

ENGLISH STUDIES SERIES | 8

# Language Teaching Texts:

## A Manual for Teachers

H. G. WIDDOWSON

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## Introduction

This book is intended as a manual for teachers and student-teachers. It contains a collection of passages on language and language teaching which have been selected and presented for the use of in-service teachers and students in colleges of education. Although many of the passages will be found to be relevant to all language teachers, the book has been principally designed to meet the needs of teachers and student-teachers of English as a foreign or second language.

The first purpose of this selection is to make available to teachers some of the basic notions about English and English language teaching, a knowledge of which represents an essential teaching qualification. Teachers and student-teachers are busy people, and they do not have a great deal of time to devote to reading books and papers about the subject they must teach. In many countries, English is not the only subject they are concerned with: they have to divide their attention between English and the other subject (or subjects) they are required to teach, and to be fully qualified as teachers they need to read a great deal about English and English teaching alone. The advantage of a selection of the kind presented here is that it provides teachers with some of the essential points about language and language teaching in the form of short extracts, and so makes more accessible to them the knowledge of the subject that as teachers they need to have. Of course, such a selection cannot be a substitute for wide reading since it only presents some of the points made in some of the books and papers on the subject but it is hoped that it will, nevertheless, provide an essential foundation knowledge for those who will not have the time or opportunity for wider reading. For those teachers who will go on to read more widely in the subject this selection should serve as an introduction and a guide to further reading. It is hoped that the passages presented here will, in fact, create an interest which will lead

teachers and student-teachers to broaden their knowledge by reading in the books and papers which have been used as the source for these passages, and other writings on language and language teaching. For those teachers who are already familiar with writings of this kind, this selection should serve as a summary and an extension of what they already know.

The selected passages are grouped together in sections, each section presenting a main theme. Within each section, the passages are arranged in such a way as to represent a gradual development of the main theme. The sections themselves are grouped together into two parts: Part I contains three sections and Part II contains two. The sections of Part I are concerned with language in general and with English in particular and their themes are the three aspects of language: form, substance, and use. Although it is convenient for the purpose of study to consider these aspects of language separately, they do not, of course, exist as separate elements in language itself, and it is for this reason that there is inevitably some overlapping of ideas in these three sections. The sections of Part II are concerned with language teaching in general and with English language teaching in particular and their themes are the two aspects of language teaching: preparation and presentation. These two sections present two consecutive stages of a process: the first dealing with considerations that have to be taken into account when preparing teaching materials, and the second dealing with considerations that have to be taken into account when presenting these prepared materials in the classroom.

Whereas the selection itself aims at making certain notions available to teachers, the way in which this selection has been presented is intended to ensure that these notions are thoroughly understood and critically assessed by the reader. To this end, not only are the passages arranged in such a way as to lead the reader to a gradual accumulation of knowledge relating to a central theme, but they are also provided with *notes, comprehension and discussion questions, and exercises.*

The *notes* which accompany each passage are intended both to increase ease of understanding and to stimulate interest. They are of two types. First, there are notes which deal with the actual subject-matter of the passage, and secondly there are notes which deal with the way this subject-matter is expressed. The notes on the subject-matter are rather like entries in an



## INTRODUCTION

encyclopedia: their purpose is to provide additional information, and so to extend the reader's knowledge of, and stimulate his interest in, aspects of language and language teaching which are mentioned but not elaborated on in the passage. The notes on expression are themselves of two kinds. First, there are those which explain the meaning of certain words and phrases whose use might otherwise interfere with the reader's understanding: these notes are rather like entries in a dictionary or glossary. Secondly, there are those which comment on features of language usage which the reader might find unusual and so puzzling: these notes are rather like entries in a manual of English usage. A particular note might fulfil more than one of the functions mentioned above. The overriding aim behind all the notes is to lead the reader to draw from the passages as much information and interest as possible.

Certain terms in the notes are marked with an asterisk\*. Such terms are ones used in a special or technical sense by writers on language and language teaching (though not always in exactly the same sense). Most of the terms marked in this way appear in the notes in Part I of the book since writers on language make more use of special terminology than do writers on language teaching.

The *comprehension and discussion questions* are intended not only to lead the reader to draw as much information out of the passage as possible, and so develop in him the ability to read with close attention to detail, but also to lead him to consider the value and relevance of the points made in the passage, and so to develop in him the ability to read critically. The questions frequently require the reader to relate the points made in one passage to those made in preceding passages. The purpose of this is to make him aware of the relevance of different points to each other and to the central theme of the section concerned.

The *exercises* which accompany those passages where exercises are appropriate are intended to consolidate the points made in the passages by giving the reader an opportunity of putting them to practical application. This practical work should not only make the notions of the passages more meaningful by enabling the reader to participate in their illustration, but it should also help to develop his own language ability and language teaching techniques. Again, the principal aim

is to help the reader towards a thorough understanding of theory and towards a sound application of this theory in practice. Those exercises which are marked with an asterisk\* are provided with a key at the back of the book.

The solutions in the *key* are really *suggestions* as to how the problems in the exercises might be done: they are not necessarily the only possible solutions. The reader may sometimes (may often) disagree with what I say, and may have very good reasons for doing so. Many of the problems in the exercises, particularly in Part II of the book, have no absolutely 'correct' solutions, and those I present in the key are only those which seem to me to be the most reasonable. The real purpose of the key is to develop in the reader a critical attitude to the problems which are raised. If he disagrees with me, then so much the better: this will provoke him to formulate his own solutions.

Most of the passages in Part I of the book are also accompanied by a *programmed summary*. This is a summary of the main points of the preceding passage set out as a series of simple statements. These statements, however, may either be incomplete, in which case the reader has to provide the word or words needed to complete them; or they may offer two alternative ways of completing the statement, in which case he has to choose the correct one. The numbers in brackets within these statements indicate where the correct answers are to be found in the key at the back of the book.

Such a programmed summary is designed, therefore, to guide the reader to the correct answers he must provide to complete it. Its purpose is to make him collaborate in a restatement of the main points of the passage so as to give him the satisfaction of knowing that he has understood and remembered them. This satisfaction not only has the effect of fixing these points more firmly in the reader's mind, but also of stimulating his desire to learn more and so go on to the passage which follows. A programmed summary of this kind is not, therefore, a test. Its effectiveness as a teaching device requires that the reader should find the correct answer easy to provide, thus strengthening his sense of achievement.

The programmed summaries are restricted to those passages in Part I which might present difficulties in that they introduce notions and terms with which the reader might not be familiar, and which may require, therefore, the additional

## INTRODUCTION

aid to understanding which a programmed summary provides. Programmed summaries have not been given for those passages which do not present special difficulties of this kind.

One final point about the selection itself. Like all selections, this one is personal, and brings out what I think are some of the points about English and English language teaching which it is essential for teachers of English to consider. It is certain that another person would select different passages from different source material. Teacher trainers may supplement my selection by passages of their own choice which make similar points more clearly, or which make different points of more immediate relevance to the teaching situation in their own countries. The book is intended to guide the reader to a clarification of language teaching problems. The solutions to these must, of course, be left for him to work out for himself.

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PART I

# About Language



