Explorations in Applied Linguistics

H.G. Widdowson

Oxford University Press

Explorations in Applied Linguistics

H. G. Widdowson

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot *Little Gidding*

Oxford University Press

Oxford University Press
Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford London
New York Toronto Melbourne Auckland
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Nairobi Dar Es Salaam Cape Town

and associated companies in

Beirut Berlin Ibadan Mexico City Nicosia

OXFORD is a trademark of Oxford University Press

ISBN 0 19 437080 1

© H. G. Widdowson 1979

First published 1979
Third impression 1985

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Set in Monotype Imprint

Printed in Hong Kong

Explorations in Applied Linguistics

To S. Pit Corder

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are made to the following publishers from whose texts the extracts and papers below have been taken:

Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, for 'The teaching of rhetoric to students of science and technology', published in *Science and Technology in a Second Language*, Reports and Papers 7, 1971.
Regional English Language Centre, for 'An approach to the teaching of scientific English discourse', published in the *RELC Journal*, volume V No. 1, June 1974.
The British Council English Teaching Information Centre, for 'EST in theory and practice', published in *English for Academic Study*, an ETIC occasional paper, April 1975.
Le Français dans le Monde and Librairies Hachette et Larousse, for 'Description du langage scientifique', published in Le Français dans le Monde, No. 129, May/June 1977.
AIMAV, for 'Directions in the teaching of discourse', published in *Theoretical Linguistic Models in Applied Linguistics*, 1973; for 'The deep structure of discourse and the use of translation', published in *Linguistic Insights for Applied Linguistics*, 1974; and for 'Interpretative procedures and the importance of poetry', published in *Some Implications of Linguistic Theory for Applied Linguistics*, 1975.
Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, for 'Approaches to discourse', published in *Grundbegriffe und Hauptströmungen der Linguistik*, 1977.
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, for 'The authenticity of language data', published in *ON TESOL 76*, and for 'Notional syllabuses', published in *ON TESOL 78*.
Indiana University Linguistics Club, for 'The significance of simplification', published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, Volume I No. 1, and for 'The partiality and relevance of

linguistic descriptions', published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, Volume I No. 2.
Université de Neuchâtel and Librairie Droz, for 'Pidgin and babu', published in *The Notions of Simplification, Interlanguage, and Pidgins and their Relation to Second Language Pedagogy*, 1977.
Verlag Peter Lang, for 'Linguistic insights and language teaching principles', published in *Forum Linguisticum 3*, Contributions to Applied Linguistics I/II.
Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics, for 'The communicative approach and its application', published in the Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Volume III No. 1, September 1978.
Faber and Faber Ltd. and Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., for 'September' by Ted Hughes, from *The Hawk in the Rain*, 1957, second edition 1968.
Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., and Harvard University Press, for an extract from *The Common Sense of Science* by J. Bronowski, 1960.
Penguin Books Ltd., for an extract (here adapted) from *Metals in the Service of Man*, by W. A. Alexander and A. Street, 1969.
Harper and Row Publishers Inc., for an extract from *Sociology* by L. Broom and P. Felsnick, 1955.
Hutchinson Publishing Group Ltd., for an extract from *Farm Animals: a basic guide to their husbandry* by F. A. W. Peregrine, A. Fox, A. P. Ingram, and A. B. Humphries, 1968.
Edinburgh University Press, for 'Rules and procedures in discourse analysis', published in *The Development of Conversation and Discourse*, 1979.

The author would like to acknowledge the very considerable help of Elaine Samuels in producing fair copies of these papers from an unintelligible mass of scribble.

Contents

Introduction

This book is a selection of papers that I have written over the past eight years for presentation at courses and seminars in various parts of the world. I am prompted to bring them together in one volume because the reactions they have provoked suggest that they touch on issues of interest to many people concerned with applied linguistics and language teaching pedagogy and although most of the papers have appeared in print before they have done so in publications which are not always very easily accessible. So they are presented here in the hope that they will stimulate wider interest and debate.

Obviously I must believe that the papers have some merit and make some contribution to applied linguistic studies: otherwise I would not have had them put into print in the first place: I do not want to try to disarm the reader with the customary coy apology for publishing them.

What I do want to do in this introduction is to give some idea about the scope and purpose of these papers so the reader will know in advance what to expect and what attitude I would like him to adopt. Actually the title of the book is intended to reflect both scope and purpose, 'applied linguistics' referring to the first and 'explorations' to the second; but a gloss is needed to make this clear.

