LINGUISTICS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract - English is given a privileged position. In deciding to focus on English over other majority and minority languages within these contexts, policymakers are, deliberately or inadvertently, further enhancing the economic and sociopolitical value of English, and disempowering local languages and communities. Linguistic theories are abstract ideas about what language is and how it works; this knowledge is understood in terms of the study of language (through a creation of metalanguage—grammatics—and language descriptions). These linguistic descriptions are then taken into account in developing texts and other material that students are exposed to in their learning environment. In short, different linguistic theories explain language in different ways, which result in different types of language descriptions and influence the choices of texts and grammatical components used in the pedagogical material that students learn and are taught through. Similarly, various theories of learning and teaching explain how (language) learning takes place and how this understanding can be used for teaching purposes. These theories are taught to the teachers during their training programs, and the teachers use them in developing their pedagogical practices. Frameworks of language in education policy also influence the curriculum, which in turn, shapes the syllabi, textbooks, and other teaching and learning resources that the students use in their classes. Thus, the three broad theoretical areas are operationalized in different ways to shape the learning–teaching behavior and material that students experience. Through this paper, we discuss about linguistics imoacts.

Index Terms - English Language, Linguistics, Teaching, Meta Language Grammatics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Grounded in linguistic research and argumentation, The English Language: From Sound to Sense offers readers who have little or no analytic understanding of English a thorough treatment of the various components of the language. Its goal is to help readers become independent language analysts capable of critically evaluating claims about the language and the people who use it. Creativity is widely believed to be about letting the imagination loose in an orgy of totally free self-expression. It is, of course, no such thing. Creativity is born of discipline and thrives in a context of constraints. It is therefore reassuring to find this view repeatedly expressed throughout the collection. The issue of the value of constraints both as a stimulus and as a support for creativity will be addressed again later in this chapter. Creativity is a quality which manifests itself in many different ways, and this is one of the reasons it has proved so difficult to define. As Amabile (1996) points out, 'a clear and sufficiently detailed articulation of the creative process is not yet possible.' Yet we readilyrecognise creativity when we meet it, even if we cannot define it precisely. For all practical purposes this is enough, and we do not need to spend too much time agonising over a definition. There is sometimes a confusion in the relationship between creativity on the one hand and discovery and invention on the other. Discovery is about findingsomething that has always been there – but was untilthen unnoticed. For example, the phenomenon ofgravity was not created or invented by Newton: hediscovered it. By contrast, invention means bringingsomething into being which had not until thenexisted. A new poem or a picture would be instancesof this – but it could also be extended to creatinga new recipe, or a new game, or a new way ofusing paper… Is discovery an instance of genuinecreativity? Perhaps it is simply a different aspect ofcreativity from invention: the outcome is not a new'product' but a creative solution to a problem neversolved before.Amabile (1996) approaches creativity from a socialand environmental viewpoint. She claims thatprevious theories have tended to neglect the powerof such factors to shape creative effort. Her theoryrests on three main factors: domain-relevant skills(i.e. familiarity with a given domain of knowledge),creativity-relevant skills (e.g. the ability to breakfree of 'performance scripts' – established routines,to see new connections, etc.) and task motivation,based on attitudes, intrinsic motivation, extrinsicconstraints and rewards, etc. The social andenvironmental factors she discusses include peerinfluence, the teacher's character and behaviour, theclassroom climate, family influence, life stress, thephysical environment, degree of choice offered, time,the presence of positive role models and the scopefor play in the environment. These factors clearlyhave relevance for learning and can be blended intoan approach which seeks to promote creativity.

II. MENTAL DICTIONARIES

At this point we must ask whether the book dictionaries we are accustomedto are accurate models of the dictionaries we have in our minds/brains,which allow us to perform as speakers of a language. While we know a great deal about book dictionaries, the research on mind dictionaries is, in comparison,in its infancy.

First, do our mental dictionaries use the same strategy as book dictionariesto allow speedy access to words? Remember that this is accomplished inbook

dictionaries by alphabetization. We probably have between 50,000and 250,000 words tucked away in our minds, most of which we can accessfairly easily. We can recognize a word in about a fifth of a second (often evenbefore we have heard the entire word), consequently, searching such a largedata base requires that it be structured so as to allow rapid searching.

Second, do book dictionaries include all the information about individualwords and the relations they enter into that our mental dictionaries include? We saw that hyponymy is the major relation used by book dictionaries todefine words. Psycholinguistic research shows that where a superordinateterm is well-established, it comes readily to mind in word-search errors andin word-association tasks. However, this research also shows that co-hyponymy/coordination is the most important psychological bond among words.

