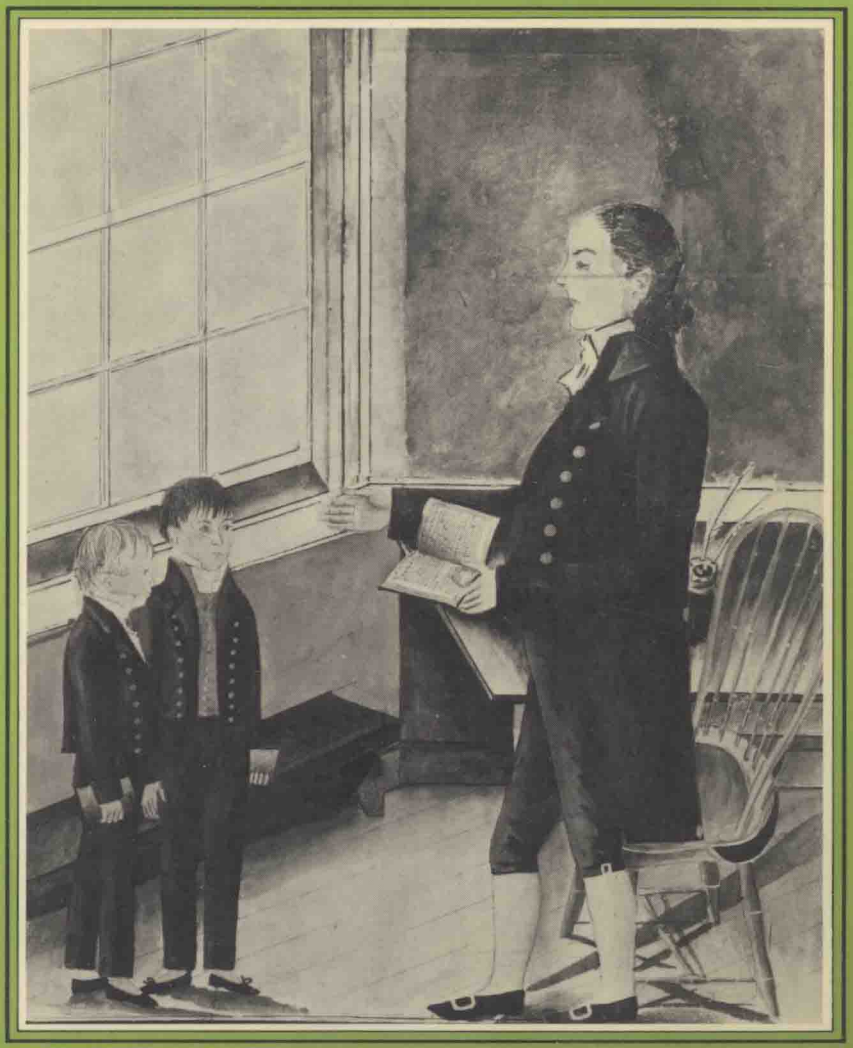
Michael Stubbs

Educational Linguistics



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The book is based upon articles which were written between 1979 and 1985. Chapters 1, 5 and 10 are entirely new. The other chapters have all been previously published, though some in rather obscure places; they have all been revised and updated here, sometimes extensively. The author and publishers are grateful for permission to reprint this material: the original place of publication is acknowledged after each chapter.

Notational conventions

The following conventions are used frequently throughout the book. Readers are reminded of them where they become particularly relevant. A few other abbreviations and conventions are introduced in individual chapters where they are necessary.

'single quotes'	for quotes from other authors.
"double quotes"	for the meanings of linguistic expressions.
italics	for linguistic forms; e.g. *feline* means "to do with cats" or "cat-like".
*asterisk	for ungrammatical, ill-formed or anomalous forms, which native speakers would not produce under normal circumstances.
Standard English (SE)	written with capitals, this is a technical term discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Contents

Relevant Models of Language

1

Introduction: relevant models of language for teachers

All the chapters in this book discuss, in one way or another, what view of language is useful for educationalists, mainly teachers in the classroom, but also researchers. I argue that there is much in contemporary linguistics, broadly conceived, which is of use in formulating such an educational view of language.

