

Foreign Language Study and Language Awareness

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Twenty-five years ago, Language Awareness (LA) was put forward, primarily by modern linguists, as a new 'bridging' element in the UK school curriculum. It was viewed as a solution to several of the failures in UK schools: illiteracy in English, failure to learn foreign languages, and divisive prejudices. The intervening years have inevitably seen a number of developments that cause us to reflect further on the need for foreign language teachers and other teachers to cooperate. Three relevant issues are discussed here. Firstly, natural approaches to foreign language learning, bolstered by the Chomskyan notion of the Language Acquisition Device, prompted a taboo during the 1970s and 1980s on formal language instruction and talk about language. Secondly, the recent emphasis on foreign languages as useful skills rather than part of education has also led attention away from the wider value of awareness. Thirdly, the fact that UK university students are choosing more and more to pursue a different foreign language from that studied at school highlights the unpredictability, especially in English-speaking countries, of a pupil's future language needs. LA can address this growing phenomenon as part of a progressive 'language apprenticeship'.

The subject of my paper can be briefly stated. I want to re-examine the interface between foreign language study and language awareness (LA). It is a theme that I first broached at the 1973 Manchester conference (Language in the Middle Years of Secondary Education) convened by George Perren, Director of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT), which brought together teachers of English and of foreign languages. I proposed a new subject, 'language', to be taught as a 'bridging subject', linking English and the foreign language in the curriculum (Hawkins, 1974).

Twenty-five years ago, in the UK, the different kinds of language teacher (of foreign languages, English mother tongue, English as a second language, ethnic minority languages and the classics) remained sealed off from each other, in schools, universities and training colleges. Teachers of these subjects never went into each other's classrooms to hear what their colleagues were saying about language. They had not even tried to agree a common vocabulary in which to talk about language. In the years that have elapsed, little has changed in this respect, though there have been isolated advances. Pomphrey and Moger (this issue) report on a pioneering project in the parallel training of foreign language and English teachers. Our ALA journal *Language Awareness* has been influential in promoting discussion of the issues. But the absence of collaboration still blocks the development of a coherent language apprenticeship in the schools. So I do not apologise for returning to my earlier theme. I shall concentrate on four main questions:

- (1) What motivated the call by modern linguists, 25 years ago, for 'language' as

a new element in the school curriculum, and what exactly were they asking for?

- (2) Has the contribution of foreign language study to LA since the 1970s been side-tracked by misapplication to foreign language learning in school of the hypothesis of the innate Language Acquisition Device?
- (3) Has confusion been confounded by recent concentration on the foreign language merely as a useful skill, overlooking its essential educational role for all pupils?
- (4) Finally, will the new millennium bring a growing realisation in the UK by those who plan the curriculum, that it is impossible to predict which particular foreign language any pupil will eventually need for adult purposes?

Already, university students are increasingly dropping the language begun in school in favour of a different one. When the school foreign language apprenticeship is increasingly seen as only the preparatory stage ('learning how to learn a language') of a multi-stage language journey, what will that imply for the future of LA in schools?

The Call by Modern Linguists in the 1970s for 'Language in the Curriculum'

Brumfit (1991: 27) points out that 'most of the early running in LA in the UK was made by modern linguists'. This was certainly true of debates in the 1970s. These came to a head in the 1978 NCLE (National Congress on Languages in Education) conference in Durham. There, the proposal for awareness of language by modern linguists was bitterly opposed by teachers of English (Perren, 1979). That fraught meeting has been described by Trim (1996: 326) as a 'dialogue of the deaf'.

Although modern linguists made the running in the 1970s, earlier calls for rethinking the school language curriculum did not come from them. The first call came in 1959, when the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), chaired then by the economist Geoffrey Crowther, considered the effect of the demise of Latin in the 1950s, as a requirement for entry to university and to professions such as law and medicine (CAC, 1959). They foresaw Latin's imminent disappearance from school programmes, and asked: what should be put into the curriculum to 'do what Latin does'? Their response was to call for 'rethinking the whole basis of the teaching of linguistics in the schools', but the committee was divided about more specific recommendations.

Meanwhile a group chaired by Michael Halliday began working on a new and imaginative approach to language, published with the title *Language in Use* (Doughty *et al.*, 1971). It was in his introduction to this symposium of teaching materials that, for the first time in the UK, Halliday referred to 'awareness of language':

Each one of us has this ability (to use language) and lives by it; but we do not always become aware of it ... there should be some place for language in the working life of the secondary school pupil; and, it might be added, of the student in a College of Education (p. 10)

Re-thinking the language curriculum was also being promoted by the London

Association for the Teaching of English, who had issued a provocative discussion document prepared by Rosen, entitled *A Language Policy Across the Curriculum* (see Barnes *et al.*, 1969: 160).

Their theme of 'language across the curriculum', at least in name, was then taken up by the Bullock Report (Bullock, 1975). This committee had been set up in 1972 by Margaret Thatcher (then Minister of Education) in response to growing anxiety concerning standards of 'literacy' in English schools. Bullock deliberately went beyond its brief, and considered the wider question of the place of language in education, making a powerful theoretical case for language across the curriculum. The final report, however, disastrously side-tracked discussion by going only part way across the curriculum, and making no mention anywhere in all its 500 pages of any contribution that foreign language study might make to the pupils' 'language for life'.

