

Foreign/Second Language Pedagogy Research

Edited by Robert Phillipson,
Eric Kellerman, Larry Selinker,
Mike Sharwood Smith and
Merrill Swain

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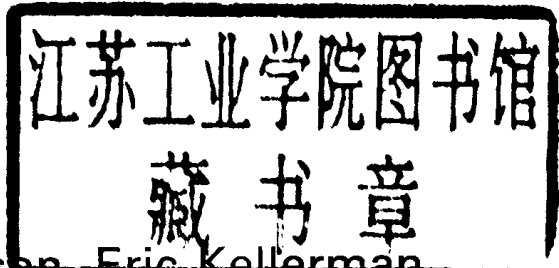
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A Commemorative
Volume for
Claus Færch

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Claus Færch 1948–1987

ROBERT PHILLIPSON, ERIC KELLERMAN, LARRY SELINKER, MICHAEL SHARWOOD SMITH AND MERRILL SWAIN

The focus of this book is on foreign and second language pedagogy research, a field to which Claus Færch made a lasting contribution. Claus's influence was widespread: the articles have been written as a tribute to his memory by colleagues and friends in his home country, Denmark, in the rest of Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden) and Finland, in Great Britain, Holland and the Federal Republic of Germany, in Canada, the USA, and Israel. Professionally these scholars span a range of interests: applied linguistics, second language acquisition, foreign language pedagogy (on the second/foreign distinction, see Phillipson's article in Section One of this volume), psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics. Some are more concerned with theory, others with teacher training, but most strive to integrate theory with the promotion of good language learning. Some are immigrants, operating daily in a second language; others come from the dominant group in their country of residence: of these, some are concerned with the teaching and learning of their mother tongue, while others teach foreign languages. What brings them together is an urge to celebrate a scholar who contributed in his brief life to all the areas already mentioned. The result is a work which offers a rich distillation of studies in the wide field of foreign and second language learning.

The introductions to each of the five sections which make up the book present the articles in that section and relate them to Claus Færch's contribution to the areas in question. With the exception of the first section, which brings together a set of articles on applied linguistics in a historical perspective, these represent the main areas in which Claus worked, namely learner language, learning processes and strategies, classroom research, and pragmatics. (There is a complete list of Claus's publications at the end of the book.) The purpose of this general

introduction is to present a brief outline of why scholars interested in second and foreign language learning and teaching can learn from Claus's example.

Claus was a dedicated researcher, a constant source of inspiration to colleagues and students at the English Department of the University of Copenhagen, to many schoolteachers, and to the international scientific community. He was also a pedagogue in the best sense of the term, in consonance with the original Greek meaning — someone who is responsible for the young and teaches them. It so happens that the Danish cognate 'pædagog' has none of the pejorative connotations, of pedantry or dogmatism, which the English word sometimes has.

Claus wished to relate the study of English at Copenhagen University more closely to the reality of the school classrooms that most graduates would spend their working lives in. This position represented a radical break with the philological-literary tradition which held sway at universities in Denmark until the 1970s. The PIF project (Project in Foreign language pedagogy), to which most of Claus's publications and teaching were originally linked, involved teamwork between researchers, students, and practising language teachers. Each contributed in all the main phases of the work, from the conceptualisation of the problems to be researched to the practical follow-up of research results. The ongoing research was integrally linked to activities ranging from the pre-service and in-service training of teachers to international collaboration with scholars working on related topics. Claus was a model researcher and pedagogue in that he made a productive, creative impact on many people.

As someone interested in theory, he was rigorous in pursuing scientific quality. What one can demand of valid theory has recently been analysed by McLaughlin (1987: 18) in relation to current work in second-language learning:

Good theories fit the data well, are consistent with related formulations, and clear in their predictions, and are heuristically rich. Perhaps most important of all, they are capable of disconfirmation.