The assumptions of the previous paragraph are, of course, widely questioned. It is questioned whether any 'model' of language can be of use for such purposes: reality, it is argued, is too complex to be captured by any model, and it all ultimately depends on the skill of the individual teacher in the classroom. Many educationalists are certainly suspicious of linguistics as a source of understanding about language. I will try and answer some of these objections in this introductory chapter, and hope that the remainder of the book will answer them in practical detail.

Relevant models of language for teachers

Much of the work in this book has been influenced, more or less directly, by Halliday's work on language in education. In 1969, Halliday published a famous article entitled 'Relevant models of language', in which he discusses what would be an adequate definition of language to guide teachers in their work. This is a constant theme in his writings. In a more recent formulation, he discusses whether it is possible to give 'a succinct account of the essential nature of language in terms that are truly relevant to the educational process' (1978: 207). He argues that a course in general linguistics for teachers is essential, but 'not a sort of watered down academic linguistics course - something new, designed and worked out by linguists, and teachers, and teacher-trainers' (1982: 13). This theme of collaboration between linguists and teachers is central in Halliday's view of language in education.

Halliday's writings are in fact one of the most substantial bodies of work available on language in education. I do not have room here to give a thorough review of this work, although such a review is lacking. I hope, however, that this chapter and the book as a whole will provide at least partial answers to Halliday's questions above. He has also written (1978: 12) that it is a funda-

mental failure of schools not to recognize the relations between language and society and that the 'whole theory and practice of education' depends on the relation between language and people as social beings. One of his basic concerns in education is to extend the functional potential of the child's language. He sees the ability to control varieties of language as fundamental to education (1978: 28); teaching Standard English is teaching a new register in which the child can do new things (1978: 210, 234; and cf. chapter 5 below); and teaching literacy is also extending the functional potential of language (1978: 100; cf. chapters 11 and 12).

Different models for different purposes

Halliday also holds a functional view of linguistic theories: that 'the value of a theory depends on what use is to be made of it, and [that] a model is tested by its effectiveness for specific purposes' (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens 1964: 301), which might be machine translation, foreign language teaching, speech therapy or teacher-training. He goes further, however, than simply asserting the value of theoretical pluralism. He also argues against the wholesale rejection of everyday forms of linguistic knowledge. Linguistically untrained people, including young children, have their own folk linguistic models. These are one kind of model, are inevitably functional, and should be taken into account by linguists (cf. chapter 14). Halliday argues (1967: 2) that theoretical models are, in any case, less different from folk models than we would often like to admit. Halliday's main statement in this area is an article entitled 'Syntax and the consumer' (1964). He argues that since descriptions of language are required for very different purposes, different models coexist and do not contend for the same goal. Models can be evaluated only in the light of goals, and we can have only private opinions about such goals: there is no one to judge the judges.

The view that different theories cannot be directly compared with each other is a plausible one, although Halliday does not provide any very strong arguments in its defence. Clearly, if things are to be compared, they must be similar in some way. In fact, things must normally be very similar indeed in purpose to be sensibly compared. All vehicles are rather similar in the universe of things, but it still makes little sense to compare a bus with a tractor, or a family car with a racing bike. They must serve different purposes and are good at doing different things. However, we can sensibly compare the merits of two family saloon cars.