Despite the scepticism of leading English teachers, as expressed at the 1978 Durham meeting mentioned above, and, it must be said, of foreign linguists in Her Majesty's Inspectorate, John Trim (who had succeeded George Perren as Director of CILT) persisted in supporting the idea of LA in the curriculum and eventually called together the working party, chaired by John Sinclair, which issued the symposium *Language Awareness* (Donmall, 1985). It was from this work that the Association for Language Awareness was born. Of the 13 members of the working party which Donmall served devotedly as Secretary and Editor, 11 were modern linguists. What lay behind the modern linguists' persistence, despite the scepticism of English teachers?

Language as 'empowerment' and the linguistic minefield

The first factor must have been the growing evidence that many pupils, perhaps a majority of each age group, were simply failing to learn the language in which the school curriculum was delivered and examined. The statistical studies showing this, now of course somewhat dated, illustrate how we saw the picture in the 1970s and 1980s:

- (1) The report of the National Child Development Study (Davie *et al.*, 1972) came like a bombshell for public opinion. Among children from manual labouring homes, 48% were poor readers at age 7, despite two years of infant schooling, as against only 8% of the children from the administrative class.
- (2) Bullock (1975) followed this up and showed that for every year that children stayed in school, the gap in reading scores between these two groups widened. The effect of schooling was to magnify, year by year, the disadvantages associated with home background.
- (3) Anxiety about literacy in English was heightened by the evidence from the ten-year study carried out by the Inner London Education Authority. The report (ILEA, 1980) based on a cohort of 12,539 children born in 1959/60, revealed that children of West Indian origin formed an underclass of poor readers on entering primary school, and that for every year at school, they fell further behind the rest.
- (4) This picture was confirmed by the research commissioned by the Rampton Committee, (Rampton, 1981). For example, the results of the GCSE English language examination taken in 1979 by 16-year-old school leavers in the six

local education authorities with the largest population of ethnic minority pupils, showed that the whereas 29% of 'indigenous' pupils achieved A to C pass grades, these grades were achieved by only 18% of the 'Asian' pupils and 9% of the 'West Indian' pupils.

This meant that for 91 out of every 100 West Indian school leavers, the doors were closed to higher education or to any career requiring good written English, such as the police, the probation service, or teaching, where role models make so much difference. More recent research may, of course, have modified the picture revealed by these four classical studies, but the questions that they raised, which have still not been answered, have prompted the present UK government's anti-illiteracy remedial campaign.

The picture they revealed, of failure by many pupils to learn the written form of standard English, was one to which modern linguists were perhaps especially sensitive, having served their apprenticeship as linguistic underdogs in foreign speech communities. From their student experience, they knew how failure to master the standard language variety (especially in its written form) can 'disempower' young learners. They were also well placed, because of their foreign language apprenticeship, to appreciate two particular aspects of the problem: firstly, what lies behind 'reading failure', and secondly, how linguistic disempowerment must be distinguished from other kinds of disempowerment which are sometimes confused with it, such as inferior knowledge or lack of confidence or authority (as in much doctor/patient dialogue or when one is questioned by police or a magistrate).

Underlying reasons for 'reading failure'

It seemed to modern linguists, from their own experience of operating in a foreign speech community, that many pupils' reading failure is due to unfamiliarity with the syntax of the language that they are being asked to read. To focus on teaching 'reading skills' is to start at the wrong place. In reading, so much depends on predicting what is coming. Fluent readers (like fluent listeners) have to keep ahead of the message or something will be missed. Readers who come to the task uncertain about the syntax of the language will fail to anticipate *the kind of word to expect* as they follow a text, as shown, for example in Oller's (1979) work on CLOZE testing. So unfamiliarity with the language itself is the first handicap to tackle.

Complicating this is a more subtle handicap: an uncertain attitude to language. Many learners lose confidence in using language for particular functions, *especially for exploring new and strange, possibly challenging, realities*. As Her Majesty's Inspectorate commented (HMI, 1977: 7):

Anyone, by following a group of pupils through a day in a secondary school, can prove that their language experiences are largely a matter of chance ... The pupil's own language may be subject to spasmodic correction ... but ... many pupils have a view of language as a minefield ...

As modern linguists, we wanted to start at the beginning, with learning the language. This was what lay behind the annual language summer schools organised in Yorkshire towns throughout the 1970s by the Language Teaching Centre at York University (see Hawkins, 1971), which offered slower learning children

one-to-one dialogue with an adult. The children (aged between 9 and 13) gave up three weeks of their summer holiday for the fun of it. Led in small teams by experienced teachers, university student volunteers worked as tutors, supplemented by sixth formers. Each tutor worked with the same pupil every day. We did not try to teach reading, for which the volunteer tutors were not equipped, but simply offered each child one-to-one dialogue, friendship, and interesting activities which encouraged the children to 'do things with words' as Austin (1962) put it. Our insistence on one-to-one dialogue with an adult perhaps owed something to our modern language background. We had read and pondered Rousseau's *Emile*, which is a manual for one-to-one dialogue.

Observing these children year after year and discussing their progress with their teachers showed us the importance of confidence in doing things with words in sustaining the will to learn. The essential factor seemed to be the availability of sympathetic older role models who had time and energy to share with the learners. The reservoir that we tapped were able students, the successes of the school system. A source as yet untapped but likely to be increasingly available in future is the growing number of retired people.