Because of the relatively crude state of scientific knowledge and methodology in the area of foreign language pedagogy research in the mid-1970s, the empirical work of the PIF project on the learning of English by Danes was launched before an adequate theoretical framework had been evolved. However, the project was sufficiently explicit methodologically and well conceived to permit valid analysis of a range of parameters, some traditional (lexis, syntax and phonology), some more innovative (particularly communication strategies and pragmatics). This

formative phase of Claus's career could be described as fitting into the pattern of 'research-then-theory' (Long, 1985). However, as Claus's development as a researcher indicates, for instance in the first major products, *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication* (Færch & Kasper, 1983b) and *Learner Language and Language Learning* (Færch, Hastrup & Phillipson, 1984), he was deeply involved in theory development as well as empirical research. His work thus embodied the merging of empirical research and theory that Lightbown's survey of the field regards as the optimal blend (1987b: 137).

McLaughlin's prescriptions for scientific scholarship tally closely with Gabriele Kasper's description of what it was like to work closely with Claus:

His thinking was creative and systematic, analytic and integrative. He was good at spotting the weaknesses in his fellow researchers' work and formulating his criticism constructively and gently. He was a willing listener to criticism of his own work and profited from the suggestions made by others. He was sceptical of easy solutions and willing to develop and accept new insights. (*In memoriam*, in Færch & Kasper, 1987a).

As someone interested in the practice of teaching and learning, Claus was fully aware of the fragmentary state of scientifically founded knowledge in the area, despite the advances in linguistics, psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology of recent decades. We can refer to McLaughlin (1987) again, in the concluding remarks to his book, in relation to the application of research findings:

At this point, research and theory cannot act as sources of prescriptions about teaching procedures. There are still too many gaps in our knowledge, especially of individual difference variables and social factors that play important roles in classroom practice. This is not to deny the potential relevance of theory and research for second-language teaching. Ultimately, teaching benefits by sound understanding of the processes involved in second-language learning. (McLaughlin, 1987: 165).

Claus did not wish to 'prescribe teaching procedures', but he did want teachers and student teachers to have a questioning attitude to what took place in classrooms, and to benefit from theory of whatever origin, educational, psychological or linguistic. His research was motivated by an intense urge to shed light on the complex processes of language learning and thereby to contribute to more successful language learning experiences. The topics he chose to investigate in a theoretically informed

way were central to the practice of language learning, meaning that he always had a ready audience of practitioners anxious to subject their current 'teaching procedures' to scrutiny. As the research evolved in interaction with classroom learners and teachers, there was never any risk that Claus's research would not be of immediate relevance to the language teaching profession. This does not in any way imply that the relationship between theoretically explicit research and educational practice is a simple or direct one.

Lightbown (1987b: 138) stresses that adequate theories of language acquisition must draw not only on linguistics, psychology and neurology, but also on sociology, a position that Claus would have endorsed — and possibly added education and ethnography. His research might well have aimed at integrating wider social dimensions, if his health had not failed him, since his vision of what foreign language pedagogy research could and should consist of was not restricted to reformist or technocratic horizons. In a paper entitled 'Fremmedsprogpædagogisk forskning og formidling' ('Research in foreign language pedagogy and its communication', Færch, 1982), written when cutbacks were about to condemn this field to the periphery of the English degree at Copenhagen University, he wrote:

When the relationship between research and teaching is debated in the media, it is usually taken for granted that for teaching to be conducted at an appropriately high level presupposes that it is dependent on ongoing involvement in research. The opposite position, that research could be dependent on close involvement in teaching or equivalent activity, is not so often discussed . . . To state that university students and teachers of foreign languages should participate in the formulation of which problems should be taken up in research in foreign language pedagogy is, naturally, not the same as saying that such research should exclusively or even mainly deal with what are experienced as problems by the people in question. In this connection it is important to note that all research, because of its dynamic nature, serves to generate new problems, which are genuine, socially relevant ones to pursue. Equally, it is one of the main traditional goals of universities to question the premisses according to which our societies function. The researcher in foreign language pedagogy can therefore not be content with working with problems which are formulated on the basis of the status quo. It is inescapably necessary that research in foreign language pedagogy should acknowledge its identity as humanistic-social research and in keeping with this should seek to

formulate problems on the basis of the researchers' alternative ideas, expressed as social utopias. (Færch, 1982: 61–2, our translation)

