

Developments in Language Teaching: A Personal  
Assessment of the Trends of the Past 20 Years.

T. P. P. GROSE

---

**Introduction**

The 20th anniversary of the English Department at Sapporo Gakuin University is an apt time for reflection. This is especially true as the last twenty years has been a time during which, throughout the world, communicative English Language Teaching has passed through several stages of development. Its growth has been marked by an exceptional dynamism and fluidity, and, as with any burgeoning science, it has been characterized by a number of bandwagons, false starts and dead-ends. This paper will seek to follow some of these developments and to analyse their effects.

A basic premise of this paper is that language teaching should try to promote communication; a seemingly facile concept, but in the light of much that has transpired over the last two decades, one that needs to be stressed. As we shall see, much that has passed for language teaching during this period bears only the remotest resemblance to anything communicative, and one of the main purposes of this paper will be to assess the extent to which any of the developments in communicative language teaching have been applied in Japan. Also, the degree to which the promotion of communication lies at the centre of these various methodologies form the basis for evaluation from which a variety of other considerations, both practical and theoretical, arise. In addition to a critical approach, I shall also try to find and analyze any redeeming aspects of methodologies that have fallen from favour.

Throughout my professional career I have always been concerned about the criteria we use to evaluate student performance, whether we can objectively assess methodologies in the light of improved student test scores, and if so, whether test scores accurately reflect student abilities. I have come to the conclusion that we cannot. While we can refer to some standardized tests in order to gather a picture, in the broadest of brush strokes, of certain specific areas of linguistic ability, limitations within the framework of such systems and the biases inherent within them

make them an unreliable guide<sup>1</sup>. They are useful only insofar as society has not come up with anything better. On a personal level, (and obviously one which cannot be applied to society at large), I believe that a ten-minute conversation with a student can provide teachers with a far better idea of a student's communicative abilities than any other test that I know of. Therefore, in this paper all evaluations are entirely subjective. Although I shall, *en passant*, make occasional references to more widely accepted testing systems, the basic premise for saying that one system is better than another, is because I, (with reference to the opinions of other professional teachers), think it to be the case.

## Discussion

One result of Britain's imperial connections and its proximity to Europe was an early familiarity with the needs of English language education. In prewar years, this tended to be piecemeal, but it did set a precedent whereby the practical needs of students could be realised, which was later to lead to an emphasis on communicative aspects of teaching language<sup>2</sup>.

## Reading Comprehension

It must be said that the early post-war efforts in this direction were quite primitive, with textbooks adopting a format of basic reading comprehension. There was very little that demanded creative language production on the part of students with much of their class time being taken up with simply responding to a list of comprehension questions, the answers to which were embedded in the body of the texts. Content had some value for ESL students in that it covered various aspects of British life, though viewed from the present, this now seems amazingly parochial and conservative. Students learned, for example, that British people did not talk to their neighbours unless they had been formally introduced, and that to call on acquaintances without a prior letter of intent was taboo. Prescriptive middle-class mores predominated, and while this may not have done too much damage to generations of ESL students who could look around them and know better, students studying English in foreign countries had no way of knowing that the society they were studying was largely a myth; hence the surprisingly quaint view of British society that still persists in some parts of the world even today. It is very easy to laugh at these very crude efforts at social commentary, but it should also be recognized that many recent texts are little better, and are simply anodyne and sanitized views of societies and cultures that have never really existed.

It is a moot point as to whether consideration of reading comprehension methods even belong in this paper, yet so pervasive are they still in the language teaching world—especially

among non-native teachers of English—that the phenomenon cannot be ignored. The importance of reading as one of the four skills is indubitable and its value as a source of linguistic input and reinforcement will be more fully discussed below, but to use reading comprehension as the core of any system seems entirely inadequate. Indeed, I have never come across any academic explanation as to how language acquisition is supposed to take place in these circumstances, other than the vaguest mutterings about ‘familiarising’ students with language and having them ‘understand’ it. As for the mechanisms at work, teachers presumably have a profound faith in a certain osmotic effect whereby language must seep from the page to the brain. Again, as with the criticisms of social content mentioned above, we should perhaps be a little cautious about how dismissively we snort at such ideas: ‘osmotic seepage’ is alive and well in other areas of language teaching too, and may yet come back to haunt us.

### Audio-Linguistics

The first serious attempts to articulate cohesive language teaching policies can be said to have started in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was a period of overriding confidence in technology; a belief that science and engineering could explain and overcome many of the problems of humanity. It was the age of nuclear power, lobotomies and language laboratories. Skinner’s ideas on conditioning were popular, and these, combined with the language laboratory—a machine that could provide conditioning *ad infinitum*—led to the belief that fluency was simply a matter of repetition. Repetition would lead to conditioning, and conditioned responses were the fountainhead of language production. Thus began audiolingualism or the aural–oral approach.