Legitimising the standard language?

The question has been asked: in giving priority to helping pupils to master the standard language variety, did modern linguists underestimate the issues which have more recently been raised by those advocating 'critical language awareness' (CLA). In particular, did we accept the standard language variety too readily as 'given'? (see for example Fairclough, 1992). I do not think we were entirely insensitive to these issues. In a position paper at the NCLE Assembly at Durham (Hawkins, 1979: 63), I wrote:

Linguistic prejudices and snobberies which are endemic in our linguistically naive community are no longer a joke when they interfere with the life chances of large numbers of children ... prejudice is nurtured by ignorance and insecurity ... the study of language will *go beyond, will get outside, English and attempt to help the pupil to look objectively at language behaviour.*

I returned to the point some years later (Hawkins, 1987b): 'More serious still is the (linguistic) parochialism and prejudice which is endemic in our society ...' (p. 2), and again 'The chief aim of (awareness of language) will be to challenge pupils to ask questions about language, which so many take for granted ...' (p. 4). No questions about language were ruled out. In discussions with the Ministry, one of the main arguments we advanced for giving the foreign language an assured place throughout the whole secondary course was that we wanted our pupils 'to be able to step outside their mother tongue and see it in some kind of perspective ...' (Hawkins 1987b: 18). And we recalled Kipling's famous line, slightly modified, 'What should they know of English who only English know?' We saw discussion of the more sophisticated issues rightly raised by CLA (e.g. that we should examine critically the cultural and political norms that the standard language variety tends to reinforce) as being most fruitful for discussion with older pupils (for instance, in the pioneering work in the sixth form at the Oratory School, Reading, of another linguist, Tony Tinkel, who was a member of our

working group from the start (Tinkel, 1988)), and of course in teacher training courses.

But even with younger pupils, we saw the need to make a beginning in critical awareness of how language works, by, for example, teacher-guided critical study of TV advertisements with their 'loaded' words and 'hidden persuader language' (see, for example, Hawkins & Astley, 1985: 11ff; Hawkins, 1987a: 48ff).

As a matter of priority, the age range for which our first teaching materials were designed was 10 to 14, because in the 1970s and 1980s the reorganisation of secondary schools on comprehensive lines was suddenly introducing a range of difficult subjects (including the foreign language) to four fifths of the 11-year-old age-group who had previously not been offered them. The pressing need for these pupils, as we saw it, was not just to help them to 'do things with words', but to 'do the specially difficult things with words that the secondary curriculum demands'. Our position has recently been eloquently restated by Alain Bentolila (1998), who has called schools to join in: 'un combat volontaire pour une distribution plus juste du pouvoir linguistique'.

Prejudice rooted in insecurity

Another factor in modern linguists' dissatisfaction with the language curriculum was growing anxiety concerning the parochialism of many elements in our society, evidenced by the racial rioting in London, Liverpool and elsewhere. Racial prejudice springs from insecurity. It is the 'poor whites' who cling to whiteness; it is all they have. As linguists, we were especially concerned with the relationship between insecurity of language experience and cultural prejudice. We saw the foreign language classroom as being one obvious place where pupils are challenged to 'go to meet', with growing confidence, what is new and strange in language behaviour and in cultural values.

Insight into foreign language structure and mother tongue experience

At the same time modern language teachers were digesting the hard lessons coming out of the Primary French Pilot Scheme. This was a national experiment launched in 1963, testing the feasibility of starting a foreign language (French) for all pupils at age eight. It was wound up in 1974 when it was claimed that the early start had proved to give the learners no advantage.

Whatever the Pilot Scheme did or did not show about the feasibility of the early start, the experiment did throw light for the first time on the learning problems of pupils across the aptitude range, because from the start of the scheme, selection of pupils had been ruled out. Any school embarking on the scheme had to agree to teach French to the whole age-group. This was something quite new for foreign language teaching. Until that time, a foreign language had never been offered to more than a small elite of pupils, one in five of each age-group. The small elite we were used to in our classrooms and to whom our methods and textbooks were geared, had been selected for 'academic streams' by the '11 plus' examination, which was largely a test of the pupils' home language background.

Experience of the problems of the four-fifths of each age group who were newcomers to foreign language classrooms can now be seen as the Scheme's most interesting aspect. But it has been strangely neglected. Discussion has focused on the question 'is younger better?'. On this the Scheme shed only an uncertain light, if only because, for lack of adequately trained teachers, it was

aborted prematurely and hypotheses about the efficacy of starting early were never really tested. However, interesting lessons did begin to emerge about a different issue, namely how would the newcomers to foreign languages, who had previously been excluded, perform? The lessons we were learning about this helped to motivate the call for modern linguists to make common cause with mother tongue teachers.

The first lesson was the 'linear correlation between pupils' performance in French and the status of their parents' occupation' (Burstall, 1970: 26). Burstall also measured the pupils' performance in English and confirmed the evidence of a similar correlation there from many earlier studies. More significant than this, however, was what began to emerge about the reasons for this correlation. Most of the early starters performed well in the early stages of the learning, when asked to mimic and repeat undifferentiated whole chunks of language. However many of them, perhaps a majority, and especially of the boys, began to fall behind at the second stage of foreign language learning, two or three years after the start.

