DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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Like other branches of linguistics language teaching has, until recently, been concerned with grammatical rather than communicative competence. Wilkins observes that although there have been major changes in the methodology of language teaching over the years the underlying principle has remained the same: 'it has been assumed that units of learning should be defined in grammatical terms, although the precise sequence in which they occurred would be influenced by pedagogic considerations,' (1972b). Further he suggests that even those courses which encourage dialogue and improvised drama are structured grammatically and the 'situations that are created are pedagogic, bearing little resemblance to natural language use'.

It is not, of course, that grammatical and communicative syllabuses have different goals, as Widdowson (1979) emphasises, 'both types of syllabus recognise that the learner's goal should be the ability to communicate' (p.248); rather they differ in their premises about 'what needs to be actually taught for this ability to be acquired', (ibid). However, it is one thing to omit something deliberately from a syllabus, it is quite another to include items which are actually misleading or wrong, yet, in their concentration on grammar, course books may use interactional structures for what are in reality grammar drills and then students may be taught to produce answers which are grammatically correct but unusual or even deviant in terms of discourse rules:

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Q:  What is this?
A:  This  )
           )   is a book.
    It     )
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**This is a shortened version of CHAPTER 7 of the second edition of AN INTRODUCTION to DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, London: Longman, 1985.

Q: Where is the typewriter?
A: The typewriter is in the cupboard.

In a methodology which leaves students to **deduce** rules of use
the hidden curriculum can be dangerous.

Grammatical syllabuses can, of course, have great success
in their own terms and those who have followed them
conscientiously have usually managed to swim, eventually, when
dropped into interactive situations — the crucial question is
whether, with all our recently-acquired knowledge about the
organisation of interaction and about form-function
relationships, we can produce syllabuses which make the task of
becoming a successful non-native interactant easier.

An immediate problem is that although Hymes proposed the
description of communicative competence as the real goal of
linguistics and although it is his work which has fuelled the
discussion of communicatively oriented syllabuses, neither he
nor his co-workers have been able as yet to provide even a
fragment of a description of communicative competence — thus
whereas a grammatical syllabus can be based on a well developed
description of a native-speaker's grammar, a communicative
syllabus can have no similarly firm foundation.

Following Canale (1983) we can usefully see communicative
competence as being composed of four areas of knowledge and
skill: **grammatical, sociolinguistic,** discourse and **strategic**
competences. Grammatical competence is concerned with 'the
knowledge and skill required to understand and express the
literal meaning of utterances' and as such is the traditional
concern of grammatical syllabuses. Sociolinguistic competence
is concerned with appropriacy, 'both appropriateness of meaning
and appropriateness of form', and this includes not simply
rules of address and questions of politeness but also selection
and formulation of topic and the social significance of
indirect speech acts. Discourse competence he sees as
concerned with cohesion and coherence in the structure of texts
and thus it includes knowledge about the organisation of
different speech events and the interpretive rules for relating

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form to function. Finally strategic competence is 'composed of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies' which enable speakers to handle breakdowns in communication and their own lexico-grammatical inadequacies and to enhance the effectiveness of their message.

Given this subdivision of communicative competence we can imagine syllabuses which attempt to teach the components concurrently and others which are organised consecutively. Johns (1974) and Candlin et al (1978) report interesting Special Purpose Communicative courses which follow the second strategy. These courses were designed for specialists, teachers and doctors respectively, who already have grammatical competence, and some sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence in the language and who need to be able to perform like native speakers in their professional roles.

However, such courses based on a detailed analysis of, and intending to improve competence in, one speech event and presupposing a high level of grammatical competence and a supportive second language background are rare. The real test of the approach is how far is it possible to design a communicative syllabus for beginners or false beginners.