Unfortunately, *ad infinitum* quickly became *ad nauseam* as students came to realise how thoroughly boring such systems were. One reason for this was that meaning was of secondary importance. The main purpose of the audio-lingual approach was the manipulation of language according to its grammatical and structural components. The effects of this were several. Firstly, as Figure 1 illustrates, the absence of any context renders the sentences virtually meaningless insofar as they are devoid of any coherent semantic integrity. So thoroughly are these patterns adhered to that the language produced is often inane, convoluted and malapropos. Speed of execution is the essence of substitution drills: the belief that rapid repetition of a grammatical structure and its variations might somehow embed that structure in the brains of students who then, like automatons, might be able to reproduce that structure on demand. This meant that students — even if they wanted to— had no time to speculate as to why somebody might wish to ‘prevent his son from getting him the mail’ or why somebody ‘didn’t insist that Sally walk under the bridge.’. Such considerations do not enter into the audio–linguistic scheme of things. The

examples listed here come from a ten volume series of texts covering approximately one thousand pages of drills of increasing complexity. In addition to their being extremely dull, drilling in this way has been shown to have other defects, too. The repetitive nature of the drills had a mesmeric effect; attention spans became severely truncated and concentration quickly wavered.

Videos taken of choral drilling showed that students' minds appeared to wander after very few rounds of drills, that a substantial number of students simply mouthed the words while other droned a quasi-mumbo-jumbo in time with the rhythms and cadences of their classmates. Furthermore, when quizzed about what they had been saying, even a short time after the exercises, many students were unable to recall any of their utterances. Those conscientious individuals who persevered with the system demonstrated what later became known as 'monitor over-use': an excruciatingly hesitant way of speaking and a mechanistic mode of production that perfectly mirrored their way of learning.

Figure 1. Some Examples of Meaningless English in the Min-men Style.

He surprised his son by playing in the street.

He suggested his son play in the street.

He told off his son for playing in the street.

*Continue*

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. let              | He let his son play in the street.              |
| 2. tell             | He told his son to play in the street.          |
| 3. get him the mail | He told his son to get him the mail.            |
| 4. insist           | He insisted that his son get him the mail.      |
| 5. watch            | He watched his son getting him the mail.        |
| 6. thank            | He thanked his son for getting him the mail.    |
| 7. prevent          | He prevented his son from getting him the mail. |
| 8. have             | He had his son get him the mail.                |
| 9. go to bed early  | He had his son go to bed early.                 |
| 10. force           | He forced his son to go to bed early.           |
| 11. hear            | He heard his son going to bed early.            |
| 12. want            | He wanted his son to go to bed early.           |
| 13. please          | He pleased his son by going to bed early.       |
| 14. buy him a car   | He pleased his son by buying him a car.         |
| 15. reward          | He rewarded his son by buying him a car.        |
| 16. his wife        | He rewarded his wife by buying her a car.       |
| 17. astonish        | He astonished his wife by buying her a car.     |
| 18. come home early | He astonished his wife by coming home early.    |
| 19. ask             | He asked his wife to come home early.           |
| 20. recommend       | He recommended that his wife come home early.   |
| 21. discourage      | He discouraged his wife from coming home early. |

Teacher	(change)		Continue	
S.8		Mr. Conroy isn't going to tell a joke to the boss tomorrow.	4. who suggested?	Who suggested that Harry jump over that fence?
Teacher	often		5. no one insisted	No one insisted that Mrs. Jones rush into the shelter.
S.9		Mr. Conroy doesn't often tell a joke to the boss.	6. her friends suggested	Her friends suggested that Valerie ski down the hill.
Teacher		Mr. Conroy told me	7. I wouldn't recommend	I wouldn't recommend that Olsen crawl through the hedge.
S.10		Mr. Conroy told me that he didn't often tell a joke to the boss.	8. we didn't insist	We didn't insist that Sally walk under the bridge.
Continue	(Start with Pattern A, that is, without a preposition)		9. their friends recommended	Their friends recommended that the Gregsons drive along the shore.
3. already-when I arrived		Mrs. Rivers had already made the children some sandwiches when I arrived.	10. did its owner suggest?	Did its owner suggest that the mailman run away from that dog?
(change)		Mrs. Rivers had already made some sandwiches for the children when I arrived.	11. why did you insist?	Why did you insist that Polly ride her bike around the corner?
Mrs. Rivers said		Mrs. Rivers said she had already made some sandwiches for the children when I arrived.	12. Timmy's father suggested	Timmy's father suggested that he hurry toward his mother.
still-not		Mrs. Rivers said she still hadn't made any sandwiches for the children when I arrived.		
(question)		Did Mrs. Rivers say she still hadn't made any sandwiches for the children when you arrived?		

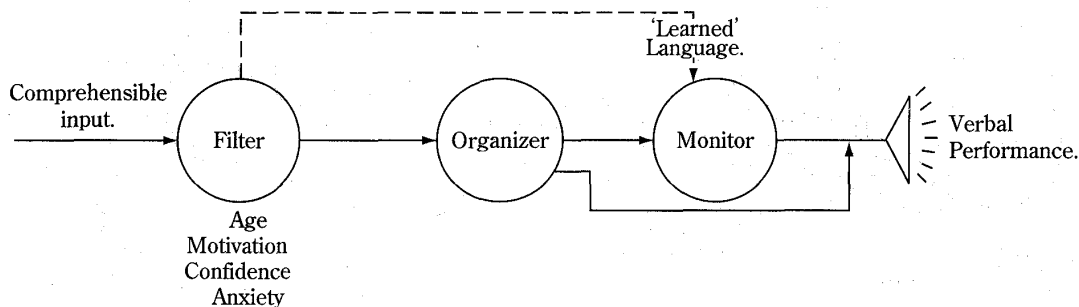
Source: Modern English, Seido Language Institute, Kobe, 1978

### Communicative Strategies

Chomsky rode to the rescue in 1957, challenged Skinner, and installed semantics as a central tenet of language acquisition. Teachers responded by producing 'communicative' teaching strategies which placed meaning at the centre of their lesson plans.

