The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and the Linguistic Theory*

Yoshio FUJII, Toshinari OSAWA

(Received June 30, 1973)

1. Are the capacities of pupils developed by “teaching”?

When discussing the teaching of English as a foreign language, one should take every possible care that this does not become an argument which is nothing but theory. In other words, one should not discuss simply speculatively the teaching of English without analysing the actual conditions of learners.

It is not exaggerating to say that the research on education, not to speak of the teaching of English, starts by being driven by a sense of responsibility to find out how to cope with the actual conditions of learners.

In this connection, a few facts will be be briefly given here. The following statistics are the results of the examination given to the pupils who seemed to have trouble in English language learning.**

(a) 85% of them answered that they did not understand the term employed by the teacher when learning the grammar.

(b) 83% did not know the crucial points to which special attention should be paid (attention pointers) when rendering a Japanese sentence into English.

(c) 65% did not know how to arrange or how to connect different words when rendering English into Japanese, even if they understood the meaning of each word.

(d) 73% did not know in which case the infinitive, the gerund, or the perfect tense should be used.

(e) 65% were at a loss how to translate an infinitive or a gerund in a sentence.

(f) 60% did not know how to answer the English questions of the teacher.

(g) 73% encountered difficulty in learning by heart only the so-called ‘important sentences’, which did not have any contextual relationship.

Indeed the learning of a foreign language is accompanied by a host of difficulties and sometimes huge efforts are needed. However, if amongst the difficulties facing extraordinary high percentage of learners some are derived from the fact that the

* Adapted from the paper read at the Summer Seminar of the Japan Association of College English Teachers, Miyagi College of Education, Sendai, August 23—25, 1972.

** These results were obtained from the answers to the questionnaires given to the pupils learning English as a foreign language at municipal junior high schools in Morioka city. The results were reported in Osawa, T. et al. *The Improvement in English Language Teaching*, The Meiji-Tosho Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1966.
necessary learning conditions which the normal human should be given are ignored, we think that measurements should immediately be taken to determine the causes of the difficulties and to apply remedial techniques for each specified type of trouble.

According to another investigation carried out on the pupils of our school*, we learned that the pupils did not have any obviously clear consciousness of the objectives nor did they feel any active motivation as regards the learning of the English language.

(a) For what purpose are you learning English?
(7th graders) In preparation for the job in my future
(8th graders) The same as the 7th graders.
(9th graders) Because it is an obligation and a required subject for senior high school entrance examination.

(b) When do you feel some interest during English lessons?
(For all graders) When I can command what I have learned. When I understand a foreigner speaking the words I learned.

(c) In what cases do you lose interest?
(For all graders) When the same words and sentences are too often repeated. When I get poor marks in tests.

(d) Even if you dislike English, you may sometimes find it interesting. When do you have even a slight interest?
(For all graders) When the discussions bear on the difference or similarities between Japanese and foreign cultures.

2. What are supposed to be the pupils' serious problems related to the learning of English?

(a) When teaching the English language, it is necessary to question whether the objectives of learning English are adequately made clear or whether intrinsic motivation of learning is really evoked.

(b) It seems necessary to reconsider whether our method of teaching allows the pupils to employ actively the knowledge of English for themselves and whether the way of teaching comprises adequate illustrations of the grammar in concrete situations; in other words, the teaching of grammatical categories, such as the infinitive or the gerund, should not be limited to superficial and mechanical process.

(c) It is necessary to fundamentally ameliorate the "course of study" of the grammatical materials.

In fact, text books are, as they are used to be, an array of unsystematic materials that lack means 'to develop the linguistic senses of language users' (This is one of the general aims of the English language curriculum in the Course of Study in English by the Ministry of Education).

The capacity of the pupils of junior high school is developed as fully as that of adults. However, the question remains whether appropriate strategies of teaching have been considered to assure the successful learning of the pupils, after having correctly determined the competence of the pupils at this level of development, especially their linguistic competence. If the teaching of English would appeal to the linguistic capacity which the normal pupils come to display, one ought to know what competence is and how it grows.*,**

We are sure that it is necessary to examine objective data and study fully the above hypothesized problems.

3. Implications of the linguistic theory for improving English language teaching in Japan

We would like (a) to study the linguistic theory which gives implications for knowing the intrinsic competence of the humans so as to make the use of language possible; (b) to study the linguistic theory which gives implications for finding a way to develop the pupils' capacity to penetrate into the meaning; and (c) to study the linguistic theory which gives implications for making possible an effective organization of the teaching materials.

