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The Push Toward Communication

Theodore V. Higgs

San Diego State University

Ray Clifford

The Defense Language Institute

Introduction

It is significant that the title of this chapter is "The Push *Toward* Communication" and not "The Push *To* Communication," for the foreign-language profession as a whole has been remarkably unsuccessful at achieving the communicative goals that we and our student clients have established. Even so, our conspicuous lack of success is not for want of trying. In our earnestness to do all that we can to teach languages and to help others learn them, we have adopted many of the strategies and methodologies that have been proposed and defended over the years. The most recent buzz word to hypnotize the profession—and the one that will occupy our attention throughout this chapter—is *communicative competence*. We begin by commenting briefly on how this term seems to be used in the literature and on what assumptions it seems to be based. We then consider what some of the implications of these ideas may be for foreign-language instructors.

Communicative competence: A first look

One early use of the term *communicative competence* is in Dell Hymes's

Theodore V. Higgs is the 1981 editor of *The ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series*. His bio can be found with the introductory chapter to this volume.

Ray Clifford (Ph.D., University of Minnesota), formerly of the Central Intelligence Agency Language School, has recently been named Academic Dean of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA. He supervises instruction, curriculum, testing, and program evaluation. He is a member of AATG, ACTFL, and TESOL.

1972 work (8); Hymes argues that a complete characterization of a native speaker's use of his language must go beyond Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence (4) to include communicative competence as well. Hymes defines the latter term as consisting of the native speaker's intuitive knowledge of the linguistic rules of his language and also of his knowledge of the social rules—in the form of conventions, registers, and protocols—that define the total environment in which communication is to take place. Such knowledge of nonlinguistic rules includes, but surely is not limited to, matters of permissible physical contact between speakers; space requirements, which are typically different in different cultures; kinesics, that is, hand gestures, facial responses, and so on; and the proper management of verbal or nonverbal cues to suggest either that the listener is being attentive or is about to try to wrest control of the floor from his interlocutor. In brief, the speaker must not only know the linguistic rules of the language, but also how, when and where to use them. Surely none of us would argue with the desirability of our students' possessing such knowledge.

At this point it is necessary to emphasize that Hymes—a sociolinguist and ethnologist of language—discusses the communicative competence possessed by native speakers as a close analogue to the linguistic competence posited by Chomsky. The assumption is that *both* systems are always in full operation during every communication event, not that one system alternates with, is subordinate to, or otherwise supplants the other.

In the context of foreign-language education, the name most closely associated with communicative competence is that of Sandra Savignon (13). She defines communicative competence as "the ability to function in a *truly* communicative setting, that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors." By a "*truly* communicative setting" Savignon means one in which "real" or "authentic" communication takes place, not one in which the teacher is doing a question/answer drill based on a story, a dialogue in the book, or on some other *ad hoc* data base from which the teacher already knows the answer, thereby rendering the exchange of information entirely unrealistic. What she means when she says that "linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input," however, is not immediately clear, since linguistic competence can scarcely adapt itself to anything. But in the section "Experimental Strategies" we read that "... students were urged to use every means at their disposal to understand and to make themselves understood. . . . [The] experimenter and the other fluent speakers ... reacted to what was said, not to how it was said." From these and other sources in her study we conclude that what Savignon must mean in saying that "linguistic competence must adapt itself" is that the student should be ready to abandon the linguistic system *per se* of the target language and instead seek out other communication strategies for making himself understood. Schulz and Bartz (14) reiterate this point

when they explain that "... meaning (what is being said) becomes the focal point; form becomes secondary."

What other sorts of strategies, then, might be available to the student? Galloway's fascinating study of communicative competence (7) reports that a group of "non-teaching Spanish speakers living in Spain, whose command of English ranged from 'none' to 'poor' ... had a relatively easy time understanding a student who practically resorted to pidginization, accompanied by an abundance of gestures, to communicate." This group of raters—which represents perhaps the most crucial potential audience for our students—in fact gave this pidginizing student a slightly higher score for successful communication as defined in the study than did any of the other three groups of raters.

A broader perspective

There are several conspicuous lacunae in the foregoing discussions of communicative competence. For example, no detailed analysis is typically made of the *type* of linguistic functions (18) which the communicators are attempting to use; nor is there analysis of their *complexity* or of the *contexts* in which they presumably are framed. All of these areas are of extreme importance in assessing language competence. Instead, the apparent assumption is that the same communication skills that allow one to obtain food in a restaurant would also serve to negotiate a business contract or an international treaty. Furthermore, little consideration is given to the accuracy of the message conveyed in terms of the level of involvement and active cooperation of the hypothetical listener. Clearly, it is easier to order a meal than it is to convince a businessman through logical argumentation that his financial interests are best served by the firm or government one is representing.

