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SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING-
A CLASSROOM 'EXERCISE' OR AN 'ACTIVITY' FOR INTERACTION?

by Lachman M. Khubchandani

In recent decades, many advances have been made in *instruction strategies,* e.g. innovations in training language teachers, preparing more effective aids (manuals, tapes, films, etc.) based on linguistic research,

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with the attention focused on one idealized variety (the standard norm) of that language.

Today, enormous progress has been claimed in the production of textbooks at all levels from "pictionaries" and conversational cut-out books to individually programmed kits which teachers are finding highly superior to a conventional textbook. In individualized instructional programs teaching is not solely confined to a classroom (or a language laboratory) but the "instructor" adjusts his role as a "learning coordinator", guiding and tracking the student through a varied sequence of activities and learning environments.

But compared to the energy, time, and money spent on learning second and foreign languages in the 'literate' world, one finds little satisfaction among instructors and pupils regarding the levels of proficiency acquired in these languages. The present programs seem to be operating in a vicious circle of selecting teaching and curricular materials and then assessing the proficiency of pupils on the basis of the *same* material.

Language as a social activity gets its meaning by the *context* in which it is used. A living language without this kind of meaning can be regarded as a *myth* of the classroom. Present language teaching programs, whether conducted through a reading-based system (inherited through the classical language teaching tradition) or through an oral-aural system, regard classroom (extended to language laboratory) as the sole reservoir of language learning. The target language is taught as an "exercise" or as a preparation for eventual utilization goals, but having no immediate reinforcement plans whatsoever outside the classroom, which makes learner's task rather streneous and intensely motivated (Khubchandani 1967).

Rational and Reflexive Demands of Language

There is now more understanding among educationists that "teaching" and "learning" are *not* mirror images of one another. Linguists and language teaching experts have to know more about the *actual processes* by which a learner internalizes the experiences in a second or a foreign language. Classroom teaching does not fully envisage the difficulties encountered by a language learner in functioning through that language.

In second and foreign language teaching, teachers and text materials pay sole attention to the explicit, unambiguous, overt manifestation through language. Such *rationalized use* of language is only one of the sociolinguistic variables in actual speech activity. A native speaker's use of speech, in natural environments is an *integral* activity relevant to the context and purpose of verbalization. His actual discourse gets modulated on a scale of *rational* and *reflexive* extremes. This reflexive use of language is characterized by implicit regulation depending on identity pressures, suggestion, inference, and covert design.

The classroom "exercise" in language teaching remains an end in itself; no communicative task is actually performed (only rehearsals are conducted for eventual confrontation with unknown audiences). It is acquired as an "artifact" in which speakers and listeners remain detached and uninvolved from the communication point

of view. Whereas, speech as a living phenomena is mapped on the prevailing extra-linguistic context, and it is very much a "fact" in which participants are involved (much more actively in inter-personal situations and rather passively in mass media contexts).

Interaction Strategies

Language laboratories have been provided for getting to grips with the raw material in a foreign speech. But the laboratory still retains the classroom flavor of 'exercise' in the sense that no communicative task is actually accomplished through speech. For this purpose, a real language laboratory is the interaction opportunities in controlled but challenging situations, where a second language is confronted as an integral meaningful activity.

Hence, in the total structure of a second language learning system, it is essential to coordinate between *instruction strategies* (teacher with classroom and laboratory aids) and *interaction strategies* (graded and controlled interaction programs where attention is focused on "event" rather than on "expression").

Dr. Lachman M. Khubchandani, Professor of Indian Linguistics at Zagreb University, Yugoslavia, is a Senior Fellow at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii.

Author of many works concerning sociolinguistics and language teaching problems in developing nations, he is Chairman of the Adolphe Quetelet Work Group for Language Statistics, Research Committee on Sociolinguistics.

For a better understanding of the speech phenomena within a broad behavioral framework, it may be useful to make clear distinction between "speech" as an *integral activity* in a society and "language" as an ideal norm (Khubchandani 1973). One of the major shortcomings of the current state of affairs in most of the second language teaching programs is their exclusive concern with the teaching of language as an ideal norm, and thus shelving aside the characteristics of the functional differentiation as prevailing among the native speakers of that language and of grassroots "folk"

multilingualism as found among plural illiterate societies, i.e. acquiring non-standard speech forms from actual usage as an integral activity.

Most language experts do recognize the importance of experience in foreign environments for effective control of a foreign language. But they assume that a sustained exposure to a language "exercise" through native informants and tapes sufficiently equips pupils for eventual "activity" through that language. In performing skills (e.g. swimming, driving) such an assumption would be questioned seriously. It is rather crucial in the total learning system to regard proficiency in a foreign language closer to the requirements of performing skills rather than treating it as a course of study.

An average person acquiring a *second* language (other than his native speech) by functioning through speech events in natural environments gains proficiency in the linguistic component of speech along with the sensibility of handling the network of options in that speech conditioned by the pressures of propriety, identity, cultural values, and demands on verbalization, without much directed effort and learning strains on his part which are otherwise experienced when learning a foreign language in a formal way. An adequate learning system must also utilize the strategies of linguistic competence component and of performance awareness (sensibility) component simultaneously, and not leave the later component to the subsequent stage, i.e. entering into the *activity stage* after the successful completion of the *exercise stage*.

Communication in Second Language

Communication is a two-sided activity. For an effective control over a non-native language, it is necessary to provide *opportunities* for performing graded communicative tasks and create *confidence* among the participants through the successes achieved in limited transactions--without the interference of direct monitoring, merely providing prompting where necessary.

In second language and foreign language learning situations, a learner aims at acquiring the competence (active or mere passive) of functioning in that language, i.e. exercising options depending on sociolinguistic variables, and not according to the norms of the target language. Many contrastive studies tend to treat the issue of language transfer (positive or negative) in a rather straitjacket manner, starting with the presumption that all types of interference from the source language are unacceptable in the target language behavior; whereas in everyday life reality one notices no such clear-cut dichotomy of *acceptable* versus *unacceptable* utterances in a language. Certain deviations from the norm could be more appropriate, purposeful, amusing, neutral, socially marked, pejorative, ambiguous, hazardous, unintelligible, etc., in specific situational contexts.

It, therefore, becomes crucial to have an adequate knowledge of sociolinguistic variables of a region or of a speech community in establishing a hierarchy of difficulty as encountered by a learner due to his inhibitions of the source language and attitudes towards the target language. We need to examine the pedagogical aspects of language learning in a sociolinguistic perspective to project the complex task of integrating the language 'exercise' techniques of classroom with the speech 'activity' in everyday life reality through *interactional strategies*, controlled and graded on the basis of behaviorally defined utilization goals.

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