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To some extent the title of this talk is misleading. Something more like ' What does Communicative methodology have to say about the teaching of···' would be more appropriate since it is with the practical classroom application of communicative theory that I am chiefly concerned in the present discussion. The title arose, however, because of the British Council seminar for Japanese teachers held at Fujinomiya in August which I attended. I became aware that the phrase 'communicative approach' was very much current in Japan and that it seemed to be acquiring the status almost of a magic formula. Participants seemed to have come with the idea that if only they could acquire this remarkable thing, the communicative approach, all would be well with English teaching in Japan. I am not certain that people fully understood the implications of the phrase, but I felt it was being elevated to something approaching an ideology. I am strongly opposed to ideologies in the classroom where I believe that any method that works, that is, produces effective learning, is valid pedagogical practice. When we look, however, at traditional methods and the state of English language competence amongst students in Japan and ask the question 'are these methods producing effective results?', I am sorry to say the answer cannot be totally affirmative. And this, I think, accounted for the eagerness amongst the teachers at the seminar for a new approach to the problems of English Language teaching.

In a sense the phrase 'communicative approach' is unfortunate since it suggests that there is one single approach or method to be adopted whereas, in fact, a variety of approaches or, more precisely, methods may be termed communicative. It is unfortunate, also, that it is frequently used as if in opposition to the teaching of grammar. Communicative methods are not necessarily non-grammar based, though some of its wilder exponents sometimes seem to suggest this, and communicative theory is much more concerned with how we teach grammar than whether we teach grammar or not.

Communicative theory developed partly as a reaction to the mechanist approaches to

language teaching in the early sixties. Julian Dakin's still immensely readable ' The Language Laboratory and Language Learning', in a way leads the attack, but it was given great impetus, I believe, by the problems facing the large number of foreign students who were entering English Universities at the time. While many of them professed to know English and had often spent many years learning it, they were often quite incapable of performing the normal linguistic tasks required by a University course in which instruction was entirely in English. They were unable to understand lectures, make notes in English, discuss, write essays. The same problems must face foreign students in Japan, and it must be that communicative methods have considerable relevance to the teaching of Japanese to overseas students here. Such incompetence at University level, I think, alerted the linguists to the problems of foreign language learning, and drawing on what they themselves were beginning to discover about meaning, discourse, and the whole basis of language development, they began to formulate the new theories now called communicative.

Communicative theory, amongst the many other issues it concerns itself with, seems to me to centre on two basic questions:

What are we learning a language for?—this gave rise amongst other things to the wide range of E.S.P. programmes which I shall not concern myself with here;

and

'What are the most effective ways of learning a language?'

The answer to the first question resulted in the name by which the new approaches are known. We learn a language in order to communicate. This, it must be emphasised, does not simply mean speaking. Communicative methods are not, as is frequently supposed, concerned with speaking techniques only, but with the whole range of activities by which we communicate ideas to others or ideas are communicated to us. Speaking is an important part of learning a language but, no more important than listening, for example, or writing, or the widely used but almost totally mishandled activity of reading.

In answer to the second question, communicative theory stresses that we learn a language by a process of exposure to all forms of language use, and by practising language as realistically as possible within the classroom situation. Widdowson, in his now classic distinction between language use and usage (rules),[2] emphasises that in learning a language we are not merely engaged in practising structural drills, many of which may be highly artificial, but in learning to manipulate language in the manner in which a native speaker manipulates it, by understanding the functions that the structures are called on to realise.

In talking about the implications of communicative theory for classroom teaching, I want to focus attention on three main emphases in communicative methodology which I think are helpful when we consider classroom practice. They are not the only emphases, and the terms

I use are not standard, but I think they provide useful focal points for our thinking, and it so happens that they also relate quite neatly to what we traditionally refer to as the four skills.

They are:

Interpretation, which has a particular relevance to the receptive skills, reading and listening;

Discrimination, which refers to our selection of materials and particularly relates to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary;

Manipulation, by which I mean language in performance in the classroom, with implications for the more expressive skills, speaking and writing.