Some have recognized this problem of accuracy but have addressed it in only the most general terms. John L. D. Clark (5) refers to ". . . the ability to get a message across ... with specified ease and effect ..." although he specifies neither. In the Galloway study cited earlier, non-English-speaking raters give higher points to students who seemed to be struggling and judged more harshly those who appeared to be speaking with relative ease, at least while these students were attempting basic communication tasks. Galloway concludes that "... visible effort seems to be a valid criterion used by native speakers of Spanish in reacting to non-native speakers of the language—at least at this [second semester] stage of a learner's language development." From the other side of the effort issue, Terrell (15) says that students should be able to convey a message so that "... a native speaker interprets the response with little or no effort." This position shifts the burden of expenditure of effort from the speaker to the listener. However, "ease of interpretation" is a construct dependent on at least task, context, speaker identity,

listener identity and the complex web of social and psychological relationships that may exist between the latter two. While our European colleagues have been broadening the scope of their communication models (Munby, 11; Carroll, 2) to include variables such as purposive domain, task, setting, medium, mode, channel, tone, manner, delicacy, complexity, range of forms, and tolerance of linguistic and stylistic failure, most of us in the United States have ignored all these features of communication.

The question of how well one must perform in order to communicate successfully continues to be a matter of serious debate, but it appears that no one has asked why there should be such vigorous differences of opinion in this area. One reason may be that the discussants are working with restricted ranges of language proficiency and often base their opinions on totally different communicative tasks. The question that needs to be asked is not merely "Was the student able to communicate?" but "*What* was he able to communicate, and *how well*?" The *what* requires consideration of both the topic or context of the communication and of the language function that must be performed in that context. The *how well* entails judgments of linguistic accuracy and cultural authenticity. In restating the crucial evaluating questions in this way, we identify the three coexisting and interrelated hierarchies of judgmental criteria relating to the general categories of language function, content, and accuracy, all of which must be under the control of a competent communicator.

It is possible that in the academic setting the unconstrained range of possible language functions and content so typical of communication events in the outside world has not been seen as a serious issue. Perhaps this is because the limited curriculum and communicative environments traditionally associated with college-level foreign-language classes unconsciously account for and implicitly control virtually every aspect of the communication paradigm, restricting it to the simplest of communicative tasks. Since most learning is directed toward survival-level activities, the functions taught and the content areas addressed have remained fairly constant across training situations. However, the fact that function, content, and accuracy are interrelated mandates that no judgment of general language proficiency or "communicative competence" be made without considering all three.

A student cannot merely be declared competent in communication. The functions that he is competent to express must be specified. The degree of proficiency required to survive as a tourist or a student is not the same as that required to negotiate treaties. One finds that content areas and language functions needed for discussing abstract ideas differ from those used in telling about one's immediate needs or one's latest European vacation. Thus, it may be meaningful to discuss communicative competence as one single judgment only to the extent that both function and content are held constant. But when we do this, we are obligated to reveal to our students the limitations of such judgments, lest we deceive both them and ourselves. We

must tell them not that they are competent to speak German but that they are competent to meet routine physical and social obligations in an environment where German is spoken. The failure of the profession at large to come to grips with this reality (that is, with the tendency to think of communicative competence in terms of the simplest communication tasks in the context of sharing the communicative burden with an apparently intelligent, willing, and forgiving interlocutor) has resulted in the widespread impression that communicative competence is a term for communication *in spite of* language, rather than communication *through* language. As a result, the role of grammatical precision has been downplayed, particularly by some who carry the banner of communicative competence.

But what happens when the communication function becomes more complex, when a student's goal is to do more than merely survive in a generally friendly environment? Broadening the range of language proficiency expected from our students absolutely changes the rules of the game. Paralinguistic communication strategies become inefficient and counterproductive, and speakers whose communication repertoires are thus limited are rendered incapable of efficient or even marginally successful communication. This has been identified as a significant problem in situations in which the required range of linguistic functions exceeds those addressed to date by the professional studies on communicative competence.

A survey done for the West German government (16) on the linguistic needs of foreign workers produced two statements. The first identified the high-frequency vocabulary items necessary to begin integrating oneself into German society. The second statement concluded that mastery of the high frequency structures alone was not sufficient to fully function within that society. In response to the motivating question behind the study, "How much German is it necessary for a foreigner to know in order to be integrated into the society?" the answer was essentially "All of it."

The apparent conflict between the two statements that emerged from the survey is easily resolved: While survival is possible with a minimum command of a language, integration is not. Survival and social integration bear little resemblance to each other. Although we as a profession have only recently begun to admit it to ourselves, to our students, and to the public at large, the capabilities of students who complete our language programs are extremely limited. A study conducted by John B. Carroll (3) in 1967 revealed that the average proficiency of language *majors* graduating from U.S. colleges and universities was about Level 2, as measured on the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) oral proficiency scale (see page 63). Weinstein (17) corroborated these findings when he reported that language majors applying for work with the State Department regularly tested at Level 2, unless they had had certain kinds of extended overseas experience. No evidence suggests that the situation has improved since then. The average proficiency level of job applicants (all of whom claim fluency in a foreign language) tested by

the CIA during the first half of 1981 was 1+. This is why the U.S. government maintains its own language training facilities to give employees the language skills they need to perform their jobs.