Applied linguistics, as I conceive of it, is a spectrum of inquiry which extends from theoretical studies of language to classroom practice. The papers appearing here explore issues that can be located at different points on this spectrum: some with a focus on matters of a predominantly theoretical kind, others with a primary focus on matters of practical pedagogy. But in all cases the whole spectrum is presupposed as the context of discussion: thus considerations of theory are linked to pedagogic relevance and

demonstrations of practical teaching procedures are linked to theoretical principles. Often these links are made explicit. Where they are not they should be traceable.

These papers, then, are related in conforming to common principles of inquiry. They are also related in that they are all concerned with the same general theme: communicative language teaching. Here some apology is perhaps in order. Communicative language teaching is a banner which everybody nowadays wants to march behind. That is why I think it is important that I should make it clear what the purpose of these papers is. We come now to the term 'explorations' in my title.

The term is used with the quotation from T. S. Eliot (cited on the title page) very much in mind. I found constantly that intellectual excursions into theory led me back to starting points in pedagogy where old scenes now took on a different appearance. This is the familiar experience of homecoming and I do not know what importance to attach to such apparent novelty. Looking afresh at problems, placing them in different conceptual contexts, does not necessarily bring them any closer to solution. Solutions are hard to come by in any human situation and in the one with which we are concerned, which crucially involves the interaction of individuals, it is unlikely that we shall find any which are definitive enough to be universally applied. The likelihood is that any such solution would not be a solution at all as far as learners are concerned, although it may be convenient for the teacher to suppose that it is.

So no claim is made that anything has been solved in these papers. They are not meant to be read as prescriptions or conclusive arguments but as attempts to explore ideas, to work out the implications of certain insights in theory for a communicative approach to the teaching of language. What value these papers have lies in the examples they present of the process of exploration itself and in their capacity to incite other people concerned with language teaching to examine the principles of their craft and to submit their practices to critical thought. I am particularly anxious to stress the exploratory and illustrative character of these papers because there is a danger at the present time that the approach which they deal with is being accepted without sufficient examination.

Language teaching is necessarily a theoretical as well as a

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

practical occupation. If this were not so, discussion on the matter would reduce to an exchange of anecdotes and pedagogy would be mere pretence. Yet people concerned with teaching languages too often use the excuse of being practical to supinely accept the directives of others rather than actively think things out for themselves; to be too ready to follow the dictates of fashion without submitting them to careful scrutiny. So it was with the 'structural' approach. So it is now with the 'communicative'. If we are really serious about the teaching of communication, we cannot just exchange notions for structures, functions for forms, and suppose that we have thereby concluded the business. A communicative orientation involves a consideration of a whole host of issues:—how discourse is processed, how interaction is conducted, learning styles and strategies, developmental patterns of language acquisition, the role of learner and teacher—all these and more. There is a great deal of exploration to be done and it is time to put the banner away and start out.

So much for the scope and purpose of this book. Now, briefly, a word or two about the presentation. The papers have for convenience been arranged in eight sections each provided with a brief introduction which indicates the main lines of argument. The title of each section indicates the focal topic of the papers within it. But of course since all the topics interrelate they naturally recur in the context of other discussions as well. The sections can best be thought of, therefore, as variations on a common general theme, with the first as a prelude and the last as a reprise. This means that the papers do not fit neatly each into each in a sequence of self-contained stretches of argument. No doubt I could have refashioned them so that they did, but this would not have been consistent with the aim of the book, which is, as I have already indicated, to represent the actual process of discovery rather than to put its findings on show disposed to the best possible advantage.

The ideas expressed in these papers owe a great deal to discussion with other people—students and colleagues too numerous to mention by name. I hope that they will accept this general recognition of my debt to them. What I owe to Pit Corder, however, calls for particular acknowledgement. If he had not given me the opportunity and encouragement to pursue applied linguistic studies at the University of Edinburgh, these papers would never

have been written. It is only fitting, therefore, that they should now be dedicated to him.

H. G. Widdowson
London December 1977

SECTION ONE

Prelude

This paper represents early efforts to work out certain basic ideas and to establish broad lines of approach to communicative language teaching. To this end I draw a distinction between usage and use and between signification and value. As with other conceptual distinctions (langue/parole, competence/performance, denotation/connotation, and so on), they are a convenience whose validity can be called into question by reference to different ways of thinking. But I have found them serviceable for my purposes and they will reappear in subsequent sections.

The paper relates these notions to developments in linguistic theory. In particular there is a good deal of argument in favour of extending the concept of competence to cover the ability to use language to communicative effect. This case is no longer in court but in 1970 (when this paper was written) people were still busy preparing their briefs. I would be less ready these days to talk about revolutionary changes in linguistics: time, as usual, has altered the proportions of things. But whether or not communicative competence should be accounted for in formal models of description, I would still argue that it needs to be of central concern to the language teacher. What such competence consists of and how the teacher's concern can most effectively be converted into pedagogic procedures are questions which (as will emerge in later sections) turn out on closer inspection to be more complex than they appear to be in this paper. Here communicative competence is more or less glossed as the ability to cope with what I call rhetorical acts in isolation. There is a good deal more to it than that. In my own defence I should point out that I do make reference in this paper to how such acts 'combine to form composite communicative units'. This is an indication of the move that subsequent exploration will take in the direction of discourse.