Although there have since been a large number of variations in emphasis and approach, the fundamental outlines of communicative systems have remained the same. These can be identified

Figure 2. Working Model for Creative Construction in L2 Acquisition



Source: Adapted from Dulay and Burt, 1981, p.189.

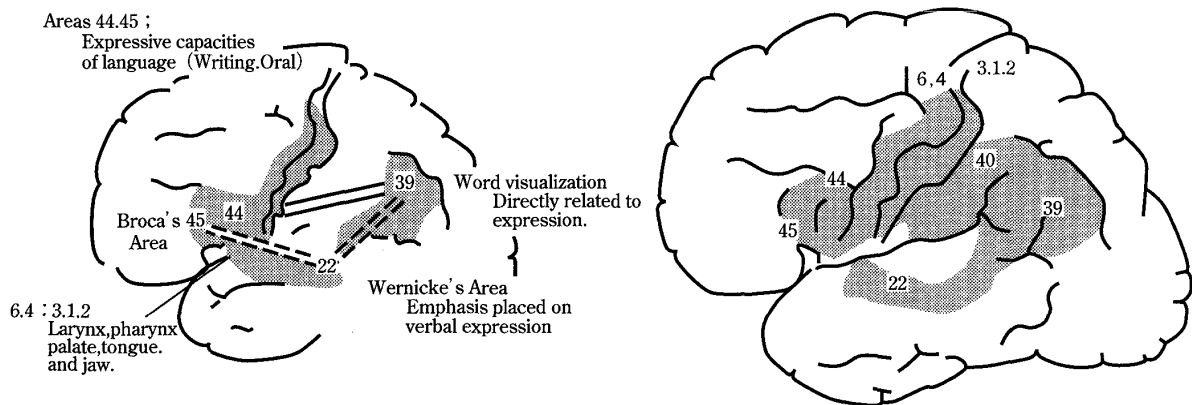
as the three basic stages of input, processing and production and may best be illustrated by Du-  
lay and Burt's well-known model of language acquisition:<sup>3</sup>

### Input

The input stage is the introduction of an item of language to a student. As will be demon-  
strated below, this may be done in several ways, but on one point all proponents are agreed:  
that the meaning of the target language should be as self-evident as possible. (This corresponds  
to Chomsky's notions of Universal Grammar, and that in the normal way of childhood language  
acquisition, 'understanding' a concept precedes articulation. Thus, to present a concept rather  
than a structured piece of language is a more natural way to proceed.). Furthermore, explana-  
tions of new language at this stage have certain disadvantages. Firstly, it may well be the case  
that the explanation of the language point is more complex than the point itself, thereby obfus-  
cating it. Secondly, if the explanations are in the students' L1, it means that the students are  
not only receiving insufficient L2 input, but that, in neurolinguistic terms, they are also bypass-  
ing important semantic functions that lie at the root of proper understanding. The analogy of  
driving a car is often evoked here: knowing how the engine functions is not the same as being  
able to drive, both operations requiring an entirely different set of skills.

Furthermore, studies in cognitive neuroscience which increasingly emphasize the functions of  
those biological (and genetic) components which underlie the important semantic aspects of lan-  
guage acquisition are a further indication of the value of using the students' L2 wherever possi-  
ble. Although enormously simplified, Figure 3 shows that there is a considerable deficiency in  
the utilization of those areas of the brain responsible for semantic input in those methodologies  
which do not employ the students' L2 (Left diagram), when compared with those areas used in  
more natural methods of language acquisition. (Right diagram).

Figure 3. Neurological Comparison of Areas Used in Non-Communicative and Communicative Systems of Learning

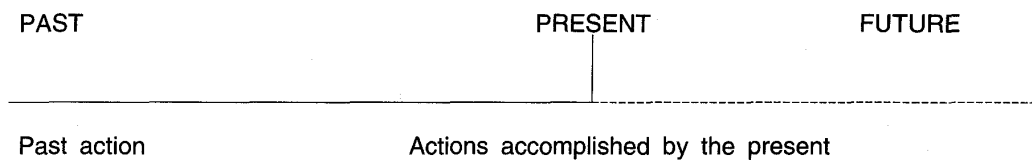


<p>Method</p> <p>Auditory-visual information emphasizing word-object relation toward cognitive and intellectual processes.</p> <p>Verbal comprehension combined with verbal expression.</p> <p>Comprehension of written (visual-auditory) words and sentences integrated with skilled somatic sensory-motor regions.</p> <p>Follows neurogenetic progression increased by cognitive and intellectual skills. Individual differences seen within progression.</p>	<p>Cortical areas</p> <p>Area 22,Wernicke's Area. verbal detection and analysis of elements of language.</p> <p>Area 40, Word-object relation toward cognitive and intellectual processes.</p> <p>Areas 44+45, Broca's Area. associated with somatic sensory motor regions.</p> <p>Areas 6, 4;3, 1, 2. Somatic sensory-motor regions of the larynx, pharynx, palate, tongue, digits, hand, forearm, upper arm, shoulder.</p> <p>Areas 39, visualization of language in association with Wernicke's Area.</p>
--	--

(Source:Diller,1981.)