There are other equally important areas which are not included in these categories, but it is quite impossible to discuss the whole of communicative theory in such a limited time and I have chosen those areas which seem to me to have immediate practical application to our teaching methods. Grouping them in this way is merely to help our thinking and practice.

To take interpretation first. Though Widdowson emphasises that the process of interpretation is basic to all language performance, the areas in the classroom in which we most immediately encounter it and where our teaching practices can most facilitate or impede it, are reading and listening, and it is with the teaching of these two skills, both I fear seriously neglected, that I want to deal here. Now reading is very widely used as a means of language teaching. That it is often misused seems to me a matter of some concern. But the fact that nearly all text-books contain texts which have to be interpreted is witness to the feeling that reading is important. It seems to me that in Japan, and elsewhere, the way we usually teach such texts is to work through them, glossing the meaning word by word, and giving a translation in the student's mother tongue. Considerable attention is given to words in isolation, therefore, very little to the underlying meaning of groups of sentences or to the implications of the passage as a whole. Indeed, students are frequently quite unable to reproduce in any form a consistent account of something they have just read. This practice has two highly undesirable consequences, in my opinion, which far from improving a student's competence in English serve to inhibit it. The first is what I call single-word obsession. A student feels that he cannot understand a text unless he understands (i.e. is able to translate) every word it contains, something a native speaker may not do. The second is dictionary dependency. A student believes he has only understood a word when he has found an equivalent in his own tongue. When he fails to do so, he is completely confused. A student when confronted, as my own students were, with a recipe in which he understands every word except the word 'recipe' which heads the instruction, is quite unable to suggest its meaning unless he has a dictionary. In other words, the normal linguistic process by which we derive meaning from context has been disrupted by the manner in which meaning is being handled in the classroom. Further, a student believes he knows a word when he has found its

equivalent and his acquisition of that word stops there. He makes little attempt to retain it or to find new contexts in which to exploit it. This, I believe, is the reason for the extremely limited vocabulary of many students. The word has been read, perhaps understood, and then dismissed as acquired, and nothing in its teaching has aided its retention.

For most teachers, the most usual approach to meaning is through the comprehension exercise and it thus follows that we should pay special attention to this kind of exercise, asking the question to what extent it encourages interpretation or inhibits it. I do not propose to go fully into the teaching of comprehension here. It is an important area and requires full discussion, and I would simply like to draw attention to Widdowson's point that when we are teaching comprehension we are not teaching students to comprehend one text but to comprehend texts in general[3]. In other words, we are developing a skill rather than disseminating meaning. In this respect, I would draw attention to two kinds of comprehension question; what I sometimes refer to as 'open' and 'closed' questions, those which encourage interpretation and those which do not. A closed question is a question which a student can answer only if he knows the answer already. Many 'what is the meaning of··' questions are of this type and in my view a test such as T.O.F.L frequently contains too many, though they become 'open' when the meaning can be derived from context. Open questions are questions which can be answered as a result of some sort of deductive or interpretative activity on the part of the reader. Thus, if the phrase 'Vehicles prohibited' is presented totally without context, 'What is the meaning of vehicles' is a closed question. If on the other hand a context is presented:'I picked up the vehicle from the garage. The car, a brand-new Toyota gleamed more alluringly than ever' it becomes an open question since by reading on the reader can deduce the meaning of 'vehicle', though the question might have been more effectively phrased 'What word means the same as 'vehicle' in the second sentence? ' In my view 'closed' questions in the teaching of comprehension should be largely avoided except as an occasional means of easing social interchange between teacher and student.