Although one cannot claim that Claus Færch's research paradigm was explicitly related to any social utopia, there is no doubt that he was a scholar of vision. In the longer term he would have been keen to use his influence in the wider arena of language policy in Denmark and principles of teacher training. Foreign language teaching has significant social functions. Even if it seldom generates the intense controversy that second language teaching does (e.g. in relation to the education of indigenous or immigrant minorities), it needs enlightened analysis and creative re-thinking. Claus Færch's work contributed significantly to this.

References

All references can be found in the consolidated reference list at the end of the book.

Section One:

Applied Linguists in Historical Perspective

The impetus to look at applied linguists retrospectively came from words of tribute paid to Claus Færch in the journal *Applied Linguistics* (1987, volume 8(3)) after his premature death:

Claus was in the great tradition of Danish anglicists, the Jespersen tradition, with interests ranging from philology through theoretical linguistics to language teaching.

Various aspects of this great tradition will be explored by considering the work of some seminal applied linguists in a historical perspective. Claus Færch was deeply familiar with our founding texts and saw clearly what they might teach us. For instance there is a direct line between Corder's (1967) classic paper on 'The significance of learners' errors' and Færch's own *Learner Language and Language Learning* (Færch, Haastrup & Phillipson, 1984). Claus was interested in founding texts for what they can still teach us today about second and foreign language learning and teaching, and it is in this spirit that we begin the first section of this volume.

It is important to note that we are not interested in embracing the past merely in order to challenge it. The perspective we are trying to achieve involves looking at some original sources in the spirit of the historian Dominic Le Capra's observation that 'a field is in constant dialogue with its founding texts'. We are thus not interested in history *per se* but rather in linking up some central founding texts of our field with current knowledge, as this is interpreted and understood by contributors to this section of the volume. By drawing out some of these links across time, we are attempting to make the dialogue with our sources explicit.

Applied linguistics is a field that has not been intensively cultivated for very long, though as Gregersen's article shows, its roots can be firmly

traced back over two centuries. In addition to such a broad historical canvas, the field can be analysed in relation to its own internal evolution, as Selinker's contribution demonstrates; in relation to some of the external pressures which led to its formation and to some characteristics of its identity, as in Phillipson's paper; and in relation to an outstandingly fertile figure on its landscape, as in Davies's paper. Our hope is that these sample dialogues with founding 'texts' of applied linguistics will reveal something of the historical complexity of the field. There is a definite need among professional applied linguists for a heightened awareness of our historical and scientific origins.

As an example of historical myopia, it is worth pondering over why language transfer was thrown out wastefully, in 'baby and bathwater' fashion, for a good decade. Any reflections on this theme are likely to be none too flattering, for it appears that researchers, as well as teachers, do in fact jump on bandwagons. A possible reason is failure to work in a dialectical way. As regards transfer, we did not dialogue with Lado's masterly work *Linguistics Across Cultures* (Lado, 1957). His work was dismissed. We allowed ourselves to take too literally statements of the kind that appear throughout his volume: 'If X, then the learner will do Y', and threw out Lado. Yet his work has exerted a crucial, durable influence, either as synthesis or antithesis. A 'purposeful misreading'¹ of a Lado claim of this sort would include statements such as: 'If X, then the learner *might* do Y' (which, to be fair, is a formulation used at times by Lado). To avoid bandwagon and baby/bathwater effects, it is helpful to do this 'purposeful misreading' exercise in depth. When applied to Lado's work, some highly topical hypotheses emerge, often unexpectedly, among them hypotheses that have not been formulated in the literature (for more details, see Selinker, in preparation).