Wilkins (1972a, 1976) takes up the challenge and the **notional** syllabus he proposes is designed to take communicative facts into account 'from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors' (1976:19). One obvious advantage of a communicative or **notional** syllabus is that it need not be language specific, but can be designed for a series of culturally related speech communities, that is communities with a large degree of overlap in their norms of interaction. Wilkins, assuming Western Europe to be a fairly homogeneous speech area, asks what are the notions that the European learner will expect to be able to express through the target language, (1972a) and sets out to describe them in some detail. Two sets of notions, the semantico-grammatical ones, concerned with 'time', 'space', 'quality', 'matter', 'deixis',

and the modal notions of 'modality', 'certainty', 'commitment' are covered in some form by most structural syllabuses, but the categories of communicative function, designed to handle 'what speakers **do** with language' are 'the more original part of the framework' (ibid:23).

He observes that 'language learning has concentrated... on the use of language to report and describe' but argues that these two functions 'are by no means the only ones that are important for the learner of a foreign language' (1972a), and he therefore sets out to classify the functions utterances can perform and also to suggest, for English, the realisations which should be taught first.

He proposes six types of communicative function, 'six kinds of thing that we do with language', (1976:44) stressing that he has not restricted himself to 'what have come to be called speech acts' (ibid:42) — **judgement and evaluation, suasion, argument, rational enquiry and exposition, personal emotions** and **emotive relations**. Each function is subclassified, so for instance argument includes **information asserted, information sought, information denied, agreement, disagreement** and **concession** and in the 1972 version each subdivision is followed on the lefthand side of the page by 'a list of vocabulary items falling within or closely related to its semantic field'; while on the right-hand side of the page are suggested grammatical realisations for students at an early stage of learning. Thus,

Information sought: 'Question':

- request, question, ask.   Information seeking is
                             likely to be an important
                             aspect of a learner's
                             language use.
                             (a) Interrogatives
                             (b) Declaratives + question
                                 intonation
                             (c) Question-word questions
                                 When

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Where                    ( far
                 How +   (
What                     ( much
                         (
Who                      (  ?

What (time)
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'Request'

Would you shut the window,

please (Would you mind

shutting...)

There are many criticisms one can make of Wilkins'
framework: some of the categories overlap; some of the
realisations sound stilted or odd; and it may not be an accident
that there are no suggested realisations for the functions
'sympathy' and 'flattery', but he disarmingly admits the
problems and points out himself that it is an 'ad hoc'
framework which he expects to be refined and modified in the
light of further research. The question we must address is
whether such a communicatively based syllabus is in principle
to be preferred, because in solving one problem it may create
another: if we accept a communicative syllabus in which students
are taught at any one time only those grammar items, or even
phrases, necessary for the realisation of the function this
raises, as Johns (1978) points out

> the question of **structuralisation**: how can the
> student be assisted to relate a particular
> structure 'to the overall framework of the
> language'. In other words instead of being
> presented with a coherent grammar of the language
> and having to construct for himself realisation
> rules for particular functions, there is a danger
> that the student may be given little more than a
> series of guidebook phrases for greeting,
> apologising or complaining and have to construct
> his own grammar.

Wilkins is very much aware of this — he notes that one
of the problems that faces the syllabus constructor is to
'decide just how much weighting to give to grammatical
criteria' (p.65), but other than suggesting a cyclic approach
in which students return at different stages of the course,

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and thus with improving grammatical competence, to the same function, he doesn't really confront the problem of teaching grammar. Obviously one solution would be to graft the communicative syllabus onto a grammatical one and teach functions as and when their realisations become possible — this is not in fact an unreasonable suggestion because as Wilkins himself points out there is no 'intrinsic ordering to the categories' of his syllabus nor any 'intrinsic way of linking one unit to the next', but it is not an option that he considers.

Wilkins himself has never published a communicatively structured course but those who do obviously must make decisions about the sequencing of items and their grammatical realisations.

Jakobovitz & Gordon (1974) offer a sketch of the first ten lessons of an intermediate course — interestingly half of the lessons are concerned with 'describing' and 'reporting', one of the major faults of non-communicative courses according to Wilkins.