Presentations can take a variety of forms. The simplest form is a picture, because everybody knows that, " a picture speaks a thousand words." Hence, a well-chosen picture can introduce a concept and a context, whether it be a single item of vocabulary or a complex grammatical form, without recourse to tortuous explanations.

A good example of this can be seen in Figure 4. Although, for reasons discussed later, this kind of presentation is now considered somewhat dated, it nevertheless shows that providing a piece of language with a context and illustrating how it is used makes it much more accessible to students. Indeed, if we accept the Present Perfect Tense as a linear progression from the past to the present time which describes what has been accomplished to date, we can produce a linear diagram thus:



A quick glance at Figure 4 will show that the only difference between it and the above diagram is that Figure 4 has a context and meaning, thus bypassing the need for any explanation of its grammatical format. Thus, by unconsciously imparting the underlying grammar to the student, it is entirely consistent with Chomskian notions of the semantic component which underlies syntax and structure.

Figure 4. A Conceptual Presentation of the Present Perfect Tense.



Elmer Colt is from Kansas. He's on a 14-day tour of Europe. The tour started in London. At the moment he's in Prague. It's the eighth day of the tour. He's already been to seven countries and stayed in the capital cities.

He's never been to Europe before, and he's already seen a lot of new places. He's done a lot of interesting things...and the tour hasn't finished yet.

### Exercise 1

*Elmer's been to London, but he hasn't been to Vienna yet.*

Write four sentences about Elmer.

### Exercise 2

*I've been to Paris, but I haven't been to London yet.*

Write four sentences about yourself.

Source: Hartley and Viney, Streamline English Departures, Oxford University Press, 1977.



As we shall see shortly, the teacher's manual suggests that the unit be introduced with the students covering the written part of the text and listening to the same information on tape. This alternative is available for most units in this textbook as indeed it is for most other popular communicative textbooks. Teachers may choose according to which style of input they feel is most appropriate for their classes, but it is true to say that the listening alternative is more commonly used. Listening, along with speaking, are generally deemed to be the weaker couple of the communicative skills, and listening is often considered to be the more natural partner for speaking (though there are, of course, exceptions such as note taking practice for lectures).

Such considerations were given a hefty boost by Krashen *et al* who were emphatic that listening should be the dominant feature of input strategy. Krashen's insistence on the irreconcilability of 'learned' and 'acquired' language and his insistence on the exclusive primacy of listening at the expense of other considerations, (such as the value of comprehensible output) has led to a waning of his influence. These issues have been widely discussed elsewhere and are so thoroughly in the public domain that I do not intend to add to them, save to make one point: much of what Krashen presented to the world in the early 1980s was basic common sense, and had been recognised as such by teachers for decades. Of course input should be comprehensible (what are the alternatives?); of course there are filters that are affected by such things as age and personality; of course there are monitors (whose users we meet every day of our professional lives.); of course there is a silent period (of enormously variable duration); of course students should not be forced to speak before they are ready, (ineffective and counterproductive.). And so on and so on.

Krashen's contribution to language teaching can be seen as important insofar as it served as a reminder to teachers of important classroom dynamics and methodologies, and insofar as it gave communicative language teachers the respectability that comes from association with an esteemed academic. Perhaps the main difference that resulted from Krashen's work was that publisher's enjoyed a boom in sales of listening comprehension text-books as many teachers increased the listening component in their classes.

As many other teachers had already been using listening comprehension quite extensively in their classrooms, and as the precise mechanisms which govern the acquisition of language through listening were (and are, see "osmotic seepage" above) still *sub judice*, the overall changes that took place in the classroom were not very great.

We have already noted the usefulness of pictures as a source of input. Providing visual clues through drama can work in the same way, providing students with conceptual understanding before they receive the target language. An extremely simple example of this would be: 1)

The teacher gives an exaggerated scowl. 2) The students understand the concept, 'angry'. 3) The teacher provides the word, 'angry' and reinforces it. Using drama to elicit language from students is also a very useful form of input. It depends upon the students having some prior knowledge of the target language or the wherewithal to deduce what it might be. Given the amount of 'passive knowledge' that many EFL students have, this is not as unlikely as it sounds.

