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Universitatea " 1 Decembrie 1918 "Alba Iulia

LANGUAGE TEACHING AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Abstract *: The purpose of this presentation has been to show the relevance of the linguistic studies to a number of practical tasks connected with language teaching. The guiding principle has been to refer to those articles and books which may offer some particular insights into language, its use and how it is learned,which is relevant to language teaching.*
Language teaching is a complex and many-sided process; it involves many considerations, alternatives which, even if we are aware of them, cannot be measured. This is why the activity of language teaching cannot be modeled or reduced to a set of logically related procedures.
Having in view that not all the alternatives are known, there are other factors which must be taken into account in any teaching task, such as : the personality of the students, their aptitude, their intellectual capacities, their motivation towards learning. All these have been investigated by educational psychologists.
There is also an important amount of knowledge about the nature of human language, about how it is learned and what part it plays in the life of the individual and the community. Linguists should have all these in mind when planning a language-teaching programme, providing a growing body of scientific knowledge about language which can guide the activity of the language teacher.
The application of linguistic knowledge to some object, or applied linguistics, is an activity and not a theoretical study. The applied linguist is a user, not a producer of theories. Language teaching is also an activity, even if teaching languages do not coincide with applied linguistics. If someone interprets language teaching in the broadest sense, including all the planning and decision-making taking place outside the classroom, then there is an element of applied linguistics in language teaching.
The presentation may be said to be about applied linguistics in language teaching, about the aspects of the language teaching process in which decisions are made to take into consideration the nature of human language , how it is learned and its role in society.
Generally, linguistics gives us a background for describing what we mean by "skill in" , and "knowledge of" a language and makes it possible to demonstrate that one way of teaching is more effective than another for achieving a particular aim with a particular group of learners.
Key-words*: language teaching, applied linguistics, "skill in", "knowledge of"*

The term "teaching " is rather vague in its meaning. Most often it refers to the activity of the teacher in the classroom in his or her interaction with his or her students; generally, teachers know that this represents just the end point of a time-consuming activity,planning,detailed preparation, correcting, final results,all of which are an important part of their work.Teachers use textbooks, visual aids, they elaborate a syllabus and a timetable; students are submitted to examinations or tests prepared by others. All these materials are things that they have little in common, but which contribute to, or control, to some extent, what goes on in the classroom. In the process of teaching, all planning and decision-making at whatever level which bears directly or indirectly on what goes on in the

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classroom is included. Textbooks and teaching materials of all kinds are the concrete realizations of the syllabus plan.

The level at which decisions are made about language teaching is that of the classroom. The linguistic contribution at this level is psychological, and is concerned with how students learn second languages. Other considerations play an important part : general pedagogic principles, motivation, attitudes, personality, intelligence; even if these are non-linguistic, they are important in the teaching of other subjects as in the teaching of languages.

The applied linguist is a contibutor to the language-teaching process; the same can be said about all the other contributors : society, as represented by the education authorities, the applied linguist and the teacher. As in all educational activities, the difficulty is to define "success". Society might define it in terms of social integration, the so called concept of the "educated man". The teacher might define it in terms of academic achievement, the "fulfillment of the individual". The applied linguist will take it in terms of the "attainment of some measurable performance skills in the language". It is individuals who learn language and they do it for different reasons: they enjoy it, the language is useful in their academic advancement or in their future careers, it opens for them opportunities for social and cultural contact and enrichement. They do not need the same level of performance ability or the same set of linguistic skills. The individual learner is very much concerned with success in his or her own acceptance. Linguistics gives us a framework for describing what we mean by "skill in, knowledge of" a language and makes it possible to show that one way of teaching or one set of teaching materials is more effective than another for achieving a particular aim with a particular group of learners.