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Lesson 1:  Greeting and Leave-taking
Lesson 2:  Making Requests: Part 1
Lesson 3:  Making Requests: Part 2
Lesson 4:  Extending Invitations
Lesson 5:  Making Apologies
Lesson 6:  Describing Events: Part 1
Lesson 7:  Describing Events: Part 2
Lesson 8:  Reporting Events:  Part 1
Lesson 9:  Reporting Events:  Part 2
Lesson 10: Reporting Events:  Part 3
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For lesson 2 they suggest three major categories of request:

A. Asking Informational Questions
   A1 - that take yes/no answers;
   A2 - Other

B. Requesting Agreement
   B1 - for personal opinion or feeling;
   B2 - for proposed action

C. Asking for permission.

and for 'Requesting Agreement', they offer the following grammatical structures, two of which sound odd to the British ear:

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B1.  For personal opinion or feeling
    (i) S + don't you think so?
        (It's a beautiful day, don't you think so?)
   (ii) S + isn't it?
        (It's a beautiful day, isn't it?)
  (iii) S + wouldn't you agree?
        (We're much better off here, wouldn't you
        agree?)
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From this outline it is apparent that although the lesson is communicatively **labelled**, 'making requests', it is in fact structurally organised as a lesson on **interrogation** — polar, wh. and tag-questions. The hidden curriculum is that the three grammatical forms are matched respectively with A1, A2 and B1, but tag-questions are only one of the ways to request agreement others being:

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Isn't it a beautiful day
What a beautiful day
It's a beautiful day
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and tag questions can also be used to ask for information. In fact Brazil et al (1980) and Brazil (this volume) would argue that it is intonation choice and not grammatical form that marks whether it is information or agreement that is being requested.

Abbs et al (1975), in their introduction to one of the earliest published courses to be functionally rather than grammatically structured, claim that

> the learner is taught strategies for handling
> particular language functions such as identifying
> people and places, expressing personal tastes,
> emotions, moods and opinions, giving information,
> making suggestions, giving advice and so on. The
> structural contents have been selected as being
> appropriate to the particular function, rather
> than as an unrelated series of structures arranged
> in order of supposed linguistic difficulty.

However, the first few functions are introduced in the following order — with no apparent functionally-based ordering.

Identification
Invitations
Likes and dislikes (1)
Description: People
Description: Places
Impatience
Not knowing
The Past (1)
Surprise and disbelief

It will already be evident that there are major problems
in realising a communicative. syllabus — it is not simply that
there is no logical sequence in which to teach the functions,
that as we have seen could be an advantage, it is rather that
it is not at all clear what a function is, or how we recognise
one. It is all very well to say that functions are concerned
with language use but speech act analysis suggests that it is
possible to perform several speech acts simultaneously with an
indirect utterance; is it also possible to perform several
functions simultaneously? Certainly Wilkins' category of
personal emotions, which 'express the speaker's emotional
reaction to events and people', and Abbs 'impatience' and
'surprise and disbelief' look more like modalities on other
functions.

Secondly there appears to be some confusion between
functions like 'invite' and 'warn' which are in a general sense
illocutionary and therefore arguably teachable, and 'persuade'
and 'incite' which are perlocutionary and thus not really
candidates for inclusion in a language course at all. Thirdly
the water is further muddied by Wilkins passing observation
that it is 'possible for one function to be contained within
another' (p.49). Fourthly the problem becomes more acute when
we look at the suggested realisations for functions; a large
number of Wilkins' examples contain explicit performative
verbs, "I suggest a visit to the zoo", "I blame John", "I
assert, contend, swear... that I was not responsible for the
accident" — but we know that the majority of speech acts are
indirect and if we take one of Wilkins' examples for 'blame'
"That was completely unjustified", we realise it could

equally well occur as (part of) the functions 'valuation',
'verdiction', 'inducement', 'information asserted',
'disagreement', 'negative emotion' and 'hostility'.

It is not, of course, in the least surprising that there
are these problems because they are exactly the ones that have
been troubling those involved in the analysis of interaction.
However, what is now necessary is for the functional approach
to react to and absorb some of the major findings of discourse
analysis: that there is organisation above the utterance and
some structures like greetings, closings and invitations can
be described with some accuracy; that context and position in
sequence are vital determinants of functional meanings, that
intonation is of crucial significance; and that inferencing is
an integral part of interpreting utterances.

