# 4. SPOKEN ENGLISH IN EAP CONTEXTS

## Saturday 3rd December 1994

## The Centre for Applied Language Studies, The University of Reading

## Organiser: Clare Furneaux

Spoken English and oracy are often, it would appear, neglected in the context of English for Academic Purposes and so it was felt that this would be a useful theme for a PIMs meeting. This is especially so because oral skills and, indeed, assessment of these is a topic of much current interest in mainstream academic circles. The aim of this meeting was to consider as many different aspects of this area as possible, drawing on the research and practice of a number of individuals from diverse work situations.

The programme for the day was a balance of plenary presentations and workshop sessions but also including the opportunity for small group discussion of key issues identified during the day culminating in a final plenary feedback session.

Programme:

Plenary Presentations:

1. Martin Cortazzi (Leicester University) - Narrative in oral fluency.
2. Alan Tonkyn (Reading University) - A background to task-based learning.
3. Simon Williams (University of Reading): Story-telling in an English language conversation scheme
4. Pauline Foster (Thames Valley University) - The influence of planning on performance in task-based learning.

Workshops:

a. Margaret Khidhayir & Doreen Du Boulay (Sussex University) - Assessing student presentations on pre-sessional courses.
b. Clare Furneaux (Reading University) - Choices in materials design.
c. Pauline Foster (Thames Valley University) - Task-based learning.

**Martin Cortazzi (University of Leicester):** *Narrative in Oral Fluency*

This paper outlines a role for narrative in the development of oral fluency in EAP. Narratives are stories of personal experience; these are often dismissed as anecdotal evidence. This is unfortunate, because narrative has a useful role in professional discourse, as is recognised in an increasing range of disciplines.

For EAP, narratives occur in a variety of academic contexts, in which they have a number of roles and functions. Theoretical models of narrative analysis emphasise the reporting functions of stories, and, more interestingly, their interactive and social-psychological functions, including evaluation of reported events.

Students' narratives are therefore powerful devices to promote discussion of language and academic issues, including the development of fluency in EAP.

Students can be introduced to basic models of analysis to develop reading and note-taking skills which might lead to oral retellings of subject specific narratives. Examples are given in the fields of law and economics. Further, narratives can be an important feature of task-based approaches, illustrated by an

example in a social-medical context. Newspaper stories are a useful source of narrative material - so are students (and teachers).

Narratives intertwine with other genres in academic and social talk. If we can develop their use in EAP we may add a dimension of human interest to work which is aimed at developing fluency and confidence in oral language.

*References:*

CORTAZZI M. (1993) *Narrative Analysis* London, The Falmer Press

CORTAZZI M. (1994) Narrative Analysis (state of the art article) *Language teaching*, 27, 3, pp 157-170

CORTAZZI M. & JIN L. (1994) Narrative Analysis: applying linguistics to cultural models of learning. In D. Graddol and J. Swann (eds) *Evaluating Language* pp 75-9O, Clevedon: Multlingual Matters

LABOV W (1972) The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In W. Labov *Language in the Inner City* pp 352-396, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania

LONGACRE RE (1989) Two Hypotheses regarding Text-Generation and Analysis, *Discourse Processes,* 12, pp 413-460

**Simon Williams (University of Reading): *Story-telling in an English language conversation scheme***

Story-telling gives speakers the opportunity for an extended turn at talk, as noted by conversation analysts (cf. Levinson, 1983: 323-324). The activity is also seen as beneficial to non-native speaker language learners (NNSs) for a number of reasons, for example, story telling in EAP may be a preparation for reporting empirical investigations and critiquing others' work in seminar presentations. In addition, certain of the discourse features, for example, types of surface cohesion, may be transferable to written genres. Materials for spoken language teaching activities commonly include longer-turn story-telling as a practice activity (for example, Klippel, 1984 and Brown et al, 1984) and, although they acknowledge that it is not a facility automatically acquired by all native speakers (NSs), Brown and Yule (1983: 19) consider the ability to construct longer turns through stories to be an important skill for language learners to acquire.

Alternative methods of story-telling, in which turns tend to be shorter, are implied in the work of Stubbs (1983: 37-39) and McCarthy (199 1: 139- 140). In their data, the short turns appear to be the result of discourse collaboration (a problematic concept in itself) or more specifically "joint production" (Stubbs, 1983:27; and cf work in child language acquisition such as Snow, 1977 and Wells, 1986). However, in Stubbs and McCarthy's examples, the joint story tellers are both NSs who experience the story events.

In NS/ NNS story-telling, shorter turns may occur for other reasons than substantive contributions, for example, through speakers paying attention to linguistic forms. In such circumstances, it may be difficult to draw a line between short-turns resulting from the reconstruction of shared events and those resulting from speakers' shared world knowledge.

Judgements on the nature and duration of turn length have implications for our notions of fluency, both in NSs and NNSs. Workshop participants were given the opportunity to examine a small corpus of native speaker and language learner stories. The corpus has been transcribed from dyadic meetings in a university English language conversation scheme and selected according to criteria associated with the well-formed story (Prince, 1973; Labov, 1972). Participants were asked to compare learners' production of turns in story-telling in early and late meetings and then attempted to establish whether progression occurred in turn length from short turns focussing on linguistic forms to stories with longer

turns. In comparing examples of jointly constructed stories with those constructed through longer turns, participants were asked to consider how far collaboration appeared to be a result of speakers' shared world knowledge, how far the result of shared experience of events and how far the result of negotiation of linguistic forms? Finally the implications for story-telling as a language learning activity in EAP were considered.