In Japan, the teaching of English as a foreign language has been closely related to structural linguistics and has achieved a specific development under its influence (20-odd years since 1940). Even now there is a teaching method called the 'Oral Approach' which is employed in various fashions. Especially the 'pattern practice', which is one of the techniques of this teaching method, is supported by the theory of structural linguistics and the theory of behaviorism. Indeed this 'pattern practice' is effective in forming one side of the abilities necessary for the beginners to form a disposition reacting to the surface signals of the grammatical structure.

However, on the other hand, an active formation of the underlying performance

---

* Carroll, J. B. *Lectures on English Language Testing and Teaching* (Translated and annotated by the Japan Association of College English Teachers), The Taishukan Publishing Co., Tokyo, 1972, pp.88. “In the past, evaluation of language instruction has been subjective. This has been true both in the United States and in Japan. As a research psychologist, I find myself preferring objective data on the outcomes of instruction. Before we can make informed subjective judgements we must first collect hard facts and good objective data.”


1. competence (what actually becomes known, as different from L.A.D., the mechanism through which the process of getting the knowledge occurs) can be learned, and probably can also be taught;
2. competence is relative, for it can be bigger or smaller, both in different speakers at the same time and in the same speakers at different times; and
3. competence is measurable, in that it is plausible to infer the amount of competence from the observable data (from performance), provided that the reliability of such inference is defined and guaranteed in terms of methods and principles of analysis of sample utterances.”
abilities of language users could not be expected from the superficial training of only reacting passively to the verbal clues as stimuli given by the teacher.

In order to make up for such a defect, it is natural for language teachers to search for some implications of the linguistic theory of transformational grammar, which was formulated by Noam Chomsky.**

Transformational grammar is a theoretical model of human capacity for meaningful communication through language, i.e., of certain abilities that can be assumed to underlie the production and recognition of sentences.

Moreover transformational grammar is concerned with the following areas that have been neglected by the other grammatical analyses: (a) the innate human capacity which human beings possess, making it possible for them to learn languages. In this connection, Chomsky made an assumption that "there is no racial differentiaction detectable as far as ability to acquire a language is concerned, if we assume that much uniformity in the human species, then we must assume that what we demonstrate about the person who has learned English, about the intrinsic capacities that made it possible to English, will be true of the intrinsic capacities that made it possible to learn Japanese or Russian or some African languages."***; (b) the ability of a speaker to recognize and produce an infinite number of sentences which he has not experienced before; (c) an attempt to define a distinction between the deep and surface structures of the sentence, the deep structure containing the aspects of grammatical and semantic relation, and to describe various kinds of transformational rules of deletion, addition, permutation, and replacement which convert the deep structure into the surface structure; (d) a definition of the difference between competence and performance. Competence is the idealized linguistic capacity every speaker of a language possesses. Performance is the produce of competence.

4. In order to apply a better theory on languages, educational and academically theoretical orientation is necessary.

Indeed the higher sciences enlarge and develop the linguistic capacity of human

---


"3. The English Language Institute Course

The course using extensive repetition and minimal pair contrast drills was based strictly on the spoken language, with considerable time and attention devoted to pronunciation. Mastering sound system was given first priority, with a limited vocabulary introduced in the early stages. New sentences and patterns were introduced first orally, with reading postponed for later consideration. In the grammar, special attention was given to the signals which the hearer utilizes to interpret the relationship among content words and ultimately the meanings of sentences."


The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and the Linguistic Theory

beings, they also possess a negative aspect depending on how they are applied.

When we apply the transformational grammar to the teaching of English, we have accepted the orientation of the theory of learning psychology which makes the programming possible in order to internalize the knowledge of language. It is the "theory on the stage-by-stage formation of the intellectual actions", the learning theory of P.Ya. Galperin* of the Vygotsky School. This has become the only means to optimize linguistic science for the organization of teaching materials as well as for the development of an efficient teaching procedure to be utilized by the pupils learning English as a foreign language.

Aside from what is mentioned above, the following are the conditions which must be theoretically examined.

(a) It is necessary to establish an evaluation method* to cope with the language acquisition capacity of the pupils and to gain the hard facts on the actual state of the teaching of English as a foreign language in Japan.

(b) It is necessary to grasp the specificity of the development** of those receiving education, pupils of junior high schools in the present case.

(c) The evaluation of the outcomes of education will be insufficient if the teaching materials are not selected discriminately and are not used to actually result in growth and development of the pupils, helping them accomplish the aims of the learning of English.