One last point might be made on this section. There is an

assumption here that communicative competence in the form of rules of use has to be expressly and explicitly taught. This assumption is questioned in later papers, and I am now inclined to think that learning and teaching should not be regarded as converse activities at all, that the logic of a communicative approach calls for an emphasis on the learner's development of abilities through his own learning processes which the teacher should stimulate rather than determine.

1 The teaching of rhetoric to students of science and technology

In this paper I want to bring into focus a number of problems associated with the teaching of English as a second language, and by implication any other second language, in scientific and technical education. I make no pretence at being able to supply solutions. I do not myself believe that it is the business of applied linguistics to supply solutions to pedagogic problems, but only to provide some of the means by which they may be solved. It seems to me that the aim of applied linguistics is to clarify the principles by which the language teacher operates, or by which he might consider operating, if he is not alienated by arrogance.

The clarification which applied linguistics provides comes about as a result of relating the language teacher's beliefs about and attitudes to language and language learning, as they are revealed by his pedagogic practices, to the linguist's and psycholinguist's discoveries about language and language learning by means of theoretical and experimental investigation. It is particularly appropriate that applied linguistics should be concerned with English for science and technology because it happens to bring into prominence, as 'general' English teaching does not, a question which is one of the principal issues in linguistics at the present time: that is to say, the nature of language as communication. It is fairly rare that a shift in orientation in language teaching and a shift in orientation in linguistics should involve a coincidence of interest, but this, I believe, is now happening.

Let us begin with some obvious and general observations. First: what do we imagine we are doing when we are 'teaching a language'? We speak of developing skills, of making habitual the ability to compose correct sentences. We stress that the primary need is to inculcate in our learners a knowledge of the language system, and we devise drills and exercises to bring this about. At the same time, we do not wish to make our learners into automatons, mechanically repeating sentence patterns and so we insist that pattern practice and the manipulation of the language structures which are taught must be meaningful. We take pains to ensure that language is presented initially in situations which give meaning and point to the language which is being acquired. The general pattern is: situational presentation to make the language

meaningful followed by exercises in repetition to make it habitual. What precisely are we teaching? We are, of course, teaching something quite abstract: we are teaching the language system: *langue*. This is not to say that we neglect *parole*. You cannot teach *langue* directly since it has to be realized in some way or another, so we use *parole* in our initial presentation and we use it in our exercises. But it is an odd kind of *parole* when you think about it: it is pressed into service to exemplify *langue*. This, of course, never happens outside a language teaching classroom. Normally *parole* only occurs as a result of some kind of social interaction: it does not just exemplify the operation of linguistic rules.

There is an important distinction to be made, then, between the *usage* of language to exemplify linguistic categories and the *use* of language in the business of social communication. When we make use of expressions like 'This is a red pencil' or 'This is a leg' or 'He is running to the door' this is language *usage* not language *use*: it exemplifies but does not communicate.

I think it is true to say that the manipulation of language in the classroom for what is known as situational demonstration or contextualization is meant to indicate what I will call the *signification* of linguistic elements. Thus expressions like 'This is my hand', 'That is his foot', and so on, are meaningful as sentences because they indicate the signification of grammatical items like the possessive pronoun, and lexical items like 'hand', 'foot', and so on. Sentences like these are exemplificatory expressions and are meaningful as projections, as it were, of the language system or code. They are, of course, quite meaningless as utterances. It is difficult to see how they could possibly represent any message in any normal communication situation. They are meaningful as 'text-sentences' (to use a term of John Lyons) but meaningless as utterances because they have no *value* as communication.

It seems to me that it is important to stress this distinction. Language can be manipulated in the classroom in the form of text-sentences which exemplify the language system and thus indicate the *signification* of linguistic items. This is not the same as language *use*—the use of sentences in the performance of utterances which give these linguistic elements communicative *value*. In the classroom, expressions like 'This is a red pencil' are sentences; expressions like 'Come here', 'Sit down' are utterances because they have a communicative import in the classroom situation, which provides a natural social context for their occurrence.

Attempts are very often made to bestow communicative value on the language items which are introduced into the classroom, by the use of dialogue, for example. But it is done in a somewhat *ad hoc* and incidental way, and what I have in mind is something more systematic.

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com