In favour of the view that theoretical diversity is good, one might argue that diversity is healthy, whereas uniformity inhibits intuitions, stifles the imagination, prevents speculation along different lines, and encourages unthinking conformity. Language is too rich, complex, subtle and 'messy' (Halliday, 1978: 38, 203) ever to be captured in a single theory. A demand for a single theory implies a simplistic view of the world, and we might not expect it from a linguist such as Halliday, who emphasizes language in the social world with

its social, political and educational implications. Such points, however, are not really arguments: they are merely lists of emotive terms such as 'rich and subtle' and 'healthy diversity'. The argument against pluralism also uses emotive terms. Rather than healthy diversity, one might see disarray, opportunism, relativism and compromise. Such terms, however, would also seek to dismiss a view by classifying it in a value-loaded catch phrase.

Halliday also points out (1964: 24), however, that the whole problem can be exaggerated, since there is a 'vast store of knowledge that is just linguistics and common ground to all linguists'. This has been demonstrated in detail by Hudson (1981), in his article on what all linguists agree on. There has now been 50 years or so of agreement about a 'core' of topics which must be included in any serious study of linguistics. This core must include phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics; the interrelations between these levels of linguistic description; and the relation between a language so conceived and its use by individual speakers or by a society. Linguistics must arguably include more than that, but the main point is that it must include at least this core.

Amongst many educationalists, there is particular suspicion of structural or formal analysis: that is, description of linguistic forms - variously referred to as grammar or syntax, but in principle including also phonology, morphology and forms of discourse. There is a fear that this represents a step back to a sterile and mechanical parsing of sentences, or to a formalistic kind of syntax which ignores meaning. There are two main answers to such fears. First, discussion of forms does not exclude discussion of meanings. Second, there are meanings transmitted by the forms themselves; by the way the content is conveyed. If teachers and pupils cannot analyse such forms, they cannot analyse many of the ways in which language is manipulated, for example, by the media. And important kinds of cultural analysis are closed to them.

This means that in the context of teacher-training, there is a major problem with the different-models-for-different-consumers view. It can be used to justify concentrating on the anecdotal margins of socio-, psycho- and hyphenated linguistics, and neglecting the central organization of language: grammar in the widest sense and methods of description and analysis.

Arguments against (and for) linguistics

Many arguments are in fact put forward against linguistics in teacher-training, and they have to be answered directly and thoroughly. There is no point in ignoring the fact that linguistics is now just as much of a turn-off for teachers as grammar used to be. And there is no point in talking if no one is listening. Some of the arguments are as follows.

1 'Linguistics has been no help to teachers so far.' This is a major point, since any attempt to introduce linguistics into teacher-training has to fight against a long history of promises and disappointments. The main answer to

this criticism is that past attempts have often been based on unsuitable, purely formalistic models of language which are out-of-date in theoretical linguistics in any case.

2 'Linguistics is too difficult for teachers.' This view risks being simply patronizing. Teachers are scholars and deserve to be able to continue their own professional education. On the other hand, there is no doubt that beginning to study linguistics can seem very daunting. The outcome cannot be foreseen and considerable commitment is necessary before anything worthwhile can come of it. In addition, it is only full-time professional linguists who could be expected to have the overview to select out what is clearly irrelevant to teachers in contemporary linguistics. As a profession, linguists have the social responsibility to make such selections, and to present the findings of modern linguistics in an accessible way.

3 'But simplified linguistics is no good either.' This, as Sinclair (1982) points out, is catch-22. If we simplify the product, teachers may learn without proper understanding, and a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, so it is better not to start at all. The logical fallacy in this argument was well known to the ancient Greeks. A more recent statement is: Even a journey of a thousand miles must start with a single step.

4 'Teachers are practical, down-to-earth people, who don't need all this theorizing.' Halliday (1982; 15) has dismissed this view as 'mental laziness': if teachers do not have a grasp of the general principles, they are condemned to mechanical copying, mistaking examples for orthodoxy in a myopic and superficial way. But this is partly an *ad hominem* (or *ad feminam*) argument. A more powerful argument is that all teaching is based on some theory, whether this is Piagetian or behaviourist or inexplicit staffroom folklore. All teaching is theory-loaded, and all theories are value-loaded. There should therefore be explicit discussion of what these theories are, and of what would be the best theory for the purpose.

