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## SOCIALIZATION AS A FACTOR IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Language is a peculiar embarrassment to the public school teacher, because outside school, children seem to learn language without any difficulty, whereas in school with the aid of teachers their progress in languages is halting and unsatisfactory. It is common experience that when translated to a town where their native language is not spoken children will become reasonably proficient in the new language in the space of six months. It is equally common experience that after six years of schooling in a second language, whatever the teaching method, most children emerge with a very poor command of the language. (Macnamara, 1973, p. 57.)

So begins Macnamara in his discussion of similarities and differences between children and adult language acquisition strategies.

While this indictment of our strategies for teaching language to children may appear a bit severe, the facts seem to bear out his conclusion. A decade and a half of FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) programs in the 1960's and 1970's supported by millions of federal and state dollars resulted in little measurable change in students' foreign language proficiency at the end of high school. Likewise, public schools with ESL programs have had difficulty demonstrating that they produce more proficient English speakers than those schools with no ESL programs. Nor have such programs been shown to reduce the amount of time necessary for students to become proficient in ESL.

In a recent study by Hale and Budur (1973) of ESL instruction in the Honolulu School District, student performance in English in schools with up to three hours a day of ESL instruction was compared with that of schools with no ESL instruction. Gain scores as determined by outcomes on beginning- and end-of-year tests indicated no significant differences.

Such findings are calculated to shake the very foundations of our profession. Can we solve the problems of language teaching and/or acquisition by simply tinkering with new techniques or innovative methodologies? Or must we look at language acquisition in its larger social context?

I am convinced that the major problem with language teaching in the public schools is that language is seen first and foremost as a subject to be studied and taught rather than as a medium through which to communicate, to establish a social identity and to organize one's own perceptions of the world.

Historically, this focus on language as a subject has come about as a result of centuries of studying and teaching classical languages.

During this century, the focus has been intensified by the formalization of linguistic theory in the form of American Structuralism and later as transformational linguistic theory. In the former, the basic unit of language was the phoneme, in the latter it is the sentence. But both see language essentially as a composite of its phonology, syntax and lexicon. American Structuralism paid some lip service to the analysis of larger units of discourse, but both ignored the most fundamental fact of language, and that is that it is a system for communicating.

Thus, although there is an element of concern for developing communicative skills in language classes, the overriding concern is with teaching the structures of the language. Course syllabuses reflect this emphasis; language tests reflect it; current teaching practices reflect it.

By contrast, if we examine how children go about learning language when left to their own devices in a natural context, we see that concern for structural accuracy is a rather late development. Halliday ([1975]) has shown that children develop many of the communicative functions and discourse strategies of language long before even the rudiments of grammar are firmly established. Numerous studies have shown that children generally ignore parental correction of malformed utterances, whether the errors be in pronunciation or syntax. And even after most of the basic patterns of the language are learned, say by the age of four or five, children are still incapable of making consistent judgements regarding the wellformedness of sentences. Gleitman et. al. (1973), for example, found that children between the ages of five and eight had difficulty treating sentences as linguistic objects separate from their meanings. In a task in which children were asked to judge whether a number of sentences were "ok" or "silly," a five-year-old judged "I am eating dinner" to be unacceptable because he didn't like to eat dinner.

Hakes (1980) presents convincing arguments for linking the development of metalinguistic abilities in children with the emergence of concrete operational thinking. He notes that while a causal link is difficult to establish, many of the same kind of mental abilities seem to be required in making judgements of wellformedness, synonymy and ambiguity of sentences as are required in performing Piagetian conservation tasks. His study of children between the ages of four and eight indicates that even at eight years of age, children are able to make adult-like judgements only in about 90% of cases involving illformed sentences. So, even if children were interested in focusing on the grammar of the language, this research suggests that in the early years of elementary school at least, they lack the ability to judge the acceptability of utterances.

What is more, studies of the actual process of grammatical development in children learning second languages indicate that even when children do begin to reach the age where metalinguistic abilities are more fully developed, they still go through an evolutionary process in learning the grammar. Rather than learn sentence patterns in a linear fashion as might be predicted by current teaching practices, children seem to learn grammatical patterns by successive approximation of the adult forms. So even though a child may memorize a sentence such as "John doesn't like

peanut butter" early in the language development process, he or she will invariably revert back to a more primitive sentence construction such as "John no like peanut butter" as he or she begins to acquire the grammar of negation. Thus it is questionable whether productive rules can be taught directly to children.

But even if sentence patterns were teachable, the question remains as to whether children are interested in learning them or not. Research by Wong-Fillmore (1976) suggests that children acquiring a second language are not particularly concerned about grammatical accuracy, at least not during the initial stages of language acquisition.

Wong-Fillmore (1976) traced the language development of five Spanish-speaking first graders in an English-speaking language environment for a period of nine months and found that they progressed through three operational stages in the evolution of their language learning strategies. During the first stage of development the children were primarily concerned with establishing social relationships (p. 659). This was done through the learning of formulaic expressions which served more of an interactional function than a communicative one. As a matter of fact, Wong-Fillmore observed that the children seemed temporarily to suspend their communicative needs or desires, content to wait until they knew more.

During this period, the children became very adept at faking comprehension. By careful observation of the context in which utterances were made they were able to appear as though they understood the utterances by imitating the behavior of others involved in the interaction.

The period was also characterized by extensive use of gestures and other non-verbal means of communicating. While the use of gestures continued throughout their language learning experiences, it was greatly reduced during later periods.