A theatrical bent, with a full array of gestures and facial expressions, has long been recognized as an asset in any EFL teacher's arsenal though, while its importance is still acknowledged, it is perhaps given less emphasis than a few years ago. In the 1970s, using mime to elicit language from students was an important facet of the communicative classroom. (Redundant hippies looking for gainful employment, perhaps?). One important feature of this was that the teacher remained silent, while the students ventured to speak; a role reversal which established an important precedent in such classrooms. Indeed, when I studied at International House in 1976, classes were observed and teacher talking time (or TTT to aficionados) was timed with a stop-watch. TTT had to be kept to an absolute minimum and if the teacher spoke for more than 30% of the allotted class time, this was considered greatly excessive. Thus, imaginative use of other faculties could convey an enormous range of information (such as the classic instruction in a teacher's manual: 'Mime looking at lipstick!'), which in turn allowed students to fully occupy themselves with verbalizing what they were seeing.

The thinking behind this was not complex, but it was profound in its implications. If the teacher is talking, the students are not. If students wish to speak, they must be given ample opportunity to do so. This is a basic tenet of all communicative classrooms.

### Processing

Processing (or the 'organizer' as it is called in Figure 2) is the thorniest of issues in the world of language teaching, because nobody really knows how languages are internalized.

Neurological studies using PET scans are providing some valuable insights into some of the mechanisms involved, but the mind-boggling complexity of these mechanisms, which transfer the sound vibrations reaching the inner ear into spontaneous, original and creative responses, (i.e. the physical manifestations of mental phenomena and vice-versa), means that true understanding remains fugacious. This, of course, has not stopped anyone (including myself!) from making a series of suppositions on the optimum way to employ these internalizing mechanisms.

Creators of 'original' teaching methodologies base their conclusions mainly upon what they perceive to be the efficacious results that their methods achieve, conveniently forgetting that the

inbuilt prejudices inherent in their testing procedures can produce almost any result that they wish. Sadly, it is difficult to conceive of any alternative system, though it remains fertile territory for charlatans. It is a lucrative market as the peddlers of 'Instant English' with their testimonials and snake-oil methodologies continue to part gullible and soon-to-be-disillusioned clients from their money.

Perhaps one of the best ways to evaluate these systems is to listen to the consensus of professional teachers. A critical reading of the author's claims and classroom trials shared between a large number of discerning teachers is probably the only satisfactory way of reaching a conclusion, (though the existence of a 'herd instinct', such as the one that led everyone to listening comprehension texts after Krashen, will probably always be with us.)

On a more mundane level common sense must also play an important part in any evaluations we make. Asher's assertions in his theories of Total Physical Response, that children learn their first language first and foremost by responding to instructions, seem to be reasonable and consistent with some of what we know about childhood first language development. TPR classes undeniably provide a lot of listening input. Also, students do not feel any pressure to respond in words. They can also be exposed to a wide range of embedded vocabulary and structures. Finally, TPR classes can be made dynamic and enjoyable. Against this, it may be argued that they are too teacher-centred and that they are not really communicative insofar as students are given little opportunity to produce language freely. We must make up our own minds, but on balance I feel there is ample justification for judiciously incorporating some aspects of TPR into the classroom.

The same may be said for Suggestopedia, the *bete noir* of EFL teachers. However unconventional we may suppose Dr Lozanov to have been, Suggestopedia should not be dismissed in its entirety. The idea of a relaxed learning environment, for example, is a piece of common sense that also happens to be a central tenet of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Also, the focus on conceptualizing language (through the use of rods), albeit in a rigidly syntactical way, and other aspects of classroom activity which accept language as one facet of a much larger psychological whole, are deserving of trial and analysis.

The most commonly accepted 'truth' about the nature of the processing system is that it requires a lot of practice. We know from first language acquisition studies that children deprived of input suffer varying degrees of damage in their communicative abilities, while conversely, children brought up in a rich milieu of communicative stimulation thrive.<sup>4</sup> The fact that this is also the most sublime piece of common sense is an added benefit.

Thus, practice is a central part of the processing system. In order to communicate well, we

Figure 5. The Teacher's Page from Figure 4.

Target Structures

(He's) been to London.  
 (He hasn't) been to Rome yet.  
 (Has he) been to Berlin yet?  
 (He's) never been to Europe before.  
 Have you ever been to (Paris) ?

New Vocabulary

tour                      Europe                      itinerary  
 seen

1 Focus attention on the map. Ensure the text is masked.  
 Set the situation. Play the cassette or read the text.

2 Listen and Repeat.

3 Silent Reading.

4 Question and Answer.

What's his name?  
 Where's he from?  
 What's he doing?  
 Did the tour start in Berlin? Ask Where?  
 Where is he now?  
 Which day of the tour is it?  
 Has he been to many countries?  
 Has he been to twenty countries, or seven countries?  
 Where has he stayed...in small towns or the capital cities?  
 Has he been to Europe before?  
 What's he seen already?  
 Has he done any interesting things?  
 Has the tour finished yet?

5 Drill:

T: London  
 T: He's been to London.  
 T: Paris  
 T: He's been to Paris.  
 T: London  
 C: He's been to London.

Continue:

Paris  
 Brussels  
 Amsterdam  
 Copenhagen  
 Stockholm  
 Berlin

6 Drill:

T: Vienna  
 T: He hasn't been to Vienna yet.  
 T: Belgrade  
 T: He hasn't been to Belgrade yet.  
 T: Vienna  
 C: He hasn't been to Vienna yet.