There is also a much more general rejection of the need for systematic analysis, and this too needs to be explicitly argued against. Teaching itself is often seen as an intuitive skill, with each classroom encounter unique and not amenable to objective analysis. Even the possibility of objective or replicable criteria of success in teaching may be rejected. Amongst teachers of English literature in particular, there is the view that analysis destroys literature (cf. chapter 7). This view, however, is a rejection of only certain types of analysis, since it forgets that traditional literary criticism uses terms such as *metaphor*, *synechdoche*, *trope*, *genre*, etc., which are just as much jargon to outsiders, as are *phoneme*, *syntagmatic structure* or *sociolinguistic variable.*

The general point is that we have to deal with entrenched professional positions. All speakers have their own deeply held personal models of language, which the mainstream education system and teachers' organizations selectively develop. We are dealing with the practical sociology of knowledge. No knowledge is neutral, but is always interpreted in the light of already held

opinions. The additional complication with language is that the need for explanation is often not seen at all.

In this area, then, as in many others, a lot of energy is spent with pots and kettles calling each other black. Each side accuses the other of being reductionist, of simplifying things and ignoring what is really important. Educationalists accuse linguists of ignoring the unique social context of each classroom, and of wanting things neater than they are. Linguists accuse educationalists of taking linguistic features out of context of the organization of a language, and of looking for a direct and simplistic relationship between isolated features of language and sociological categories, picking and choosing features of language in a piecemeal fashion. (I develop this argument in detail in chapter 13.)

Further, the pots and kettles debate often hinges on the moral issues which are tackled. Teachers of English argue that a main value in studying great literature is that it introduces the discussion of moral issues, and thus leads to the psychological and moral development of pupils. But a study of modern English language and linguistics can also introduce social, political and moral issues (cf. chapter 4). Halliday (1982) argues in fact that linguistics is *uncomfortable* because it destroys fondly held myths about language, and *subversive* because it forces us to come face to face with unpalatable truths about social inequalities in contemporary multicultural societies. Such issues are not hypothetical, as in literature, but are precisely the topics debated by government select committees. They have to do with the role of English as a world language, and with historical and social forces on minority languages and dialects. Teaching a language or teaching about language is therefore a social and political act, and this should be explicit in the teaching. It has to do with changing people's attitudes, not merely with imparting another body of knowledge.

The merits of a syllabus on linguistics for teachers is that it can combine a discussion of social and ethical problems with a clear intellectual content; and not only a body of factual knowledge, but also a training in critical thinking and analysis. (It would be wrong, of course, to make inflated claims here. Subjects such as history and biology equally study the relationship between human beings and their environment, and train students how to weigh complex evidence in reaching rational decisions on morally important issues.)

Theory and practice

Much of the trouble arises from a suspicion of theory per se. But as Lawton (1981: 7-8) argues, teachers need to do the right things, to do them for the right reasons, to be aware of what they are doing, and to be able to explain to others what they are doing. If they cannot make clear to themselves and others why they do what they do, then they are condemned to unprincipled imitation. In addition, they will be unable to counter criticisms of their practice, and teachers are regularly under attack from many quarters. They will be

vulnerable to crude calls for accountability and for visible, but superficial 'results'. Some things *can* only be explained in theoretical terms. For example: Why were traditional grammatical parsing or drills wrong? How is talk related to learning? Why are non-standard dialects not merely 'bad' English? How does the English spelling system work? Why is oracy not parallel to literacy?

One of the problems in studying language in education is the wide range of types of facts about language which have to be considered. For example (as I show in detail in chapter 5), the concept of Standard English can only be understood by a combination of linguistic description (e.g. of its syntax), of a theory of linguistic variation (it is an intersection of dialectal and functional varieties), of the ways in which it has been deliberately codified and subjected to language planning over centuries, and of the political and ideological implications of its use.