The materials should be such that they will motivate pupils' interest in the subject. They should be used at the appropriate learning levels.

---


"The learning of every mental action passes through the following basic stages:

1. Creating a preliminary conception of the task.
2. Mastering the action with the object.
3. Mastering the action on the plane of audible speech.
4. Transferring the action to the mental plane.
5. Consolidation of the mental action."

The first stage begins with the task of learning something, a task usually set up by other people; on the basis of demonstration and explanation the child builds up a preliminary concept of the action. Then he makes himself familiar with the action in its external content, and gets to know it in practice, in its application to the things. Next, the action is separated from things and transferred to the plane of audible speech; it becomes verbal. Finally, the action is transferred to the mental plane."


*** Hunt, Kellog W. "Recent Measures in Syntactic Development." In M. Lester (Ed.) Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1970, pp. 187–200 : He offered new suggestions on measures of syntactic development. His contribution is a new syntactic unit which he calls a T-unit, a kind of minimal independent sentence structure. The mean length of T-unit turns to be the most reliable index of syntactic maturity. We intend to examine in the pupils having the lessons in the Japanese language.
It is necessary to lay 'the concept of conservation' in the core of the optimization of the teaching materials.

The concept of conservation means to stand against the diversity of various simulations which the surface structures display and to make oneself conscious of the underlying invaribility.*

It is needless to say that it is important to verify various hypotheses through experimental classes. As we have mentioned above, scientific means can be used to enlarge and develop the capacity of human beings, but this may present a negative aspect depending on how it is used, whence the confirmation of the objectivity of the hypothesis with the aid of experiments becomes a necessity.

5. The actual application of the linguistic theory

a. Concept of innate capacity

The characteristics and the reality of this innate capacity are still at the stage of hypothesis. However, through experimental classes, it is necessary to examine how "pointing out similarities between aspects of the two languages facilitates learning"** by appealing to the common features of English and the native language of the pupils who have reached a certain stage of development through learning Japanese. Thus, it may become clear that the parts of the English language specifically different from those of the Japanese language would be stored coordinately for some time, be gradually reduced by the learning of similarities, and the conditions supporting the fact that competence can be taught and learned would be also affirmed.

Indeed, the process of diagnosing the foreign language learning aptitude is an important problem. The following are examples of the basic survey so far carried out.***

(a) Pupils who were trained to read quickly the cloze passages**** in Japanese easily learned quick reading of the cloze passages in English.

(b) Pupils who were trained to predict the verbal contextual element by using


** Carroll, J.B. "Contrastive Analysis and Interference Theory." In James E. Alatis (Ed.) *Report of the Nineteenth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies*, Georgetown Univ. Press, No. 21, 1968 : pp.121—122. “There has been hardly any recent study of guidance and coaching, and yet guidance and coaching are usually heavily relied upon in foreign language learning. We need to study their effects in helping students overcome negative transfer. Apparently negative transfer in foreign language of ten involves response system that are extremely subtle and out of the conscious of the student. It would be my guess that to the extent that these response systems could be brought into the awareness of the student. Negative transfer effects would be considerably reduced, because the student could make them better direct his own learning to avoid the interference of his first language system. Likewise, pointing out similarities between aspects of two languages may facilitate learning.”

*** Osawa, T. “A Contrastive Analysis in the Acquisition of English by the Children 10 to 14 : Native and Non-native Performance” Unpublished, 1673.
The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and the Linguistic Theory

The cloze passages in Japanese easily adapted themselves to the task of filling in the blanks of the cloze passages in English.

(c) The study of synonyms is an important phase in the teaching of English as a foreign language. However, it is necessary to connect this study with how to understand the shades of meaning that polysemic verbs (e.g., bring, take, and so on) have, because I found that pointing out the representative meanings of the polysemic verbs by using Japanese was economical for the pupils to comprehend sentences in English.

(d) A contrastive study on the basic vocabulary of English by the method of free association is also an important work in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

b. Concepts of the deep and surface structures and those of transformation

Next we will discuss the applications of the concepts of the deep and surface structures and those of the concepts of transformation.

It is said that how a speaker or a hearer effectively displays his insight into the understanding the relation between sentence structures has a large correlation with his cognitive capacity on the deep structure. In this connection, we will discuss how to develop the cognitive capacity of the deep structure of the sentence.