A further aspect of the teaching of reading is the recognition that the purposes for which we read, and therefore the manner in which we undertake that reading, are not always the same. We may read to absorb the broad outline of a subject, or to discover a precise piece of information — an address, for example — or with considerable attention to detail. To do this we also must be able to recognise the kind of material we are reading — the context against which we must interpret the written word. The results of not doing so can be extraordinary. An ageing professor, not Japanese, returned a book to me and proceeded to talk in great detail about the weather. The book was George Mikes' 'How to be an Alien' and I suddenly realised that he had taken what is a satirical look at the English as a handbook of English behaviour and was following its instructions to the letter. This seems to me to be the

consequence of always teaching texts in the same way. Reading is thought of as one single kind of activity and all reading material as the same. The text-books, too, encourage this view, since the texts they provide, especially at Junior High School level, tend to be all of one type — some sort of fictional, occasionally factual, narrative with a moral at the end. These, in fact, are Sunday School texts and as such are a fairly rare variety of reading material in contemporary England, and the ways of thinking they embody will hardly ever be encountered by a foreign learner once he leaves the classroom. If we are to use reading as an effective aid to learning English, we must view it as a possibility for the student to encounter as many models of written language as we can possibly provide, colloquial as well as literary, advertisement as much as narrative, so that he can recognise and internalise the different features of language they embody and develop his interpretative skills accordingly. This is particularly true in Japan where there is an enormous amount of written English on display. Yet when you talk to students they seem largely unaware of its existence. They cannot tell you what is written on their tee-shirts, they are unable to recall vocabulary items they see every day in shops and supermarkets. The language is not in their text-books so they cannot read it.

I have spent a considerable time on the teaching of reading because it seems to me it is the area in the Japanese classroom where there is the greatest scope for flexibility and perhaps the greatest need for reform, but another equally significant area where our interpretative skills are drawn on to the utmost is listening. It goes without saying that if we are to teach language communicatively, to develop the student's ear for and interpretation of normal spoken English, we simply must get listening activities into the classroom. In my view, every lesson should contain some listening experience, if only for five minutes, and it certainly should play a much larger part in curriculum and examination than it does at present. Again and again, when one meets people, outside the teaching profession, whose spoken English is well above average, one finds that they have learnt largely by listening to popular pro-grammes on the American radio network.

Listening activities can be divided loosely into two main categories, those which are designed to encourage sound and word recognition, and those designed to develop the students ability to decode spoken messages. Now even when listening activities occur in the classroom, they are often of the first type rather than the second, and frequently they are not really listening activities at all but kinds of drill designed to teach pronunciation or grammar. This means that, just as in our reading activities we present the students with highly artificial texts designed to practise grammatical structures, so in listening we present them with instances of slow, rehearsed, perfectly composed sentences very far removed from the speed,

rhythms, hesitations, and indeed pronunciation, of ordinary British or American speech. Though these practices may be necessary in the early stages of learning a language, if used exclusively, they become inhibiting. As with dictionary dependency in reading, they foster in the student the idea that he cannot understand what he hears unless he hears and understands every word, something which in fact, in rapidly spoken English, it is impossible to do. To counteract this, therefore, it is essential to introduce into the classroom at a very early stage, along with word/sound recognition activities, simple instances of natural spoken dialogue, carefully graded for vocabulary and structural difficulty, accompanied by listening tasks which can be performed without hearing and understanding every word that is spoken. Many materials, 'Strategies'[4], for example, or the New Cambridge Course[5], provide numerous examples of how this can be done—number practice related to telephone calling for example. Japanese students' inability to speak is not so much their inability to compose sentences, though many of them cannot do this since they have spent most of their language practice-time in blank-filling exercises, as their almost total inability to listen to what is said to them. They seem to have no experience of English as a natural aural medium and the consequences for their learning are disastrous. It will not, I believe, get any better until listening is made a central feature of the language learning process.

In turning now to the second area, discrimination, I am shifting the emphasis rather more on to what we teach than how we teach, with special reference to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. One of the keypoints of communicative theory is its emphasis on the diversity of language use and the different kinds of linguistic task, both receptive and expressive, which the foreign learner has to master. But in stressing the diversity of language task it has also focussed attention on the differences in learners' needs. The whole of E.S.P. methodology, which in my view has sometimes gone to extremes, is based on the idea that the language a student acquires should be relevant to his needs. It therefore becomes important for teacher and student to discriminate between more relevant and less relevant linguistic practices.