Luc (1992: 28) has described this second stage as follows:

... as soon as the child goes beyond commonplaces and stereotypes ... greetings, introductions, expressing preferences ... where he does not have to construct a sentence but only to repeat what has been learned as a chunk, great difficulties appear ... either the child cannot say anything ... or else he models what he wants to say precisely on the way it would be said in (the mother tongue) ... What he lacks essentially is a correct idea of how the foreign language works, *notably how it relates to the mother tongue, which, for most children brought up in a monolingual environment, offers the only possible reference point.* (My translation and emphasis).

The early start merely brought forward by three years the onset of this second stage of the learning. So why did some pupils find this second stage so difficult while others took it in their stride?

It happened that just at that time we were getting some clues from research on 'aptitude' for foreign language learning, notably by my colleague Peter Green at York. His Aptitude Test (Green, 1975) predicted, better than any other measure, which children would succeed and which fail in learning German, by assessing (in a pencil and paper test lasting 40 minutes) the speed with which they could grasp structures and patterns, rules or regularities in a language they had never met before (Swedish). At the same time, Green also tested the children's verbal and non-verbal intelligence. He found that his measure of the children's grasp of language structures that were new to them, and their ability to manipulate them, proved more predictive of success in foreign language learning, than testing 'intelligence'. Differences in insight into 'rules' in a new language could only have been due to some differences in their experience of the mother tongue, because they knew no other language. The question this posed was: could we help *all* learners, and not just a small elite, to gain a similar linguistic preparation? And what were the essential elements of that language experience which prepared the learners to go to meet the foreign language?

It was this question that I tried to tackle when the Nuffield Foundation asked a group of us to review the lessons of the Pilot Scheme. In an appendix to the

Nuffield Report (Hawkins, 1977: 93ff), I outlined a programme of awareness of language, starting in the primary school and aimed at equipping young learners to tackle the language challenges of secondary education. Any such programme would necessarily involve mother tongue teachers, and this reinforced the call for a new partnership.

Confusion of L1 Acquisition and L2 Learning

If foreign language teachers made the early running in LA in the UK, their more recent contribution has been less clear. This may reflect the fact that the discipline has been side-tracked by an age-old, recurrent confusion. Put simply, it springs from the simplistic equation: since all children acquire the spoken form of their mother tongue without intervention of the teaching or learning of grammar, why not simply expose them to the foreign language and let them acquire it naturally, thus 'imitating the child'?

The pronouncement of the great empirical philosopher John Locke (1690): 'French should be talked into the child ... Grammar is only for those who have the language already' has entered the folklore of foreign language teaching. Locke, of course, had never stood in front of a class of 30, for four short sessions per week, where (unlike getting the mother tongue) the foreign language is not essential to satisfy pressing individual needs for food, comfort etc. and with the 'gale of English' howling at the classroom door at the end of each lesson.

It was failure to distinguish between L1 acquisition and L2 learning *under school conditions* that underlay the disagreement between two of the giants of the 'Great Debate' of 1880–1914: Henry Sweet and François Gouin. Gouin (1880) argued from having observed his nephew, aged two and a half, acquiring his mother tongue without instruction, that his own efforts as an adult to learn German had been all wrong. What he ought to have done was to imitate the child (the 'natural method'), because learning a (second) language should be 'as natural as learning to fly is for the bird'. Sweet (1899/1964: 27) corrected him magisterially: 'The fundamental objection ... to the natural method is that it puts the adult into the position of an infant, which he is no longer capable of utilising, and at the same time does not allow him to make use of his own special advantages'. Mackin, introducing the 1964 re-issue of Sweet's book, came back to this point, arguing that much confusion (e.g. about the 'direct method') might have been avoided if teachers had listened to Sweet: 'Teachers believed that all they needed to do was to talk in the foreign language and that after some time the learner would somehow suddenly begin to use the language — much as the child did when learning his mother tongue' (Mackin, 1964: 1). Poldauf (1995: 3), too, expressed the difference between mother tongue and school foreign language learning in a pioneering paper on awareness of language:

... awareness is the ability, no matter how conscious, to view a language objectively, that is as a phenomenon ... When teaching a foreign language to a child before such an awareness of the mother tongue has been formed, the school may attempt a distant simulation of bilingualism. After it has been formed, such a procedure is not only a waste of time but runs more and more against the grain of the learner.

We are born with a LAD, who needs a LASS?

Despite all the evidence, arguments for a 'natural method' of foreign language learning, imitating the child, have recently been revived by a muddled application to foreign language learning in school of the Chomskyan notion of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), the 'grammar searching mechanism' or 'language instinct' which children are assumed to be born with. The LAD hypothesis was advanced by Chomsky as the only logical explanation of the facts, as he saw them. The notion of an innate LAD, once widely accepted, has been questioned by mainstream linguists. The doyen of American linguists, Dwight Bolinger, stated his reservations in Bolinger and Sears (1981: 165):

There is no question that human infants come into the world with vastly more performed capacity for language than used to be thought possible. There is evidence that even a four-week-old infant is especially tuned to speech sounds as against other sounds. But whether or not the genetic design contains elements that are explicitly linguistic hinges on the overall question of explicitness. There is so much interdependence in the unfolding of our capacities that we cannot be sure that the linguistic ones do not start as nonlinguistic, only to be made linguistic by features of the environment.