In the first paper in this section, Gregersen takes us back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and reveals that early applied linguists shared many of our own concerns. These pioneers are placed firmly in their historical and social context, nationally and internationally, as are their successors, from Otto Jespersen to Claus Færch. The tasks carried out by the applied linguist, then as now, reflect the ongoing movement of theory. The article traces applied linguists through the history of ideas from the enlightenment and national romanticism via comparative philology and structuralism to sociolinguistics and socially decontextualised theories of language. The description of Danish scholars and social developments reveals that Denmark was, and perhaps still is, in many respects a 'typical' Western country, with complex internal and external pressures. In tandem with the development of theory go practical concerns,

from spelling reform to speech pathology and foreign language teaching. Here it is important to know what factors constitute the dominant tradition, and identify on what theoretical and social foundations this tradition rests. This is an issue which is followed up in depth in relation to contemporary classroom language learning in papers in the second half of the book.

The second paper in the section, by Selinker, compares the early language transfer experiments by the Americans, Nemser and Brière. It looks at what they did in their very innovative work, their results, where the two sources are the same, where different, and what their results might mean in the light of current thinking on language transfer. The exact place of language transfer in the second language process, given the concerns of universal grammar and the enormous variability and incompleteness that are now universally recognised, is still a most current issue. Selinker's paper shows the importance of returning to earlier sources for insights into today's questions.

The paper by Phillipson directly addresses the question of 'founding texts'. It quotes a number of recent critical assessments of the adequacy of our methodologies, by both Western and Third World scholars. It specifically analyses the use of the labels 'second' and 'foreign' in order to highlight the diversity of contexts they refer to and to question whether research methods or teaching traditions can be 'exported' in a relevant way to different contexts. Historical analysis of how applied linguistics and worldwide English teaching were deliberately built up by British and American interests in the post-war period, in order to achieve specific goals, uncovers something of the political agenda of our profession. An increased awareness of the political context of our work and of our historical and scientific roots can help us to understand how we got where we are and why we believe what we do about what we study and teach.

One source that all of us must plead dependence on is S. Pit Corder. The final paper in this section, by Davies, discusses Corder's seminal influence and shows how relevant much of his thinking still is. The framework for this study of Corder and his associates at Edinburgh is the familiar one of the relationship between theory and practice, and the question of which comes first in applied linguistics, linguistic theory or practical problems such as language teaching. An interesting comparison between North American and British traditions identifies Corder's major significance in both contexts. This is an appropriate way to end this historical section, in view of Claus Færch's strong links with Edinburgh, where he was a student for two years, and with Corder, who played a

major role in establishing applied linguistics as a theoretically explicit research and teaching activity in Scandinavia.

Note

1. This is an insight from Harold Garfinkel, who points out that one cannot directly apply ethnomethodology to concerns of second language acquisition, primarily because change (possible acquisition) and non-change (possible fossilisation) over time are central variables for us, whereas they are usually not included in ethnomethodological studies.

1 Relationships Between Linguistics and Applied Linguistics: Some Danish Examples

FRANS GREGERSEN

Introduction

Linguistic knowledge may be applied to a host of problems. The most important ones are either concerned with remediating pathological states as to speaking or understanding or focussed on education. Within the first sphere we find subjects and professional specialties such as speech therapy, remediating reading difficulties and the application of linguistic knowledge to sign language. Educating the public is the task of language planning, e.g. reforming orthographies, proposing new terminology and creating norms for efficient communication in society at large. More specific are mother tongue teaching and foreign language pedagogy, two areas that have loomed large in all descriptions of applied linguistics, the last one to the extent that it has tended to become synonymous with it.

In what follows I shall present an overview of how some of these areas have been treated by Danish linguists. The order will be chronological and the focus will be on the exploitation of linguistic theories for solving practical problems.

The Rask–Petersen Programme

Rasmus Rask (1787–1832) and Niels Matthias Petersen (1791–1862) were connected by strong bonds of friendship. Of these two friends,