*References*

BROWN G. and YULE G. (1983) *Teaching the Spoken Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

BROWN G, et al (1984) *Teaching Talk: Strategies for Production and Assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

KLIPPEL F. (1984) *Keep Talking*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

LABOV W. (1972) *Language in the Inner City*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

LEVINSON S (1983) *Pragmatics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

McCARTHY M (1991) *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

PRINCE G. J. (1973) *Grammar of Stories*, Paris: Mouton

SNOW C.E. (1977) 'The development of conversation between mothers and babies' *Journal of Child Language*, 4 (1), pp 1-22

STUBBS M. (1983) *Discourse Analysis*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

WELLS G. (1986) *The Meaning Makers*, London: Hodder and Stoughton

**Alan Tonkyn (University of Reading): *Task-based Learning: a Method in Search of a Theory*?**

The presentation addressed the key issues of what it is that learners learn through task-based learning and why they learn this. The approach questioned the validity of many claims regarding task-based learning and critically assessed the work of a number of applied linguists in this field.

Following a definition of the term 'task' as used in language learning, the case for tasks - learning how to use language rather than learning about it, skill theory, communicative competence, comprehensible input - was examined, drawing on the work of such key figures as Johnson (1994), Widdowson (1976), Prabhu (1987) and Krashen (1985).

The work of Klein (1986) and Spolsky (1989) in establishing the essentials of Second Language Acquisition then led to the case being put for caution in the use of task-based learning. Justification for this cautionary view being drawn from, among others, McLaughlin's (1987) work on information-processing and skill theory: the value of controlled and conscious processing and of automatisation; Skehan's (1994) paper on second language acquisition strategies, interlanguage development and task-based learning; and Krahnke and Christison's (1993) study of recent language research including that into the 'interaction-acquisition' link. Data in the form of transcripts and recordings of student performance during task-based activities provided evidence for the claims being made.

In conclusion, suggested constraints and conditions that should be acknowledged and taken account of in the use of task-based learning techniques were proposed. These included recognition of the need to encourage precision and accuracy through the recording and monitoring of student performance and the use of preparation and rehearsal to expand the repertoire as well as assist defossilising (Johnson

1992). Finally it was proposed that tasks could be used in the production phase of learning allowing the routinising of language presented more formally at an earlier stage.

*References*

JOHNSON H (1992) 'Defossilising' *ELTJ*, 46, 2

JOHNSON H (1994) 'Teaching declarative and procedural knowledge'. In Bygate,M., Tonkyn,A., & Williams,E. (Eds.) *Grammar and the Language Teacher*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall

KLEIN W (1986) *Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

KRAHNKE K & CHRISTISON M (1983) 'Recent language research and some language teaching principles.' *TESOL Q,* 17, 4

KRASHEN S (1985) *The Input Hypothesis*. Harlow, Longman

McLAUGHLIN B (1987) *Theories of Second Language Learning*, London, Edward Arnold

PRABHU N S (1987) *Second Language Pedagogy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

SKEHAN P (1994) 'Second language acquisition strategies, interlanguage development and task-based learning'. In Bygate M, Tonkyn A & Williams E (eds) *Grammar and the Language Teacher*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall

SPOLSKY B (1989) *Conditions for Second Language Learning*. Oxford, Oxford University Press

WIDDOWSON H (1976) *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford, Oxford University Press

**Pauline Foster (Thames Valley University): *The Influence of Planning on Performance in Task-based learning***

Task-based learning has become an important part of Communicative Language Teaching, and strong claims have been made on its behalf, even to the extent that entire syllabuses should be constructed of tasks rather than, for example, grammatical, functional or situational items. So far very little research has been done to test out these claims, or the claims of critics of task-based instruction who argue that classroom group- and pairwork encourage learners to use relatively simply-constructed language, and (worse) can predispose them to fossilise at an early interlanguage stage because tasks can be successfully completed in 'classroom pidgin'.

The presentation reported a study designed to address some of these concerns. The study focussed particularly on whether the way the task was implemented (i.e. with or without planning time) would affect the language of the participants. Young adult learners of English in a local college were divided into two groups: those with planning time and those without. Each of the two groups was then required, during their normal scheduled classes, to complete three tasks over a three-week period. The three tasks chosen ( problem-solving, narrative and personal information exchange) were reasoned to make differing cognitive demands on the learners and enabled a study to be made of how task type influences performance.

The results of the study were reported, looking at measures of syntactic complexity and lexical variety. It was argued that not to provide learners with the opportunity to plan what they were going to say increases the likelihood that they will rely on unchallenging or formulaic language that does not promote reanalysis or restructuring of interlanguage forms. The pedagogic implications of these findings were discussed.

The presentation was linked to a workshop in which participants had the opportunity to analyse for themselves some of the recordings made of the study groups to compare the performance of those who had had planning time and those who had not.

**Doreen du Bulay and Margaret Khidhayir (University of Sussex):** *Towards a framework for assessing oral skills.*

The workshop considered the background, rationale and problems of the formal assessment of student oral presentations as contributing to the overall assessment of English language proficiency for study at Sussex University.

An overview of current practice was given and the assessment criteria used were outlined and discussed. A number of key issues were then addressed: what does or should constitute the criteria for oral assessment in an academic context? How far is the presentation a reasonable measure of student performance in this context and how valid and reliable are the assessment criteria adopted? The workshop presented a rationale for the adoption of the presentation as a formally assessed task and went on to consider some of the problems of assessing presentation performance.

These problems give rise to such questions as: are the subset of criteria used of equal importance or should more weighting be given, for example, to grammatical accuracy and pronunciation; should the response to the 'unprepared' questions from the floor have greater weighting than the prepared monologue, especially when this is read? Participants were invited to contribute to the debate through the consideration and assessment of videoed recordings of presentations made by students on pre-sessional courses at Sussex University.