What distinguishes theoretical linguistics from other approaches to language is not its scientific status,but its goals: what aspect of language it sets out to describe and explain. It is on the basis of what its goals are that it selects its data. The linguistic study of language confines itself to a study of the verbal utterances of human beings.Its aims are to describe the structure of these utterances and to do so by setting up a theory of linguistic structure, namely grammar. The linguist is not concerned with the situational context in which his or her data were produced, the relations between the speakers and hearers, their social characteristics, what is happening while they talk, the results of their speech, the paralinguistic behaviour, etc. The linguist's data are, reduced to the bare essentials, of two sorts: sequences of sounds, an acoustic wave form, and certain sorts of judgements on these sequences, their acceptability, similarity, and difference. All these are his or her data ,and his or her job is, by the application of some notions about them , to reduce them to some sort of order, to discover some sort of regularity in them in spite of their apparently heterogeneous nature. While linguistics gives us a means of "describing" what we teach, it does not provide us with the means of "determining" what to teach.

An important characteristic of human language that differentiate it from animal communication is its creativity. This means that we have the ability to construct and understand a large number of sentences in our native language, including sentences we have never heard before. Most of the sentences we produce and hear are "new" in this sense. When we teach someone a language we wish him or her to have the same capacity to understand and to produce sentences he or she has never heard before but which will immediately be understood by his or her native speaking hearers. A description of a language which is" projective" is, a necessity for language teaching.

Besides being " projective", another quality for a grammar of a language is that it is " vulnerable" , that is, that it can be proved wrong empirically. Such a grammar must be

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"predictive" in the sense mentioned. For a grammar to be "vulnerable", it must be explicit- it must not leave anything unstated for the reader to fill in from his or her own knowledge.
Grammars must be both "explicit and projective" if they are to meet the criterion of"descriptive adequacy".
Some linguists, including Chomsky, say that the objectives of the linguistic study of language have been the characterization of the "internalized code or set of rules used by the speaker-hearer when he or she uses the language, and not a description of the utterance produced by speakers of a language". Linguists, according to his own point of view, do not study what people do when they speak and understand language, but seek rather to discover the rules underlying this performance. This is what Chomsky calls their performance:
"A distinction must be made between what the speaker of a language knows implicitly(what we may call his competence) and what he does(his performance).A grammar, in the traditional view, is an account of competence.(Chomsky,N.,1966, Topics in the Theory of Generative Grammar, Mouton , p. 9).
This distinction is also made by de Saussure between language and parole. De Saussure used the famous analogy between the score of a musical work and its performance , to clarify this distinction (de Saussure, F. 1961, Course in General Linguistics, W. Baskin(trans.), Peter Owen).
The task of a linguistic theory is said to be to state the systems of rules which relate meanings to sounds. This is a very complex relation, one which linguists found it necessary to break down this relationship into a number of steps or stages.These stages the linguists set up to do this have varied from time to time and from one theoretical orientation to another. What all linguists agreed about is that at least two stages are necessary, meaning two types of organization in language.This is called the "double articulation" of language. For there to be patterns there must be basic units which enter into formal relations with each other. The two sets of basic units corresponding to the two types of structure are what we call words, and sounds or letters. The first or primary units, words, are meaningful in themselves, while the secondary units, sounds, are not. There are problems in defining what a word or sound is; the definition depends on the particular linguistic theory or "frame of reference". "Word" will be defined differently in different theories; there is no "theory-independent" definition of "word" or "sound". While the establishment of different levels and their relationship is a theoretical matter, what the theory is concerned with is the structure of language; each level has a type of structure of its own, and a corresponding theory which establishes the relevant categories of units such as word or sound. These categories have sub-classifications, in the case of word, as the different parts of speech or, in the case of sound, such categories as vowel and consonant. Each level, in its turn, has a set of possible relations between its units and categories.

Language teaching is an everyday, practical activity or series of procedures. The process of planning and designing can be seen as the making of a series of logically interrelated and dependent choices. These choices can be answers to specific questions, in which case the process of planning and designing can be broken down into a series of questions and answers, or, if we wish to put it another way, a series of problems and solutions. For this reason, applied linguistics has been called a " problem-based "activity. The problems are solved or the questions are answered according to the principles derived from the scientific study of the structure of language, how it is learned and its role in society. In a language teaching process, two problems remain important: what to teach and how to teach. These are the problems of content and method, one of product and process design.