Similarly (as I have also discussed in detail elsewhere: Stubbs 1980), literacy can only be fully understood by study from several different directions. We need descriptive linguistic information on how the spelling system works, and this requires technical linguistic concepts including phoneme, morphophoneme and morpheme (cf. chapter 12). Reading must also be seen as a psychological and perceptual process. But it must also be seen sociolinguistically, as an activity which has different social functions in different social groups (cf. chapter 11). And it must be seen ideologically as part of the social practices by which social control is maintained. Street (1985) provides a particularly clear discussion of the differences between a view of literacy as a neutral technology or skill, and a view of literacy as a set of concrete social practices which are understandable only within political and institutional settings. He also points out that a linguistic approach might be thought superficially to support the 'technical' model, although in fact it undermines it. My only criticism of Street is that he neglects the more technical aspects of speech-writing relations. Both the technical and the ideological understanding is required.

I think it is possible to show that any linguistic topic of interest to educationalists must be approached in three ways, which we can crudely label for initial convenience as: description, theory and practice. Here are some further examples.

1 Suppose our general area of interest is *regional and social dialects*. First, we require descriptive information; for example, how exactly they differ from Standard English. Second, we require a theory of how dialects relate to social class or ethnic group and to speakers' identities. And third, we need to discuss what account educational policy should take of such dialect diversity: for example, what is the role of dialect, if any, in the classroom?

2 Or suppose our interest is in the *ethnic minority languages* spoken in the UK. We need descriptive information about the language actually used by speakers: for example, on code-switching or language mixtures. We need information on who speaks which languages, and theories of bi- and multi-

lingualism: for example, whether it affects cognitive development. And we need to know what practical provision to make for teaching English as a second language or teaching the ethnic community languages.

3 Or suppose our interest is in *child language acquisition.* We require descriptions of the difference between children's and adults' language. We require theories of how children acquire language: is it basically genetically programmed or environmentally determined? And we need to know how all this relates to policies of teaching English as a mother tongue in schools, or to the language of school subjects more generally.

My claim is that any topic concerning language in education must logically be approached from at least these three points of view. Description and theory are interdependent. Both must be formulated with the educational practitioner in mind. But also practical planning and policy are untrustworthy, if they are not firmly based on systematic information.

In chapter 4, I have developed this three-way division into a way of organizing a whole syllabus on English language, and have given many more examples and illustrations. The main points here are as follows. By the shorthand term *description,* I mean ways of analysing any piece of actual language in use: educationalists require ways of commenting systematically on the linguistic forms which occur in any piece of language they come across. By *theory* (even more shorthand), I mean theory of linguistic variation: what kinds of diversity are expected in languages, their correlation with social class and other social groups. Basically we require a theory of the relation between language and human beings in society. Both description and theory should be non-prescriptive. They describe people's linguistic behaviour, without trying to prescribe what people ought to do. By *practice,* I mean here applied policy-making at all institutional levels, including governments, publishers, educational systems and ultimately individual classrooms. Here, any discussion is inherently prescriptive: but it should be *informed prescriptivism,* based on the preceding description and theory.

Each of these three main divisions can of course be discussed at much greater length. For example, in chapter 2 I begin to develop what a descriptive sociolinguistic theory of language variation would have to look like. It would have to distinguish between dialects and diatypes (varieties of language defined according to use). For example, regional and social dialects are spoken in different geographical regions and by different social groups. Diatypes vary according to the use of language in formal or informal settings, as in writing or speech.

Cultural analysis

I do not intend to imply in any of the above that it is possible to have pure description which is independent of theoretical or ideological assumptions. I have phrased things in the way I have, however, because the opposite danger

is too evident in education: there is ideological discussion with no attempt to provide the descriptive basis for it.