(a) The concept of the deep structure helps the language teacher develop the capacity of the pupils' insight into the meaning. The deep structure is assumed to be the source of the meaning of the surface structure; it contains the motives of the sentence production. Therefore the pupils have to learn how the motives presented in the situation are used to control the utterances with the aid of contextual task; for instance, the pupils are given a certain situation which motivates them to select a word or a word group, a grammatical form or a sentence pattern, and so on. Once the motives are successfully semanticized, later on the symbols evoke the motives, and conversely the motives evoke the symbols.

(b) The concept of transformation also helps the language teacher develop the capacity of the pupils' insight into the recognition of the relation between sentence structures. The relation between the deep structure and the surface structure is utilized as "transformational exercise" in which the pupils have to learn how the language operates via intellectual manipulations of sentences. For instance, in lan-


"The 'cloze procedure' was invented by W.L. Taylor (1953) to refer to a type of test originally designed to measure the readability of passages of prose. The test was constructed by deleting words from a selection and requiring the examine to fill in the blanks. The average score for a large group of subjects was taken as an index of the level of difficulty of the passage. The term 'cloze' was used with the notion of Gestalt "closure" in mind, referring to the natural human psychological tendency to fill in the gaps in patterns. The restoration of words deleted from a selection of prose in order for the passage to make sense is a special use of this ability to complete broken patterns."
language teaching procedures we present (a) some meaningful situations or contexts first, give the pupils the conception of the task, and then basic vocabulary and kernel sentences; (b) teach them how kernel sentences are transformed into one by using a set of sequential directions (algorithmic procedures)* and teach them the knowledge of sentence structure**; (c) give them chances to perform with the help of directions; then stimulate them to proceed to mental action without the help of directions; (d) evaluate how well the pupils have mastered the knowledge of the English language with reference to the following skills:

- Hearing (recognition)
- Speaking (production)
- Reading (recognition)
- Writing (production)

6. Introspection and prospects

(1) It is necessary to verify the various educational strategies through the data on the outcomes of the teaching of English as a foreign language on a national scale. Therefore we think that it is necessary to officially install schools which cooperate with colleges of education in the investigations programmed by the latter.

(2) A kind of fundamental investigation should be carried out continuously in the integrate curriculum in the schools attached to the universities or the colleges of education.


The authors reported as follows:

1. Some implications of transformational grammar for English learning: competence and performance, base and surface, the way language operates.

2. Some implications of recent psychological studies for the formation of mental actions in English learning: algorithmic way as a process to produce English sentences.

3. The theory of 'algorithmic (step-by-step) formations of mental actions'.


1. Teaching the knowledge of sentence structure: knowing a language means knowing sets of relations rather than constituent elements.

2. Teaching successful strategies of acquisition: one of the abilities Carroll has identified deals with verbalization of grammatical relations in sentences. Using, perhaps, linguistic theories of transformational grammar the teaching of such verbalizations therefore ought to facilitate foreign language acquisition.

3. Teaching habit integration and automaticity: many language teachers seem to be convinced that pattern drills serve to automatize grammatical habits. However, it is difficult to justify this expectation on the theoretical grounds.

Development of grammatical competence should be facilitated by getting the learner to perform a set of transformation on families of sentences.

4. On semi-grammatical sentences: no language teacher should ever force his pupil to use only well-formed sentences in practice conversion. There must exist lawful transformations between semisentences and well-formed ones.
A joint research in close relation with specialists of all allied sciences should be performed.

Abstract

1. Are the capacities of pupils developed by "teaching"?
   The result of the examination given to the pupils who seemed to have trouble in English language learning is presented, and that measurements should be taken to determine the causes of the difficulties is suggested.

2. What are the pupils' serious problems related to the learning of English?
   A few disadvantages of the present teaching of English are noted.

3. Implications of the linguistic theory for improving English language teaching in Japan.
   Some implications of transformational grammar for the English language teaching are outlined: (a) the innate human capacity, (b) the ability of a speaker to recognize and produce an infinite number of sentences which he has not experienced before, (c) the deep and surface structures and transformation, (d) competence and performance.

4. In order to apply a better theory on languages, to the teaching of English an educational and academically theoretical orientation is necessary.
   The higher sciences enlarge and develop the capacity of human beings, but possess a negative aspect depending on how they are applied. How the linguistic theory should be applied to the teaching of English is suggested.

5. The actual application of the linguistic theory
   Two topics in reference to the teaching of English are discussed: (1) It is necessary to point out similarities between aspects of the two languages. (2) The transformational exercises in meaningful situations develop the capacity of the pupils' insight into the meaning.

6. Introspection and prospects
   It is necessary to verify the various educational strategies through the data on the outcomes of the teaching of English as a foreign language on a national scale.