Among the features of the environment which shape linguistic behaviour, performance factors, are now increasingly engaging mainstream linguists (e.g. see J. Hawkins' (1995) widely commended and cited study). Even if some innate capacity for acquiring the spoken language is accepted, however, we should remember the observation of Mattingley (1972) that there is not a scrap of evidence for any innate expectation regarding the *written* form of language. Mastering reading/writing is a learned, not an innately programmed, process.

As for the claim, rationally deduced from the premise of the innate LAD, that feedback from the linguistic environment is of minor importance, Bolinger also questions this:

It is probable that parents unconsciously adopt special modes of speaking to very young children, to help them learn the important things first — impelled by the desire not so much to teach as to communicate, with teaching as a by-product. (Bolinger & Sears, 1981: 165)

Further evidence of the importance of feedback from adults was provided by Bruner (1983). He showed that something more than a LAD is needed for effective language acquisition. He called it a LASS (Language Acquisition Support System): 'The interaction between LAD and LASS makes it possible for the infant to enter the linguistic community'. In *30 Years of Language Teaching* (Hawkins, 1996: 129ff), a dozen recent research studies in the UK are cited all showing the critical effect of the 'investment of adult time' on children's language acquisition. It is interesting that in Pinker's (1994) brilliantly written (and widely praised) book arguing the Chomskyan hypothesis, not a single one of these UK studies is mentioned.

Foreign language learning and the LAD

A consequence of the LAD hypothesis which caused confusion for the training of foreign language teachers was the supposition that the LAD, having done its

work on the mother tongue, was available, apparently unaffected by the experience, to acquire a *foreign language under school conditions*. It was against this mischievous notion that getting a foreign language in school was just like getting the mother tongue that 20 years ago Corder (1978: 45), who got so many things right, protested: 'It is ... counter-intuitive to suggest that the second language learner starts from scratch ... does the fact that he already possesses language ... count for nothing?'

We now have evidence from recent work on brain scanning (MRI) that first language learning is a different activity from foreign language learning in school, *taking place in a different area of the brain*. Psychologists have long suspected this, from study, for example, of bilingual epileptics who, after an attack which damages a part of the cortex, can lose the ability to speak one of their languages but not the other. Recent research has shown that, while subjects who were bilingual from birth had a single zone of activity in the Broca area for their two languages, those subjects who had learned their second language at adolescence possessed two independent zones for the two languages in the Broca area. 'The brain uses different strategies for language learning according to the age (of the learner)' (Kim *et al.*, 1997: 171).

Expectations about L2 from experience of L1

Not only do mother tongue and foreign language learning in school differ in their location in the brain. More significant is the effect of the *expectations about L2* that are set up *in the course of getting L1*. To give a single example of this, when I listened to Spanish speaking adolescents learning French in school and compared their expectations (about French) with those of my English speaking pupils, I found that the Spanish learners naturally expected all nouns to be marked by gender (either masculine or feminine) and that articles, adjectives and pronouns would accord with the gender of the noun. Furthermore, they expected a noun in French like *silence* to be masculine because they were familiar with *el silencio* (masculine), *groupe* to be masculine (Spanish *el grupo*) but *troupe* to be feminine (Spanish *la troupe*). My English pupils (speaking the only language in Europe not marked by grammatical gender) had no such expectations and they found it disconcerting.

My conclusion was that as a foreign language teacher I needed to have a clear idea of the *expectations about language* that my pupils brought to the foreign language class, and that these expectations were conditioned by their *experience of their first language*.

Rebirth of contrastive analysis

In the 1960s, foreign language programmes swung violently away from cross language analysis, after the high point marked by Lado (1957). But its return, centre stage, was illustrated by the 50 papers given at the important 1991 Innsbruck seminar on New Departures in Contrastive Linguistics (Mair & Markus, 1992). In one of those papers, the late Hermann Wecker traced the decline of cross linguistic analysis to the widespread acceptance of Chomskyan linguistic theory in the 1960s and 1970s:

Dulay and Burt (1975) declared the total bankruptcy of applied Contrastive Analysis, claiming that learning a second language was no different from

learning one's first language in childhood ... it was best conducted monolingually, without reference to the learner's native language ... Historically this unfounded criticism of applied Contrastive Analysis coincided with the rise of the Chomskyan school of rationalist linguistics, which emphasised the existence of an innate language acquisition device and language universals. (Wecker, 1992: 279)

The raft of claims for what Wecker calls 'rationalist linguistics' may have hung logically together, but this did not make them true. Their uncritical acceptance misled a whole generation of language teachers. Teachers of the mother tongue were misled by the argument that feedback from the family and the environment was unimportant. Foreign language teachers wrongly supposed that mere exposure of the hypothesised LAD to the new language (comprehensible input) for four short sessions per week without any explanation of how the language worked, would ensure acquisition. Talking about the language and grammar became no-go areas.

The Foreign Language as Education, Not Simply Instruction in a Skill

My third question concerns the role of the foreign language as an essential part of education, because it has been neglected in much recent discussion. This has concentrated, perhaps understandably, on seeing the foreign language as merely a useful skill, meeting individual or national needs, which has been reflected in methods of instruction and testing etc. What may have been overlooked is the sheer exhilaration of the journey into a foreign language and a foreign culture *for its own sake*. It is the intrinsically rewarding nature of such a journey that I have tried to convey in Hawkins (1999). I do not wish to enlarge on that aspect here, but to re-examine three specific ways in which the foreign language contributes to 'awareness of language'. They are:

- (1) by positive feedback on the mother tongue and cultural stereotypes;
- (2) by encouraging close attention to matching words to meanings;
- (3) by building confidence in what Halliday called the 'mathetic' function of language.