Continue:

Belgrade  
 Athens  
 Rome  
 Madrid  
 Lisbon

7 Drill:

T: London  
 T: He's been to London.  
 T: Vienna  
 T: He hasn't been to Vienna yet.  
 T: London  
 C: He's been to London

Continue:

Vienna  
 Paris  
 Belgrade  
 Brussels  
 Athens  
 Amsterdam  
 Rome

8 Drill:

T: Has he been to London yet?  
 T: Yes, he has.  
 T: Has he been to Lisbon yet?  
 T: No, he hasn't.  
 T: Has he been to London yet?  
 C: Yes, he has.

Continue:

Has he been to Lisbon yet?  
 Has he been to Stockholm yet?  
 Has he been to Copenhagen yet?  
 Has he been to Madrid yet?  
 Has he been to Rome yet?  
 Has he been to Amsterdam yet?  
 Has he been to Paris yet?

9 Drill:

T: London  
 T: Has he been to London yet?  
 T: Madrid  
 T: Has he been to Madrid yet?  
 T: London  
 C: Has he been to London yet?

Continue:

Madrid  
 Belgrade  
 Amsterdam  
 Athens  
 Copenhagen  
 Rome  
 Paris

10 Pair Work. Students ask each other about Elmer Colt.

S1: Has he been to/ yet?  
 S2: Yes, he has/ No, he hasn't

11 Transfer. Ask questions/

T: Have you ever been to/  
 S: Yes, I have/ No, I haven't  
 Ask him • Ask her/ Ask me • Ask each other.

12 T: In your life...until now...have you ever seen  
 the Queen of England?

Repeat! Have you ever seen the Queen?

Drill:

T: The Queen  
 T: Have you ever seen the Queen  
 T: An elephant  
 T: Have you ever seen an elephant  
 T: The Queen  
 C: Have you ever seen the Queen?

Continue:

An elephant  
 A James Bond film  
 A Rolls-Royce  
 A helicopter  
 The Eiffel Tower  
 The Taj Mahal  
 Concorde

13 Pair Work. Get them to ask each other:

S1: Have you ever seen a.../ the...  
 S2: Yes, I have/ No, I haven't.

14 Drill:

T: He's been somewhere.  
 T: Where's he been?  
 T: They've seen something.  
 T: What've they seen?  
 T: He's seen someone.  
 T: Who's he seen?  
 T: He's been somewhere.  
 C: Where's he been?

Continue:

They've seen something.  
 He's seen someone.  
 She's done something.  
 They've been somewhere.  
 I've done something.  
 I've been somewhere.  
 I've seen someone.

15 Set the exercises in class or for homework.

Source: Streamline English, *ibid.*

should practice communication. But what kind of practice is most effective? Memorization is a dirty word in the communicative language teaching business, containing as it does dark echoes of 'mim-mem' and the horrors of the kind of repetitive drills illustrated in Figure 1. Nonetheless, we cannot deny that the incorporation of language into the brain must involve some kind of memorization process. Some kind of mnemonic is at work; the problem is how this should best be optimized by teachers.

Figure 5 is a page from the teacher's manual from Streamline English Departures showing the guidelines given for teaching the lesson illustrated in Figure 4. It contains seven drills. In the light of what we have said about audio-lingualism, how can we justify this kind of approach? There are several points we can make.

Firstly, all of the drills are contextualized. They are very clearly focused on the target structure, and lead the students through the various forms of the Present Perfect Tense (as it is used within the unit) to a situation whereby students can personalize the language to speak about their own experiences. It moves from a situation of controlled language production to one of more free expression. The author, Peter Viney, has justified the use of such drills on several grounds, the most important of which is that they are relevant. They are also short and to the point: students can very easily perceive the end to which the drills are being used and their interest levels are consequently raised. Furthermore, choral drilling can provide a comfortable learning environment for less confident students who can practice the structures in anonymity. At the very least it provides students—particularly at an elementary level—the chance to get their mouths around new and alien agglomerations of sounds.

It was also pointed out that many common classroom activities involve drills in disguise. The well-tried 'find someone who...' exercise, for example involves students going around the classroom repeating the same sentences over and over again. The 'guess my job' activity, the 'twenty questions' game and countless other communicative activities do the same. Are these not drills? The answer is 'yes', but they are redeemed by the simple fact that they are meaning centred, and students, highly motivated to use the language to attain a goal, are using this kind of repetition unconsciously to internalize the language. Thus, we need not condemn all drilling out of hand; in the above mentioned circumstances they clearly have a place.

The Streamline English series of textbooks were considered novel and innovative when they were first published in the mid-1970s. The formats were colourful and entertaining (criteria which receive surprisingly high evaluations from students), the tapes were relatively sophisticated and the language taught was considered 'useful' and realistic by the students. Its methodology seemed to have a sound theoretical basis with its clear, self explanatory presentations leading

into a controlled phase of internalization through drill and practice, which in turn led to the goal of personalization and self-expression. The texts were best sellers for many years, and the style was widely imitated by other publishing houses.

However, a growing body of opinion gradually began to question some of the assumptions underlying the 'Streamline way'. Teachers noticed that outside of the classroom, in environments that did not involve teachers and textbooks, students were not able to use much of what they had learned in the structured environments of their classes. Hoped for levels of fluency were not being attained and even better students seemed to be very monitor dependent.