It seems to me that in our teaching of grammar and vocabulary we tend to view all items as having equal importance. We do not discriminate or encourage the student to discriminate between those items which carry maximum value for language use and those which may be practically useless. To consider grammar first. In our teaching the first distinction we need to make is between what I shall call theoretical descriptive grammar and practical functional grammar. Since in the classroom we are usually concerned with training language users and not linguisticans, it is clear that the emphasis must be on the latter. By practical grammar I mean those structural forms which it is essential for a student to know in order to be able

to communicate accurately and effectively. For instance, in English, it is not especially important for a student to be able to describe one prepositional phrase as that of time and another as that of place since such a distinction in English does not usually affect grammatical form. Adverbial, adjectival distinctions, however, are more important, as are subject/object relations. Our teaching should reflect this. I think, too, we need in our concern for grammatical correctness, something very dear to most teachers' hearts, to distinguish between what I shall call 'significant' and 'insignificant' error. Significant error is that which inhibits effective communication, insignificant error that which may be incorrect but impedes comprehension much less. For example most teachers and many native speakers are horrified at the misuse of the second person of the verb to be 'You was' instead of 'You were'. It seems to be an error of the most outrageous kind, yet, as an error, it scarcely impedes comprehension at all, whereas a failure to grasp that a negatively formed question 'You aren't coming, are you?' is confirmed by the negative 'No, I'm not,' wreaks havoc with normal communication. Yet, judging by the time and effort one spends attempting to disentangle the intention behind such responses in non-native speech, and the infrequency with which one encounters instances of 'You was', the second is clearly highly drilled and the first scarcely practised at all. 'I like' and 'I'd like' is another such example. I am not saying that in our teaching of grammar we are not always concerned with accuracy to some extent, but that it is important, in our correcting and emphasis, we pay special attention to those areas which are significant for communicative efficiency.

A similar need to discriminate is required in the area of vocabulary acquisition where again there is a tendency to emphasize all items as having equal importance. Yet, clearly, they have not. Some words a student will meet once in a lifetime, others almost daily. Unfortunately there seems to be a belief that the more unusual and difficult words you know, the better your English is. As far as I can see, many examinations seem to be constructed on this principle. They thus are testing what in fact is accidental acquisition. The more obscure a word is, the more a matter of chance it is that a learner will have encountered it. What examinations should be testing is a student's competence in the basic skills of the language and his ability to manipulate these communicatively, and our vocabulary teaching should likewise be directed towards this end. It also should be pointed out that vocabulary should be taught in such a way as to bring it into immediate use by giving appropriate collocations. There is not much point in learning the word 'bicycle' unless you also know that what you usually do is 'ride' it.

A final area where a learner's own discrimination needs to operate is that of appropriacy, a central preoccupation in communicative theory. In using a language a student needs to

know not only correct structures and lexical items, but to distinguish contexts in which such forms are appropriate. 'I'd like' and 'I want' are both correct grammatical forms expressing a similar need, but the second is usually polite while the first, in certain contexts, can be downright rude. He needs, also, in his selection of vocabulary, to be aware of concepts of negative and positive value. A word like 'extraordinary', for example, would seem to function generally as praise in American English whereas in British English it frequently denotes criticism. Now, it is, I think, extremely difficult to teach this kind of awareness in any formal way and there is a danger of our falling into the trap of teaching phrase-book English. Some of the new materials seem to do this. And this danger is especially prevalent in countries where language instruction lays strong emphasis on correct grammatical form. The student acquires one way of doing something in English and assumes it is the only way. 'I'm fine thank you, and you ?' seems to be being taught in this way at present, whereas there are, in fact, numerous responses to 'How are you?' ranging from 'Very well, thank you' to 'Dreadful'. Instead, one is parrotted on all occasions. Language thus is entirely divorced form thought. Much can be done if we realise that functional awareness in English is acquired largely by the degree to which we can internalise the rhythms and forms of English, and depends on the extent to which we can develop a student's ability to think and feel English as a vital living force. The way we present vocabulary items and the contexts within which we practise grammatical structures are important, but above all such competence is developed by exposure to all forms of English use. We cannot achieve it if we persistently expose students to one form only, especially if that is of the literary variety. The peculiarly stilted nature of much foreign English is the result of its acquisition from nineteenth century narrative fiction.