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What to teach can be described in linguistic terms, as sets of rules, categories, lists of lexical items, of sounds, rhythmical sequences, intonation patterns; in sociolinguistic terms as lists of speech acts or speech functions, in psycholinguistic terms as sets of skills or language activities. The ability to answer the question depends upon our ability to describe language correctly in any of these terms.

Whatever the aims of the learner are in learning the language, the problem remains that we have no real alternative to "expressing " the syllabus in " linguistic linguistic" terms, since only linguistic theory is rich enough to yield descriptions of a language of a sufficiently detailed sort for the task. Since learners do learn languages, they do at least to some extent without the benefit of systematic and deliberate teaching.

We teach that part which we know how to describe. As long as we do not deprive the learner of the data which makes it possible for him or her to do so, he or she will learn on his or her own that part we cannot describe. The contribution of linguistic theory to language teaching is felt in that "vague" area of WHAT WE TEACH. This is not a direct contribution and many linguists have decided that they do not see any way in which their findings can be useful in solving the problem of language teaching. The best known expression of this point of view is that of Chomsky :

" I am, rather skeptical about the significance, for the teaching of languages, of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics and psychology….. it is difficult to believe that either linguistics or psychology has achieved a level of theoretical understanding that might enable it to support a "technology" of language teaching.(Chomsky, N., 1966, Linguistic Theory, North East Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages,p. 43.)

Similar ideas to these have been expressed by Thorne who said in answer to the question whether there were any lessons to be learned from linguistics of relevance to the teaching of languages :

" This is the kind of question you should ask an applied linguist not a theoretical linguist. As a theoretical linguist, I would have thought no-not directly.All scientific advances always have, to use a fashionable word, spin-off, but it is usually the case that those engaged in work in the field never see what this is." (Thorne,J.P., Interview: "Linguistics", Listener, no.68.pp.209-44.)

So, the relevance of theoretical linguistics to language teaching is indirect and it is not the task of the theoretical linguist to say what relevance it may have. This is the field of the applied linguistics. The relation between linguistic theory and the actual materials used for teaching in the classroom is an indirect one. Linguistic theory cannot alone provide the criteria for selecting, ordering or presenting the content of a teaching programme.

The activity of describing languages was called a primary application of linguistics. Linguistic theory is applied to the raw data in a corpus of utterances and yields a linguistic description of those data. If the theory is "projective" it will predict the features of any further data drawn from this same source. The process of description must be carried out on more than one set of data if it is to be relevant to practical tasks like teaching.

Describing language, or parts of language is part of the processes of developing linguistic theory itself.The linguist must test his predictions about the nature of language by applying it to a wide range of data drawn from different sources. There is feedback to theory in the activity of making linguistic descriptions. There are linguists who make a distinction between the making of descriptions for purposes other than furthering our knowledge of language, such as theoretical aims, and the making of descriptions for use in some practical task :

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“The use of linguistic theory to describe language is not itself counted as an application of linguistics. If a language, or a text, is described with the sole aim of finding out more about language, or that particular language, this is a use of linguistic theory, but it is not an application of linguistics. Applied linguistics starts when a description has been made, or an existing description used, for a further purpose which lies outside the linguistic sciences.(Halliday, M.A.K., Strevens, P.D., and McIntosh, A.,1964, The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching, Longman, p. 138).

The opinion here is different for two reasons. Linguists do not make “complete” descriptions of a language in order to further linguistic science. Then, there is no difference in kind between descriptions made for “applied” and “theoretical” purposes. The differences are ones of form. How you say something depends on whom you are talking to, not affecting what you say.A theoretical description takes the form it does because the hearer is a theoretical linguist. Other descriptions take the form they do because the hearers are teachers, learners or members of the “general public”.