The second stage was one in which the central concern was on communication, on getting the point across. During this stage the children began to combine the formulaic utterances learned during the first period. Language mixing increased. Children often substituted words from their first language in places where they had not yet learned the words in English.

Only during the third stage did the children begin focusing to any large degree on grammatical correctness and then the initial effort seemed to be directed largely at getting control over the more global features of the language such as word order. During the nine-month period only one of the five children made significant progress into this stage and that child was the most socially adept, not the most intelligent.

The exact reasons why children eventually begin focusing on form is not entirely clear. Behavioral psychologists proposed that it was due to reinforcement of correct patterns. Brown (1974) and a number of other authors have found that there is no evidence that caretaker approval or disapproval is contingent on syntactic correctness. As a matter of

fact, parents tend to correct primarily for factual correctness or truth value.

Lamendella (1977) has suggested that children gradually make their speech more nativelike because they are thus able to communicate more efficiently. Presumably the more features of their language which learners share with their speech community the more redundancy there is and the more efficient the communication process becomes. While this explanation has a certain amount of appeal there are some notable disconfirming cases. Many learners' interlanguage fossilizes at a stage well prior to the realization of native speech. These speakers seem content to achieve a certain level of communicative ability, and feel little motivation to continue to strive toward perfecting their grammatical patterns. Such is apparently the case in a number of bilingual immersion programs.

In the Culver City immersion program in California, for example, children who have been taught totally in Spanish for three years and then partially in Spanish for an additional three years typically have not achieved native proficiency by the end of the sixth grade. True it is that they perform many times better than children in foreign language programs, but they still fail to achieve the nativelike proficiency characteristic of children who must communicate with their peers in the second language.

A more plausible explanation for the tendency of young people to become native speakers of their first language as well as of a second, is that language plays an important role in the child's development of a social identity.

Of all the characteristics of a person's culture which serve to identify him or her as a member of a particular group, language is one of the most obvious and most powerful. Thus language not only serves as a means of communication but also of integrating oneself into a linguistic community.

To appreciate the power of this motivating force, one but has to read the diary accounts of parents who have attempted to rear their children bilingually. A classical account of one such case study is that of Leopold (1954) who spoke to his daughter Hildegard only in German from birth. Hildegard's mother spoke to her only in English. During the first two years of her life, Hildegard began learning both German and English in approximately equal amounts. At about two-and-a-half Hildegard began interacting with English-speaking peers, and her German began to stagnate--this in spite of Leopold's continued effort to speak to her exclusively in German. By the age of three-and-a-half she had almost completely stopped speaking German. She began responding to her father in English. Near the end of her fifth year her family moved to Germany for six months.

Upon arriving in Germany, her first reaction was one of rejecting German and retreating to English. After a few weeks, however, she resigned herself to the fact that German was the language of the people and she began learning it. Within a couple of months she began speaking German

to her parents--even to her mother who had never spoken in German to her. By the end of the six-month period in the country, she had almost stopped speaking English altogether.

When the family returned to the United States, Hildegard at first reacted very negatively to English. Within a month, however, she was already speaking English fluently again and had begun to stop speaking German. It wasn't until later that she became fully bilingual.

While this phenomenon of peer influence on children's choice of language has not been systematically studied, numerous diary studies attest to its existence.

The fact that full admission to a speech community requires that a child become a linguistically indistinguishable member of the group seems to exert a great deal of influence on a child's motivation to speak the language natively.

I recall an incident in Los Angeles in which a noted black linguist brought a tape recording of some children from the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles and played it for our associate dean who was a Chicano. He asked the associate dean to guess where the children were from. The associate dean promptly replied that they appeared to be from Watts. The linguist said, "No, they are from Mexico." The children and their parents had settled in a black neighborhood of Los Angeles and the children had acquired the dialect of their peers, not that of their anglo ESL teachers.

Samuels and Olsen have shown that adults do much better than children on language learning tasks involving drills of the sort commonly used in teaching sentence patterns and pronunciation. No amount of such drills will enable a child to use language appropriately in a functional social context.

It is the normal, not the exceptional, case for children to learn language natively when exposed to it under the proper conditions. If we wish to enable children to be able to utilize the innate language acquisition ability with which every normal member of our species is endowed, we must begin to take into account the social context in which learning takes place.

In practical terms, this means the following: For ESL programs in the elementary school it means that we should begin to recognize that many aspects of the language will be acquired naturally and much more efficiently by interacting with peers than they could ever be taught by a method known today. Candidates for such aspects of the language are grammatical patterns and pronunciation. We should identify more clearly those aspects of the language which may not be acquired very efficiently through unstructured peer interaction and we should focus our teaching efforts on these.

This would mean that instead of starting our instruction with sentence patterns like, "This is a book," which we require the students to master, we might start out with an extended listening period in which we

work on areas of development in English which are essential to the child's proper functioning in the regular curriculum. This might take the form of telling stories, giving instructions, making concrete simplified presentations on areas of the curriculum which the child will encounter in a more complex form when it is presented to the native English speakers.

For the foreign language classroom, what I am suggesting is that a lot more attention be paid to the social context in which the learning is taking place. This would certainly mean that we would de-emphasize the presentation of sentence patterns per se and take a more functional approach. It would also require that language teaching be seen as a socializing experience rather than an academic one.

In summary I am proposing that we treat language as what it is--a system of communication, a means of establishing social identity and a means of formalizing our perceptions and views of the world.

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