Communicative Teaching

So far we have concentrated on communicative syllabuses,
which are essentially lists of functional items, without
considering methodology. It is in fact possible to implement
a communicative syllabus metalinguistically — Woollard (1984)
reports a Malaysian school course for 16-18 years olds based
on 88 functional categories and examined and therefore
frequently taught in terms of labelling rather than performing.
The following examples from a Malaysian textbook give some
idea of the problem.

> Girl: How can I ever trust you in future?
> Boy: On my honour, darling, I won't ever lie to
>   you again
>   A. to claim
>   B. to explain
>   C. to promise
>   D. to inform
>   ----------------
>
> Father: He's an ungrateful, selfish excuse for a
>   son.
> Mother: Perhaps, (sic) he's too busy to come.
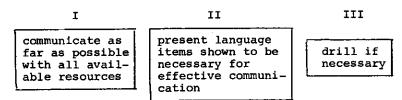>   He's always so busy with his business deals.

A. to disagree
B. to defend
C. to advise
D. to claim

<div align="center">(Woollard, p.218)</div>

Of course communicative syllabuses are not intended as the
basis for courses on discourse analysis — their main aim is
to facilitate and encourage communication in the classroom but
the problem is that they tend to encourage a concentration on
'components of discourse' and not the 'process of its creation',
(Widdowson, 1979:249). Paradoxically one doesn't need to
follow a Wilkins type communicative syllabus to emphasise
communication. In fact Brumfit (1979) suggests that the lasting
effect of the communicative movement may be more a shift in
methodology than a change in syllabus specification. The
traditional methodology, he suggests, was basically

I	II	III
present	drill	practice in content

and it was this that Wilkins (1972b) was reacting against when
he talked about the interactive situations being 'pedagogic,
bearing little resemblance to natural language use'. Brumfit
(1979) sees the post-communicative model as

I	II	III
communicate as far as possible with all available resources	present language items shown to be necessary for effective communication	drill if necessary

and comments that this is now a student-determined system with
the advantage that 'what needs to be taught is defined by the
failures to communicate at the first stage which thus operates
as a diagnosis.'

Wilkins suggested that by following a communicative
syllabus the learner would 'approximate more and more to the
language use characteristic of the community whose language he
is acquiring' (1976:13), but Brumfit points out that this may be

aiming too high, because the learner 'is not, usually, aiming to become a member of that community, but merely to be able to communicate with it.' (1980:103). In other words the aim is not to produce someone who is communicatively competent but rather someone who is a competent communicator, and there is an enormous difference. Thus one of the skills communicative teaching tries to foster is how to cope with limited language resources, a problem which requires excessive use of non-verbal signalling, paraphrase, inferencing,circumlocution, repetition and checking.

It is important at this point to consider what is meant by communication because the label is used for activities which 'range from drills to simulations, from dialogues to communicative games' (Harmer, 1982); in fact, much of what goes on in the foreign language classroom is not genuinely communicative. Apart from those occasions when the teacher is organising the classroom and the lesson, "open the window/your books", instructing,"a noun is..." and socialising,"hello Susan...", all the language used is more or less artificial, because it arises not from a need to use the language but from a requirement by the teacher to produce language. There are, however, degrees of communicativeness and artificiality.

Willis (1983) suggests that all classroom language activities can be seen as one of three kinds, **citation**, **simulation** and **replication** with only the third being in any real sense communicative. **Citation** activities are formal exercises like repeating, combining and transforming and give rise to sequences like

> What is this?
> It is a red pen.
> What is this?
> It is a blue book.

Simulation, including such activities as discussion and role play, is often regarded as communicative, (Sturtridge, 1981), but is not genuinely so. As Willis points out it is only when an activity has an outcome that it is truly communicative —

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'one of the features of communication is that the communicative decisions we take carry rewards and penalties', whereas in 'role play' there are no penalties — as he observes, in a role-playing situation the 'shopkeeper' can treat his customers 'in a surly monosyllabic manner with no risk of his losing their custom' (p.240) and it matters little to the customer if he pays 2p or £2 a dozen for his eggs; in simulation activities success is again measured linguistically.