Foreign language feedback on mother tongue

With able pupils, the effect of the foreign language on use of the mother tongue can be dramatic. In Hawkins (1999: chapter 12), I have described the way in which a gifted pupil, who had lost the incentive to improve his indifferent written English, found a new interest in language through his exploration of German and French.

A different way in which the foreign language can open conceptual doors which in a monolingual curriculum would remain closed was shown by another able pupil. He had grown up in that 'dialogue of the deaf' that characterised discussion between Protestant and Catholic communities in the (Belfast-like) Liverpool of the 1930s. His home (Protestant) culture had equated Catholicism with all that is ugly and detestable. Then he began the journey in school into the Spanish language, exploring the poetry and drama of the Spanish Golden Age,

deeply imbued, as it is, with Catholic faith. One author who made a special appeal was the devoutly Catholic, 16th-century Latinist and poet Fray Luis de León. My pupil read the story of how this pious professor of Latin was thrown into prison by the Inquisition. He had translated the Song of Songs from the Latin into Spanish as a kindness for his cousin, whose Latin was not strong but who wanted to read the mildly erotic Old Testament verses with her fellow nuns in the convent. When, after five years in a prison cell, he was prized from the grip of the Holy Office by his friends' efforts, helped, it is said, by the intervention of King Philip II himself, Fray Luis resumed his popular lectures at Salamanca. On the first day, in front of a crowd expecting fireworks, he began quietly with the customary phrase 'Decíamos ayer' ('As we were saying yesterday'). The story may be apocryphal, but what impressed my pupil, accustomed to the acrimonious bellowing of his Protestant co-religionists, was that Fray Luis's gentle rebuke has echoed down the centuries more penetratingly than any angry outburst or the lies of those who imprisoned him.

Among the poems of Fray Luis that my pupil read for his examination were the lovely 'vida retirada' and the ode to music that Fray Luis addressed to his great friend Salinas, Professor of Music at Salamanca and organist at the cathedral. When we had finished our reading, my Protestant schoolboy said, quite astonished, 'I never thought a Roman Catholic could write such poetry'. It was a first step on a liberating journey out of the prejudices of the graffiti-daubed housing estate.

These were able pupils. But what about less able pupils who cannot take their foreign language very far? In Hawkins (1987a: 46ff), I identified a number of ways in which I have seen the foreign language make a contribution to 'awareness' of the mother tongue for such pupils. It helped them to recategorise areas of the primary curriculum that early schooling had left imprecise (the calendar, telling the time, mental arithmetic etc.). For all of these it offered a neutral medium in which to rehearse basic concepts without any stigma that a 'remedial' class might imply. It also offered useful education of the ear and an apprenticeship in accurately matching new sounds to written forms. By exploring structures that contrast with the mother tongue, like new ways of counting or of asking questions, less able pupils also explored nuances of meaning which do not have equivalents in English but which compel re-thinking English meanings (a good example was learning to use the two verbs 'to be' in Spanish, *ser* and *estar*). It may be chiefly in the exploration of language and meaning that the apprenticeship to a foreign language can be most educative.

Matching words to meanings

Halliday (1975) protested that Linguistics had taken a 'wrong turning' in the 1960s by neglecting meanings as too elusive to be studied objectively, existing as they do only in peoples' minds, in favour of syntax, which can be measured and computed. Bruner (1975: 65) made a similar point: 'The primacy of syntax may be a valuable axiom for linguistics, but the primacy of semantics is a better axiom for psychology'. Their emphasis on the primacy of meaning is something that foreign language learners and teachers understand. The matching of new words to meanings is their bread and butter. Similarly the mismatch of language and

meaning is something to which their discipline makes them sensitive. Comenius, writing in 1641, was an early language teacher to observe this:

Most people commonly do not speak but babble; that is they transmit not as from mind to mind ... but exchange between themselves words not understood or little or ill-understood (God ... Sin ... Virtue). Not only the common folk do this but even the well educated for the most part ... we are all nought but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals as long as words not things (the husks of words I say not the kernels of meaning) be in our mouths. (Originally written in Latin. Version quoted in Fitzgibbon Young, 1932)

We can hear this in our own day when politicians debate, say, the problems of Northern Ireland. They use the same grammar and the same words, but the meanings their words are intended to evoke differ grossly, depending on which clan the speaker wishes to find favour with.

This is why Halliday's 'learning how to mean' must form part of the awareness of language that we want schools to offer. In this connection, I was interested to read the valuable Innsbruck Symposium paper by Carl James (1992), which examines an important role for translation.

Gaining confidence in the 'mathetic' function of language

To take further the education in meaning that can be made by the foreign language, we should again go back to Halliday (1975: 15), and to his 'mathetic' function of language, or using language 'to learn about reality'. This he contrasted with the 'pragmatic' function, simply commenting on what is already known. Halliday did not discuss adolescent language, but there is good evidence that the 'mathetic' function, using language to learn new things about the world, going beyond what is familiar, declines sharply with adolescence in many young people. It seems to decline largely because of insecurity, with the need to make sure that one is accepted on the home ground among those whose opinion matters. It is specially marked among boys, for whom adolescence is particularly traumatic in our society, and may go far to explain the consistently better performance of girls across the curriculum in the adolescent years.