III. USING EXISTING COGNITIVE AND LINGUISTICRESOURCES

An important insight emerging from task-based methodology is that we can, and must, create in the classroom "a need to communicate which brings into play not just target-language resources, but all the other resources learners have at their disposal (emphasis ours), for example, conjecture, gesture, knowledge of conventions, numeracy, and the mother tongue" (Prabhu 1987: 29). Learners in Class I or Class IV may be "babies" in the new language, but cognitively they are children, not toddlers. Failing to use their (and their teachers') existing cognitive and linguistic abilities deprives us of a resource, and alienates the learner, who fails to make a connection between the new language and her mental world. This is the consideration behind our recommendation for cutting across the barriers between languages, and between content subjects and languages.

IV. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Second-language pedagogy, more than the teaching of any other curricular subject, must meet the most stringent criterion of universal success: the spontaneous and appropriate use of language for at least everyday purposes. This is a feat achieved in one's own language(s) by every pre-school child (Chomsky 1975). It is this "minimum level of proficiency" (which can, however, be shown to require a mental grammar of remarkable sophistication, which allows for the comprehension and production of language in "real time") that the person on the street aspires to: "speak English", as against merely passing examinations in it, or knowing its grammar.7

• Can the English-language classroom replicate the universal success in the acquisition of basic spoken language proficiency that a child spontaneously achieves outside the classroom, for the languages in its environment? If so, how?

• Other spoken language skills in limited domains (for example, for the travel and tourism industry) would build on such a basic proficiency.

A common cognitive academic linguistic proficiency Language in education would ideally and ordinarily build on such naturally acquired language ability, enriching it through the development of literacy into an instrument for abstract thought and the acquisition of academic knowledge. We can then speak of a "cognitive academic linguistic proficiency" (cf. Cummins 1979) as language and thinking skills that build on the basis of a child's spontaneous knowledge of language. This is a goal of language education, andeducation through language. (This discussion has mostoften been in the context of language education in themother tongue.)

• Such cognitive and academic skills, moreover, are arguably transferable across languages, to a second language.

V. THE VARIETY AND RANGE OF ENGLISH TEACHINGIN INDIA (AN EXAMPLE)

The teaching and learning of English today is characterised by, on the one hand, a diversity of schools and linguistic environments supportive of English acquisition, and, on the other hand, by systemically pervasive classroom procedures of teaching a textbook for success in an examination, modulated by teacher beliefs influenced to varying degrees by inputs from the English-language teaching profession. Traditionally, English was taught by the grammartranslation method. In the late 1950s, structurally graded syllabi were introduced as a major innovation into the state systems for teaching English (Prabhu 1987: 10). The idea was that the teaching of language could be systematised by planning its inputs, just as the teaching of a subject such as arithmetic or physics could be. (The structural approach was sometimes implemented as the direct method, with an insistence on monolingual English classrooms.) By the late 1970s, however, the behavioural-psychological and philosophical foundations of the structural method had yielded to the cognitive claims of Chomsky for language as a "mental organ".4 There was also dissatisfaction within the Englishteaching profession with the structural method, which was seen as not giving the learners language that was "deployable" or usable in real situations, in spite of an ability to make correct

sentences in classroom situations. In hindsight, the structural approach as practised in the classroom led to a fragmentation and trivialisation of thought by breaking up language in two ways: into structures, and into skills. The form-focused teaching of language aggravated the gap between the learner's "linguistic age" and "mental age" to the point where the mind could no longer be engaged.

CONCLUSION

Language is an object of education because it is the material out of whichtexts are woven, and because language itself is the object of study in writingand speaking courses. We focus on language as we learn to edit ouressays and speeches. We develop our vocabularies and learn the meanings,uses, and conventional spellings of words. We learn to control the genresrequired for various disciplines and the specific characteristics expected inthose genres, for example, personal essays, academic papers of various sorts, business letters, reports, and magazine articles. Language is also an objectof study in so far as we develop our skills in using it to communicate, toacquire knowledge from lectures and books, to integrate new informationwith old, to replace false beliefs with new true ones, and to increase or decreaseour estimates of the likelihood that some belief we hold is true. As teacher educators, I believe we need to make a point of including such activities in our programmes to equip teachers in training not only with the techniques and knowledge needed for the classroom, but also with a set of skills which will sustain them in their own development long after a course has ended.

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