Replication, Willis suggests, is the closest we can get to genuine communication in the classroom and this is achieved by creating situations in which there is a real need for communication in order to achieve something else, usually to solve a problem or play a game. In this instance the only artificiality is that the foreign and not the native language is used. Concept 7-9 devised originally for an ESL situation represents one of the earliest examples of such activities, there are now many more, and their advantage is that they involve the student intellectually and affectively, but their very genuineness can be a disadvantage — Fish (personal communication) tells of two Japanese students completing a tangram puzzle well ahead of other students but the only English they used was "yes" and "no". There is thus the danger of students creating a special problem-solving dialect and also of the involvement with the task generating not the intended motivation to learn more communicative strategies but rather a growing frustration at having to perform in the foreign language at all.

Brumfit's proposed sequence, attempt to communicate leading to necessary remedial teaching, conceals the very dificult link between the two stages, — as Willis (ibid, p. 253) points out 'many teachers will have great, possibly insurmountable difficulty in diagnosing quickly and effectively the problems students have in their communicative exercises, — as it stands, Brumfit's proposal has the claimed advantage of being student-centred but the disadvantage of being almost impossible to implement. Willis suggests as a

modification the sequence

I	II	III
Replication	Citation	Simulation

This of course implies a course structured in terms of a
careful presentation of activities designed to stimulate the
need for certain items which can then be explicitly taught
through citation and later practised in simulation situations.
Willis conceives the activities in terms of 'illocutionary
sequences and semantico-grammatical categories' and offers an
interesting sketch of a course which takes **sequence** as the
basic communicative unit and sets out to teach students to
build up sequences from exchanges and exchanges from moves —
different macro-functions can be slotted into this abstract
framework — and decisions about what functions to teach,
their sequence and their grammatical realisations are based on
insights derived from speech act theory, conversational
analysis, discourse analysis and Willis' own research.

An attractive feature of the Willis-Brumfit proposal is
that it doesn't require an out-and-out commitment to
structural or communicative syllabuses. As Willis observes, a
replication exercise concerned with distinguishing and
matching shapes will naturally lead into citation exercises
concerned with the specific lexis of size and shape and the
grammar of nominal group structure. One should also note that
whereas replication is a vital part of communicative teaching
certain essential aspects of communication, like greetings,
closings, invitations and presequences can in fact only be
practised through simulation exercises.

It is still early days to make a final evaluation of the
communicative syllabus but as we have seen there are many
areas in which it can be improved. There is still a great
deal of research to do but we can now see more clearly the
areas in which it is needed. Firstly, we need a detailed
description of the skills of the competent non-native speaker

— and even more importantly a ranking of these skills. How do some speakers with limited resources manage to understand and communicate with a great degree of success — in advance of research we can suggest that formulae for agreeing, checking, requesting clarification and repetition, and practice in inferring from context and partial understanding, are essential components of a communicative course.

Secondly there is a great need of contrastive studies — as Schmidt and Richards (1980) point out 'so far little attention has been given to the effect of transfer operating at the level of discourse rules'. Comparative studies would tell us what stylistic structures and linguistic and sociolinguistic formulations were comparable and therefore less important from a teaching point of view and which were very different. It would be useful to know if greetings and closings work in the same way, if kissing and handshaking is customary or forbidden, if pre-sequences are part of the system, whether the language is one in which the indirect formulae work in similar ways, whether the politeness system in terms of rules of address and situations requiring miti-gation are comparable, what topics are usual and what are taboo in interactions between strangers.

Finally, and most importantly, we need some serious research into the teaching/learning process — a disturbingly large number of those who speak several foreign languages see the problem largely in terms of learning vocabulary and structures. Language teachers work in a real and not an ideal world and will always have too little time — thus we need studies which compare the ultimate communicative performance of students who have followed structural, communicative and a variety of mixed syllabuses — only then will we be able to say for sure whether the best way to teach students to communicate is to teach communicatively.