The application of linguistics to language teaching was not a direct one. There are a number of stages or steps in the application of linguistics to the practical activity itself. These stages, or steps, are represented by sets of different techniques of application, the first being the linguistic description.These stages are related logically so that the results or “output” of one stage are the data or “input” to the next. The second stage of application is concerned with operations on the various descriptions of languages produced by the first-stage application. Each stage has the function of answering some questions or solving some problems relevant to the planning of a language-teaching programme.

The second stage of application is concerned with specifying the content of the syllabus. It is not necessary to teach the “whole” of a language, even if there is a description of it.Learners are designed for particular functions. Out of whatever description of a language that the primary application of linguistics may yield, a selection must be made. Any process of selection implies making comparisons according to some set of criteria. The criteria for selecting material for language teaching are various : utility to the learner, meaning selecting what he or she needs to know. This can be interpreted in various ways : those codes and varieties of the language which will be useful to him or her, those speech functions which he or she will need to command, those parts of a language which has not yet been learned. The criterion of difference can also be mentioned. In a way all parts of the second language are different from the mother tongue. Some parts will be more different from others. The differences represent learning tasks and are a basis for constructing a syllabus. If the learner’s mother tongue has no tense system in its grammar, the learning of such system presents a learning task. Where the learner’s mother tongue has such a system the size of the learning problem will depend on the nature and degree of difference there may be between the tense systems of the two languages. The next criterion for selection may be difficulty. This is not the same as difference. What it is different in the second language from the first language does not in all cases represent a difficulty. For example, at the phonological level, what is totally different from anything encountered in the mother tongue that its recognition presents no real problems, does not seem to be so difficult to learn as something which is liable to confusion with some similar feature in the mother tongue. Difficulty implies some features of a language which, while desirable to include in a syllabus, are so difficult for a particular group of learners that is impossible to attempt to teach them. To establish what is really difficult to learn is a problem of empirical research and cannot be predicted on the basis of structural differences between the mother tongue and target language .

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The techniques involved in second stage application of linguistics are comparative. It is by comparing the descriptions of languages , dialects, varieties that we select what is to from the content of syllabuses.
The learner may be regarded as possessing a form of the target language as a language.It can be so regarded in exactly the same way that an infant learning his mother tongue can be counted to possess a language of his own at each successive stage of his learning career. A learner's so-called errors are systematic, and it is this regularity which shows that the learner is following a set of rules.These are not the rules of the target language but a "transitional" form of language similar in many respects to the target language, but also similar to his mother tongue, or any other language he may already command. The errors are part of the data on which a description of this transitional language of his is based. The process of comparison is a two-step operation. By the study of the learner's utterances we attempt to describe this transitional language or " interlanguage" as Selinker has called it, and then we compare this description with the description of the target language. The differences we find represent the "residual" learning tasks of the learner. The principles upon which each activity is based become more complex as we move down the scale. The problem of structuring the syllabus is not solvable by reference to any one linguistic approach. At this level many other variables are involved(sociolinguistic, structural linguistic). The structure of a syllabus is influenced by the psychological processes which take place in language learning. In sequencing material in any syllabus is that the learner should move from the known to the unknown, we should make use of what the learner already knows in order to facilitate his learning of what he does not yet know. This general pedagogic principle in language teaching is easy to assert but not easy to apply.It is difficult to establish what is meant by "known" in this context. In one sense the use of language is "known", since the learner possesses language for his or her communication needs. This knowledge "facilitates" the learning of a second language.
Structuring the syllabus is made on the basis of a gradual move from the more general to the more particular, a statement of a general rule to a statement of particular rules or exceptions.This would entail introducing verbs which formed tense or person forms by some very general rule before the irregular verbs. This type of organizing the teaching material would correspond to the "deductive " process. Alternatively, the material can be organized so that the direction is from the particular to the general. This form of structure is based on the assumption that the learning process is "inductive", or "rule discovering".
The inductive or deductive approach represent what are conceived to be extremes of "organizational types", but say nothing about what is being organized, what are the items, elements, units which are being ordered. The matter can be approached in different ways. We can consider language learning as the acquisition of the ability to perform different types of speech act. So, we would classify what had to be ordered as referential, directive, or other classes of acts. Students should learn to make certain sorts of statements before they learned to ask questions. Such a criterion would limit the range of communicative functions a learner could employ at any particular stage of his or her learning.
Syllabuses should not be put in front of learners. They form a guide which may be more or less detailed for those who prepare the teaching materials which are put into the hands of students and teachers. Few teachers prepare syllabuses, but a minority prepare their own material for teaching. Their materials are usually additional to, establishments of, the usual class texts, only those parts of the texts which they have found by experience with their own students, deal inadequately with some particular point.