This avoidance of 'mathetic' language by basically insecure adolescents has been observed in France. Bentolila, writing in *Le Monde* (26/5/98) under the title: 'Les faux-semblants du français "branché"' ('switched-on' or 'with-it' French), he claims:

One in ten of young French adults are linguistically insecure: their language, product of a restricted environment, making few demands and offering scant motivation, is unable to transact meanings that go beyond complicity and familiarity ... this debilitated language, almost bloodless, only tolerates what is close, *flees in fear and resentment from any invitation to explore the wider world*; it slams shut all doors on the universe of the written language, makes of it a world apart, strange and unapproachable ... It offers no possibility of access or mutual understanding beyond the narrow circle where it rules, while within the circle it makes any attempt at analysis or questioning extremely hazardous ... (my translation)

Bentolila insists that this 'langue particulière' should not be despised:

It is the only means of communication of hundreds of thousands of young people. Its difference should be respected and taken into account in school because any pedagogy worth the name must start from where the pupils are, linguistically and culturally.

But he declares 'it is irresponsible demagoguery not to recognise the poverty of this language, which does not open doors to the world but only to the ghetto.' Defending the French language, Bentolila concludes, is not a matter of preserving it from foreign borrowings or wrangling about the feminisation of some terms. 'Defending the language means refusing to allow some to be excluded from the language community'. Bentolila's 'langue particulière' accurately describes the early experience of my Merseyside pupil in his Protestant ghetto.

As to what shapes a child's 'will to learn' through mathetic language, climbing out of the linguistic ghetto, and the relationship of this with the foreign language, we were given a clue by Vygotsky's early work. The brilliant young Russian psychologist died tragically young from tuberculosis in 1936, just after his book *Thought and Language* had been condemned in the Stalinist purges. His insights did not become widely available until the book was reissued in 1962 in Khrushchev's abortive 'glasnost'. Vygotsky observed that most of the secondary school curriculum consists of attaching clear meanings to words which, when first met, are merely *sign posts to possible meanings*. It is easy, and tempting, simply to ignore the signpost, not troubling to explore where it points (an issue since examined insightfully by Corson, 1985). The gist of Vygotsky's observation was that only by sharing the journey with good (older) role models, would the traveller be likely to have the confidence to follow where the language signposts lead. He suggested that the influence of this process on the mental development of the child 'is analogous to the effect of learning a foreign language' (Vygotsky, 1962: 109).

Need for a New Approach to the School Language Apprenticeship

The need for a fresh approach to foreign language teaching in schools is reinforced by a coming challenge to which we have drawn attention (Hawkins, 1996: 19): language learners in universities are increasingly dropping the language begun at school and studying a different language which they find they need for adult purposes. The relationship between school foreign language courses and further study at higher education level is thus changing fundamentally.

In the UK, currently some 63% of pupils begin French at age 11, some 24% German, 6% Spanish with the rest nowhere. This arbitrary distribution reflects the availability of teachers, but bears no relation to present national or individual adult needs. In the new millennium, it will be increasingly irrelevant. The stock response in the UK to the bizarre imbalance of language provision in schools has been what is called 'diversification' which in practice means offering more German and Spanish and less French. This still leaves a score of languages which adults may need in the new millennium. Even if these could be taught in schools,

the fundamental problem remains: how to predict which language a particular pupil is eventually going to need.

As Coleman (1996: 124) shows, the biggest growth area currently in language studies at university is in non-degree 'service' courses for Specialists in Other Disciplines whom Coleman calls SODS. And more and more of the SODS are choosing to study a language different from the one begun at school. This process has been encouraged by the growth of mobility at student level. Over 600,000 UK students have already taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the SOCRATES and ERASMUS programmes to spend a term of their course in a foreign country, taking the new language in their stride. This is likely to become increasingly the pattern of university studies in the new millennium.

We face, therefore, the need to re-think the reason for starting, in school, a foreign language *which most learners are going to drop in favour of a different one at adult level*. The answer was touched on, but not pursued, by the National Curriculum Working Group: 'One of the most valuable general skills which the study of a modern foreign language can impart is the enhanced ability to learn other languages at a later stage. To be fully effective, however, this needs to be a conscious objective of the course' (Harris, 1990: 7). I am arguing that we should follow the logic of this and plan the school course as a language apprenticeship on which later study of a different foreign language can build. This has challenging implications. One is for the way we examine language. We will no longer measure effectiveness of the apprenticeship in the foreign language by mere ability to 'survive' in a series of situations, but by how the foreign language experience contributes to *learning how to learn* through language, and to confidence as a (mathetic) language user. The implications for teacher training will be far-reaching.

The Renaissance Grammar School saw its responsibility as the teaching of the linguistic 'trivium' (Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric) on which the university 'quadrivium' of specialist subjects and all later learning could build. The apprenticeship in language awareness that I am proposing would learn from this but it would be a 'pentagon' of five elements, the first four of which would become integral parts of the training of all teachers.