Some of this was attributed to the fact that such texts were too simplistic in the way in which they broke the language down into its component parts. Notwithstanding the element of personalization in most units, the very strong structural element in the texts seemed to work against a flexible use of language, and the degree to which the exercises could be seen as really communicative was brought into question. Also, while the type of language presented is quite realistic and certainly less inane than that of audio-lingualism, a brief study of discourse analysis shows us that people do not usually communicate in such tidy structural modules. Therefore, it is too trite an interpretation of language to suppose that a single structural component (for example, Unit 64--Present Perfect Tense) can be fitted into a comfortable 45 minute lesson. It was seen as a 'painting by numbers' approach to language learning and, as such, not conducive to creative acquisition.

It was felt that, at very least, such lesson modules would have to be supplemented and expanded to include a far wider range of language items than those provided by simple, mechanistic drills. Extensive listening exercises, deductive interpretation, problem solving, information exchange, projects and group discussions are just a few examples of some of the ways in which this might be achieved.

Consistent with this line of thinking, the content based approach to language learning has been developed. Taking the concepts of 'meaning-centred' and 'relevant' to their logical conclusion, the content based approach has eliminated the categorization of language into its functional, notional and structural components from the language learning classroom. Meaning is everything. To this end curricula have been designed that are topic based. The target language that teachers present in their lesson plans is the type of language that is needed to achieve a predetermined task related goal. This is regardless of the status of the item in any grammatical scheme of things: the topic determines the kind of language to be taught, not vice-versa. This is incidentally more in line with the way in which we learn our first languages.

Topics can generally be covered in some depths which make content based courses quite

suitable for university level classes (one criticism of the Streamline type of course was that it was trivial and, regardless of the type of language attained, deemed by many to be unsuitable for university classes.). One of the main challenges here, however, is to design lessons in which complex issues may be dealt with at quite a basic linguistic level. One of the ways in which this is being done is through the provision of a wide range of introductory material which focusses on students responding to language embedded in the text. Responding to information is far easier than producing original language, and teachers have consequently been surprised at the complexity of material that students have been able to handle. Some typical exercises at this stage of language presentation are questionnaires, class surveys or collating material from sources outside of the classroom. Following this, there is a period of negotiation, (roughly corresponding to the internalization stage), in which students working in groups might pool their ideas or opinions in order to solve a problem. Finally, at the production stage of this process, students might explain and justify their results in a presentation.

One practical example of this is as follows: students are given the goal of designing a new hotel for their neighbourhood. At the first stage they are given questionnaires about what kind of facilities they rate as being important, and about the kind of facilities extant hotels that the students know possess or do not possess. In this way students can be exposed to a wide range of language and vocabulary which they can learn and respond to without, at this stage, having to produce anything more than minimal responses. Next, students can be given a range of alternatives from which they must choose the options that they would like to incorporate into their own designs. This, too, does not require too much production from the students. At the next stage, however, when students compare and discuss the merits of their respective designs, there is a need for students to use the language that has been internalized during the first stages of the exercise. As they are working with their peers, however, students can generally feel quite comfortable about making mistakes, especially if they fully understand that the main purpose is to communicate their ideas successfully. Judicious monitoring and guidance by the teacher is particularly important at this stage. Finally, the students display and describe the results of their discussions to the teacher, the class as a whole, or to other students.

This is one example of a content-based lesson. This particular lesson takes about three hours of class time plus homework with intermediate students, although, at the teacher's discretion this may be expanded or reduced considerably. Also, according to the level of the students, the balance between responsive phases and production phases may be greatly adjusted.

Many teachers (including myself) seem quite happy with the trend towards content-based classes, especially insofar as it allows both students and teachers to engage their intellects in

matters of interest and importance. It remains to be seen whether such classes will work at very elementary levels, but there are indications that creative lesson planning can successfully incorporate aspects of content-based curricula to relatively low level students. The signs are encouraging.

## Conclusions

In recent years in Japan there has been a lot of talk about teaching English 'communicatively'. Guidelines from the Ministry of Education concerning more communicative approaches to language teaching have been sent to universities and schools who have, in turn, cogitated and responded accordingly. The degree to which these responses have promoted communication in the classrooms may be measured by looking at the degree to which any of the communicative systems, principles or methods listed above have been incorporated into mainstream syllabi in Japanese institutions. The answer, depressingly enough, is hardly at all.

This is in spite of the fact that pressure for change continues. For example, many people in Japan were shocked by the recent revelation that Japan ranked 162nd in the world in terms of English language competence.<sup>8</sup> Any misgivings we might have about the TOEFL testing system upon which these results were based notwithstanding, this is a shameful indictment of what purports to be English language teaching in Japan, and *any objective assessment of what English teachers have been teaching for the past twenty years must conclude that it has been an abject and dismal failure*. It is a failure to acknowledge (at any level of the educational process) the need for communication.