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The process of turning the items selected for a syllabus into teaching materials for use by the classroom teachers and learners is a separate process from the structuring of these items into a syllabus. The way an item is presented, what is said about it, and how it is practiced it will be dependent upon what has gone before.
Teaching materials can be classified in a number of ways(visual and auditory, moving, still, written). This is often done when the focus is on the classroom teaching methods. The term used for all materials is" pedagogic grammars". Its meaning was restricted to "the presentation of information about language for teaching purposes". So, teaching methods which proscribe the making of descriptive statements about the target language to the learner would not place pedagogic grammars in the hands of the learner himself, but confine their use to the teacher.
The problem which the making of pedagogic grammars or other teaching materials deals with is that of presenting the item to be learned in such a form that it will be more readily learned. The form of teaching materials shows the theoretical orientation of the person who prepares them, what he or she believes to be the language-learning processes.

The application of linguistics to language teaching is an indirect one. It is not a single-stage operation. Because of this, many teachers, when first introduced to linguistics, see no relevance in it for their work and, why many linguists unacquainted with language teaching in practice disclaim any practical usefulness for their work. The fact is that only those familiar with both linguistics and language teaching are in a position to discern the relation between the two. When someone is engaged in the task of preparing teaching materials he or she does not certainly start at the top and work downwards ; rather he or she switches or shifts, without being aware of it, up and down the scale.When faced with the problem of how to present some linguistic items on the his syllabus he will find himself going back to the linguistic description to see if there is something he has overlooked, or he will check it again a similar feature of the learner's mother tongue to see how he can best exploit what is familiar about it to the learner. This theoretical approach is highly developed.

An outstanding field is that of Phonetics. It is the discipline which studies the sounds of speech. Sounds can be studied from the point of view of the way in which they are initiated or modified by the organs of the vocal tract, or the way such movements disturb the air molecules between the speaker's mouth and the hearer's ear and are interpreted by the brain. The study of phonology cannot begin until adequate framework for the description of sounds has been set up. It is motivated by the fact that phonology takes sounds as its raw material and analyses the patterns into which they fall when used by speakers of particular languages. It has been recognized from the very beginnings of the linguistic thinking , that some aspects of pronunciation cannot be reduced to order in the segmental way. So, stress, the property that distinguishes the English words, needs to be thought of as a property of syllables. They are made up, according to most theories, of classes of phonemes that fit neatly inside them. Very surprisingly, to give a watertight definition of the syllable is difficult (Bell, Alan and Joan Hooper, eds., 1978, Syllables and Segments, Amsterdam :North-Holland).
Rhythm is the recurrence patterns of syllables or the stresses which characterize them; because intonation patterns make use of stress, lexical tone and pitch patterns special to whole utterances, intonation is also independent of individual segments. It is possible to distinguish segmental phonology from suprasegmental phonology. Concerning the traditional distinction, the non-prosodic aspects to pronunciation are best represented as sequences of phones.

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If any common feature exists among the approaches to phonology since around 1976, it lies in the decreasing importance dedicated to the segment as the fundamental unit of analysis and the reinterpretation of numerous phenomena as prosodic (Andersen, Henning, Diphthongization, in Language, 48, 11-50).

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