I would take the view that all educational research is, and all school curricula should be, forms of cultural analysis, and are therefore inherently ideological. This view is developed very clearly by Lawton (1983). Most of this chapter has been about the knowledge which *teachers* should have about language. But this knowledge can be the basis of what teachers select for their *pupils*. Lawton argues that a school curriculum is a selection from a culture, and that it should contribute to pupils' understanding of social norms and practices: for example, the social, economic, moral and belief systems of the culture. Clearly an ability to analyse linguistic and other communication systems is central to understanding the society in which we live, the ways in which it is run, and its dominant social and political values. (Cf. especially chapters 4 and 5).

There is one common confusion here. Teachers who raise such ideological issues with their pupils are often accused of political bias or indoctrination. This is a basic misunderstanding. Teachers who give their pupils the methods to understand better the culture in which they live are giving their pupils the tools to make their own analyses and arrive at their own interpretations. It is teachers who do not question the status quo who are biased. They take for granted the present order, as though it was 'natural' or inevitable, with no possibility of change, and as though it was possible to report things neutrally. Pupils must be given the analytic tools to analyse purportedly 'neutral' reporting and to analyse the ways in which reality is socially constructed. This is why they must be able to analyse forms of language as well as content.

The aims of this book

My aims in this book are therefore as follows. First, to provide descriptive information and precise ways of talking about aspects of language which are of interest to educationalists. Examples which I discuss in detail include: the English spelling system; the vocabulary of English; the syntax of Standard and Non-standard English; the semantic and pragmatic organization of casual conversation, literary language and the discourse of language-disordered children.

Second, to provide concepts for discussing variation within language and the relation between such variation and language use. I discuss in particular: dialectal versus diatypic variation; standard versus non-standard language; written versus spoken language.

Third, to show how such descriptive and theoretical discussion can be of practical value to teachers. I discuss in particular: the planning of a school syllabus in English language; the teaching of literature; the teaching of spelling; the place of Standard English in schools; the diagnosis of children with language disorders. I do not, of course, claim to discuss any of these topics exhaustively. However, I do try to show, with reference to detailed examples,

how systematic description and theory can provide a principled basis for school curricula and classroom lessons; and therefore to show with reference to particular examples how classroom lessons can be based firmly on theory, while remaining eminently practical.

Fourth, to discuss the ideological implications of the description, theory and practice, and to show how an understanding of language variation can contribute to a cultural analysis of the society in which the teachers and pupils live. Topics which I discuss in some detail here include: the role of English as an international language; the nature of literacy; the role of Standard English in maintaining the dominant social and political values of society.

FURTHER READING

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978) *Language as Social Semiotic*. London: Edward Arnold.

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2

Understanding language and language diversity: what teachers should know about educational linguistics

Introduction

This chapter develops several of the ideas introduced in chapter 1 about a relevant model of language for teachers, and proposes several ways of organizing people's thinking about language. It provides ways of thinking about language diversity: both the range of languages and dialects used within Britain; and also the range of language varieties, dialects and styles used within English. It also begins to discuss a way of analysing the central linguistic organization of English.

Teachers and (other) experts

Teachers must often feel that they are under siege from academic experts on all sides, and that they are expected to assimilate an increasing amount of knowledge quite apart from the actual subjects that they teach. They are increasingly expected to know about different methods of teaching and examining, about the physical and psychological development of children, about the effects of social class or ethnic group on educational attainment, and so on. As well as all this knowledge about pedagogy, educational psychology and educational sociology, they are also increasingly expected to know about educational linguistics. Ideally, all teachers (not only teachers of English or foreign languages) should know a great deal about language, since all teachers in contemporary Britain, America and elsewhere constantly come up against problems in at least some of the following areas: child language acquisition, including pathological language development; literacy, including teaching reading, writing and spelling; non-standard dialects in the classroom; immigrant languages, and therefore teaching and testing English as a foreign or second language. They ought, ideally, to be informed about the current debates over language deprivation, language across the curriculum, community languages in schools, and so on.