Mastering the mother tongue

If we believe in a state system of education, offering equality of opportunity, an essential foundation must surely be to give all pupils a confident mastery of the language in which the school process is delivered. The teaching of English in the UK is no longer the disaster area that it was when two national commissions of enquiry (Bullock, 1975; Kingman, 1988) were found necessary. No other curriculum subject has been the subject of such widely expressed and repeated national concern. Recently English teaching has responded in two ways. There is now a new urgency in the attack on illiteracy in the primary school, and at secondary level a new openness by teachers and teacher trainers to the kind of excellent language teaching pioneered in the imaginative symposium *Language in Use* (Doughty *et al.*, 1971).

Two further steps are now needed. The first must be a greater willingness to follow where the Bullock Report pointed, to close co-operation with other subjects in formulating a coherent language policy 'across the curriculum'. The

second is to implement another of Bullock's proposals that regular sessions of one-to-one dialogue with a sympathetic adult (who has mastered the language of the school process) be offered to all pupils deprived of it by home circumstances such as poor housing, ill-health, anxiety, inexperience, and other obstacles which can defeat even the best parents' best intentions. One way to tackle this was perhaps suggested by the York summer language schools described earlier. Another will be by enlisting the growing numbers of retired people.

But if our community is to make a serious attack on this part of the apprenticeship, it must go far beyond language to the kind of schooling that will prepare adults to invest time with children. It calls for a move from the present model of the school as a race track where it is every runner for himself, an apprenticeship in selfishness, and where schools compete in performance in league tables which take no account of character building. A better model might be that of the mountain climb, where teams of climbers, roped together, attack the learning tasks. Each learner has two duties: he makes his own pitch up the mountain, but then he must secure the rope and give his whole attention to the next climber below. The prophet of this kind of school was the late Alec Dickson, founder of Voluntary Service Overseas and Community Service Volunteers. Good examples of initiatives in 'youth teaching youth' are given by Goodlad (1979).

LA in the curriculum

Reinforcing this effort to achieve, in Bentolila's words, '*une distribution plus juste du pouvoir linguistique*', we need a progressive exploration of how language works in society. This would tackle the many questions about language that are seldom raised in class and which the LA movement has identified. The pressing need, if progress is to be made in awareness of language, is for the various kinds of language teacher to learn to co-operate.

The awareness of language apprenticeship would necessarily start with issues within the grasp of young children, but it would be progressive, embracing, with school leavers, issues such as the role of parents as society's first 'language informants'. It would be prolonged beyond the 16+ stage, and of course in teacher training courses it would have a central role.

Education of the ear

The third important element in the apprenticeship would be learning to listen. 'Education of the ear' is, in MacCarthy's (1978: 13) phrase 'the prerequisite of successful language learning'. It is especially needful when pupils spend so many hours beguiled by the visual wizardry of the TV screen to the neglect of discriminating listening. In the new millennium the exotic sound systems of non-European languages will increasingly form part of higher education language programmes, calling for sophisticated listening skills. I need not enlarge on this except to stress that *expectations* are crucial in listening. Psychologists have shown the close correlation between grasp of language structure and the capacity to hold messages in the short-term memory and to decode them. Learning to listen is largely learning what it is one should listen for.

Ouverture aux langues

The fourth component of the language pentagon must be what our French

colleagues are calling 'ouverture' or 'éveil aux langues' ('awakening to languages'). One of the aims of the awakening is to see language difference as interesting and not threatening. In London schools alone there are some 180 different languages spoken. In many schools, in class discussion of language difference and language universals, the presence of pupils speaking many languages can be a positive asset. All can testify and all can take part in the small research projects that will advance the awareness programme. At the 1998 ALA Conference in Québec City, there was great interest in the reports brought by Michel Candelier and his colleagues of the European Union funded research in a number of European universities, aiming to promote classroom activities to develop 'éveil' or 'ouverture aux langues' in primary school pupils (Candelier, this issue). This must be an important element in the 'pentagon'.

Learning how to learn the foreign language

The fifth component is, of course, the exploration of a foreign language. The choice of which language to study will be less important than the way it is approached. Some languages may lend themselves better than others, and staffing constraints will determine choice of language in many schools. But whichever language is offered in school, the experience should be planned as an apprenticeship in learning how to learn language. It should set up expectations on which later language study, probably of some different language of adult need, can build. This will mean far more attention to cross language comparisons and more talk about language than has been the fashion, and tests which do not only assess performance in the foreign language but also assess, and encourage, pupils' growing awareness of how the foreign language compares with the mother tongue and how foreign languages are learned.

Conclusion

I picture the ideal language curriculum, then, as a strong oak tree. It would have well-nourished roots in the primary school (confident mastery of mother tongue, education of the ear, 'ouverture aux langues', growing awareness of language), a robust trunk at secondary level in the apprenticeship in learning how to learn a language, and progressive awareness of what it means to see language as the instrument of everything by which we go beyond the animals. Finally, building on this carefully planned apprenticeship, post 16+, we should encourage a rich growth of branches, foliage, and even some exotic acorns, responding flexibly to society's and to the individual's adult foreign language needs, *which cannot be predicted at any earlier age*.

Such a language apprenticeship would call for close, on-going cooperation between teachers across the curriculum. Led by language teachers, it would embrace teachers of music (especially in the 'education of the ear'), of biology (who will know about animal communications systems), and of history (so that the history, for example, of the Norman Conquest, would no longer be taught as it is now in the UK by largely monolingual history teachers, without any reference to its linguistic consequences). It is what we argued for 25 years ago. Perhaps in the new millennium it may become more than an idle dream.

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