In the brief space left, and at the risk of becoming excessively tedious, I want briefly to turn attention to the third area of my talk, what I have called manipulation. I am not particularly happy with the term — it has a mechanical ring about it — whereas what I want to discuss is aspects related to the expressive skills, but I use it to distinguish the third stage of classroom activity in any lesson. In talking about a lesson it is usual to make a distinction between presentation — language input — and practice — output. But I prefer to think of the practice stage as having two distinct phases. The first is the controlled rehearsing of a particular language pattern or function, and the second is the application of the practised skill in conditions as near as possible to those of real language use — conditions in which the student must draw on his own linguistic resources in order to fulfil the demands of the linguistic task he is confronted with. It occurs, for example, when a student who has been practising question forms has to complete a questionnaire from new information gathered orally from other students. To do this he must not only ask the question, but make it understood to someone else and make sense himself of what comes back as an answer. He

is thus operating in conditions very close to those under which real language occurs. Much of the concern of communicative methodology has been how to introduce such conditions of real language use into the artificial situation of the classroom. In terms of the expressive skills two solutions have been especially fruitful. One is problem-solving. Students are presented with tasks which can only be completed by verbal exchange. The questionnaire mentioned above is a simple example but there are others in which one student may have half the necessary information, a price-list for example, while another has a list of possible purchases and a restricted budget. Thus many simple role-play activities, furnishing a room, planning a party etc, which artificial in themselves, take on the semblance of real speech since real communication becomes necessary.

The second effective innovation communicative theory has introduced is that of information transfer activities, where a student receives information in one form and is required to manipulate it in another. Aural information is realised in note-form, notes are turned into text, (the use of models of writing becomes essential here) written text becomes verbal summary and so on. And the student is not only practising language; he is using it to perform functions that are normal to native speakers and to perform them in the way native speakers perform them. Such practices facilitate an integrated approach to language teaching, in itself more realistic.

It is, of course, impossible to discuss the teaching of the expressive skills without raising the vexed question of fluency versus accuracy. Let me say that, personally, I think it is made too much of. It is immediately clear to any intelligent teacher that, when we are encouraging a student to manipulate the language freely and with confidence, we cannot choose this moment to be nagging him about accuracy. But a class is not one single activity and there will be other moments and other exercises when accuracy can be our concern. What is needed is a judicious balance between the two. One of the reasons for my triple division of a lesson into presentation, practice, and manipulation, is that, at least as far as speaking is concerned, it would seem that the first two present more opportunities for accuracy practice, the third far less. Possibly too, many writing activities (not all, and the eraser should be banned from the Japanese classroom !) allow the student time for concentration on correct language production whereas speaking, of its nature, is usually less accurate. What we must be careful not to do is to inculcate in our student a fear of making mistakes, in any mode, since they are one of the most productive means of language learning.

It must by now be apparent from the arguments I have advanced that I am firmly convinced of the value of so-called communicative methods in the language classroom. Let me say, finally, that I really do believe that they make lauguage teaching easier and not only

for the native speaker. Many communicative tasks require detailed instructions which are often better given in the students' mother tongue, and with the right materials, and they are readily available, such methods make no greater demands on the foreign teacher of English than more traditional approaches. Instead, he is freed from the tedium of endless hours of unremitted exposition and is able to programme his teaching for units longer than the single class. The teaching seems to progress almost by its own momentum. Further, these methods shift the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student, which is where it rightly belongs, and by the diversity of task they present, make language learning a more rewarding and ultimately enjoyable experience. This, in a country where motiviation is quite justifiably low, must be persuasive. There is, after all, no moral virtue in learning English. If we are enjoying something, we cease to question whether it is useful to us or not.

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