Sadly, the reasons for this are as embarrassing as they are easy to find. The main culprit is the university entrance examination system. As is well known, university entrance examinations are the focal point of students' academic lives. They are of paramount importance, a definitive moment in deciding many aspects of students' professional and social futures. *There is no speaking component in any university entrance examination that I know of*. Students do not have to be able to communicate anything whatsoever. Until recently, there was not even a listening component in many universities' examinations, and they have only been introduced grudgingly and after much foot dragging, on a limited basis.

Indeed, it is instructive to see in what ways the entrance examinations do not conform to the criteria set out above for communicative language. Firstly, the reading comprehension sections can in no way be described as 'communicative'. Sections that test pronunciation and stress are in written form so in theory they could be successfully answered by a deaf mute. Questions addressing usage and grammatical knowledge, like the reading comprehension questions, commu-



nicate nothing. At best they test a passive familiarity with a range of grammatical structures. All of this might be slightly mitigated if students could at very least communicate something in writing, but the format of the test is mostly multiple choice answers. Although a few sentences may be translated and written (from Japanese to English or, more usually, English to Japanese), there is no scope at all for creative or communicative writing.

A more disturbing aspect of the tests is the fact that they often test arcane and less usual forms of language at the expense of more commonly used forms. As with the examples given in Figure 1, there is a predominant focus on structure rather than meaning. Hence, as with the audio-lingual approach, many of the sentences are awkward and convoluted, and which, if spoken to a native speaker of English, would produce bemusement or laughter. Some recent examples are: 'The ears of my dog are longer than those of yours.'; 'A library is a building in which are kept many books for reading.'; 'If I were a bird, I would fly in the sky.' to name but three.

Because of the importance of the entrance examinations, student syllabi through the Junior High Schools, High Schools and private cram schools are geared towards passing them. Thus, the communicative components that they contain are few. More worrying, though, is the fact that the teachers of these syllabi have no need to speak English themselves, because the examinations themselves do not require any communicative proficiency. Indeed, to become a teacher of English in Japan requires no demonstration of spoken competence in the language. Ellis (1987)<sup>7</sup> reports that, in Japanese classrooms, Japanese is the language in use for 95% of the time. My own experience suggests that this is a conservative figure, and that if the amount of time that Japanese students actually use English to communicate were measured, the results, over thousands of hours of English study, spanning at least six years of compulsory English education, could be measured in minutes.

In the light of what we have noted above about the amount of exposure to L2 that students require, the amount of time that is needed to internalize language through practice, and the amount of time that students themselves are able to communicate in the classroom, the only conclusion available to us is that current classroom practices in Japan are not, in the slightest degree, communicative. Thus, nobody should be surprised at Japan's position of 162 in the world's English competence tables. We can merely despair at the amount of time and energy wasted.

Notes

- 1 I am particularly galled by the esteem in which the STEP test is held in Japan. It seems to me to reflect little more than the proficiency with which students are able to take tests.
- 2 An offshoot of this has been that, until quite recently, British Publishing Houses have enjoyed a disproportionately large share of the market for communicative English language textbooks. The US on the other hand has tended to focus more on linguistic theory. This is now changing.
- 3 See Burt M. and Dulay H. 1981. Optimal Language Learning Environments. In *The Second Language Classroom : Directions For the 1980 s*, eds Alatis J. Altman H. Alatis P. Oxford University Press.
- 4 See, Pinker, S. *The Language Instinct*. Harper Perrenial, 1995
- 5 Pinker S. *Ibid* pp. 288-293
- 6 Nikkei Shimbun, May 12 th, 1997
- 7 Ellis R, 1997. *The Language Teacher*, December, 1997

Bibliography

- Asher J, 1981. Total Physical Response: Some Guidelines for Evaluation. In *The Language Teacher*. Vol x, No 13, November, 1985.
- Brown E D, 1981. Affective Factors in Language Learning. In *The Second Language Classroom: Directions for the 1980 s*. Alatis J, Alatism H, Alatis P. (eds). Oxford University Press.
- Burt M and Dulay H, 1981 Optimal Language Learning Environments. In *The Second Language Classroom: Directions for the 1980 s*. pp 177-192. Oxford University Press.
- Carroll B J, 1980. *Testing Communicative Performance*. Oxford. Pergammon Press.
- Chomsky N. 1971. *Chomsky: Selected Readings*. (eds) Allen J, Van Buren P. Oxford University Press.
- Diller K, 1981. Neurolinguistic Clues to the Essentials of Good Language Teaching Methodology: Comprehension, Problem Solving and Meaningful Practice. In *The Comprehension Approach to Foreign Language Instruction*. (ed) Winitz H. Rowley, Massachusetts. Newbury House.
- Dulay H, Burt M, Krashen S, 1982 *Language Two*. New York. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis R, 1984. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis R, 1997 Interview in *The Language Teacher*, Volume 21 No 12 Dec 1997.
- Hartley B, Viney P, 1978. *Streamline English, Departures*. Oxford University Press.
- Krashen S, 1982. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergammon Press.
- Pinker S, 1995. *The Language Instinct*. Harper/Perennial.
- Seido Language Institute. 1978. *Modern English*. Seido Publishing, Kobe.
- Stevick E, 1980. *A Way and Ways*. Rowley, Massachusetts. Newbury House.

(テイモシー グロース 本学人文学部助教授 言語学専攻)