We are faced with the irony of promoting languages for careers while failing to prepare students for more than tourist-level activities. The University of Dallas Graduate Program in International Management (10) found that few entering students—including language majors—have the language skills needed to participate in the International Management Program, to say nothing of those skills needed to lead a fulfilling and successful life in a culturally and linguistically alien situation. The Dean of the Graduate School of Business of the University of Dallas told one of the authors that language majors typically fail the foreign-language entrance examination.

A proven strategy for evaluating communicative competence

One of the areas with which the authors have more than a passing acquaintance is the use of oral proficiency measurements of the foreign-language skills of U.S. government employees and prospective employees. Because of the actualities of dealing with individuals, corporations, and other governments around the globe, the U.S. government has developed the FSI language-proficiency rating scale, which accounts in a systematic fashion for the variables of language function, context, and accuracy of communication. To our knowledge, this is the only existing test of oral language production that consistently takes all these factors into account. The instrument provides proficiency ratings on an eleven-point scale from 0 to 5, including intervening "+" designations. To make even more apparent the *functional* component of this scale, the CIA Language School, in cooperation with the Foreign Service Institute, has now organized the well publicized standard—i.e., *global*—proficiency definitions into a functional trisection of speaking proficiency which contains the three hierarchies of language function, context, and accuracy (see Figure 1).

The left-hand column of this trisection shows a progression of functional language tasks that starts with Level 0—no ability to communicate—and moves upward. At Level 1, one has the minimal ability to create in the language: to ask and answer factual questions. At Level 2, that ability expands to the point where one can narrate a series of events in the present, past, or future. At Level 3, one moves on to more abstract topics and is able to state hypotheses and deal with unfamiliar topics. Level 4 adds the tasks of representing a point of view in negotiations, whether for a private firm or for the government, and the sociolinguistic and cultural skills of tailoring one's language—dare we say "adapting one's linguistic competence"—to fit one's audience (i.e., through using different language registers or manipulating discourse structure). Level 5, the top of the scale, requires performance

LEVEL	FUNCTIONS	CONTENT*	ACCURACY**
FSI Speaking Level	Task accomplished, attitudes expressed, time conveyed	Topics, subject areas, activities and jobs addressed	Acceptability, quality, and accuracy of message conveyed
5	Functions equivalent to an Educated Native Speaker (ENS).	All Subjects.	Performance equivalent to an ENS.
4	Able to tailor language to fit audience, counsel, persuade, negotiate, represent a point of view, and interpret for dignitaries.	All topics normally pertinent to professional needs.	Nearly equivalent to an ENS. Speech is extensive, precise, appropriate to every occasion with only occasional errors.
3	Can converse in formal and informal situations, resolve problem situations, deal with unfamiliar topics, provide explanations, describe in opinions, and hypothesize.	Practical, social, professional, and abstract topics, particular interests, and special fields of competence.	Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker (NS). Only sporadic errors in basic structures.
2	Able to fully participate in casual conversations, can express facts, give instructions, describe, report on, and provide narration about current, past, and future activities.	Concrete topics such as own background, family, and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Understandable to an NS not used to dealing with foreigners; sometimes miscommunicates.
1	Can create with the language: ask and answer questions, participate in short conversations.	Everyday survival topics and courtesy requirements.	Intelligible to an NS used to dealing with foreigners.
0	No functional ability.	None.	Unintelligible.

*May be job specific

** See also factor performance rating scales

Figure 1. Functional Trisection of Oral Proficiency Levels

on all tasks equivalent to that of an educated native speaker, with the emphasis on the word *educated*.

The center column of Figure 1 deals with content areas. Those outlined are particularly suited to government needs, but the items in this column are variable, depending on test setting. At Level 3, the government might ask about the merits and liabilities of increased military aid to El Salvador, while in an academic setting one might elicit positions with respect to faculty unionization. The task would be the same, and the content equivalent.

The third column judges effectiveness of communication. At the lowest levels the listener must contribute considerably in order that communication take place: a Level 1 speaker is expected to communicate successfully only with someone already accustomed to dealing with foreigners. At Level 2 any native speaker of the target language should be able to understand, while Level 3 requires that the speaker not miscommunicate. In Germany, for instance, he would not end up in a room having only a bathtub when he really had other needs. Nor would he say that an event had taken place when he meant only that it might have. The Level 4 speaker not only says what he means, but he does so with linguistic precision in terms of appropriate form and vocabulary. At Level 5, the speaker routinely uses the full range of inflection and nuance available to the native speaker.

The following hypothetical examples, based on the performance of State Department visa officers, will serve to demonstrate the various proficiency levels in performing the rather elementary task of passing on some factual information to a visa applicant:

Level Visa Officer's reply to applicant

- 5 Under U.S. statutes, your affiliation with the Communist Party renders you ineligible for a regular tourist visa. There exist, however, waiver procedures which may be invoked. These are the steps that you should initiate ...
- 4 According to U.S. lawss your affiliation wiz ze Communist Party makes you uneligibile for a regular tourist visa. You may, however, request a waiver. Zis iss what you must do...
- 3 Zee laaw zayz zat mambeears of zee Communistic Partee caanoht bee geeven a regoolair toorest veesaa. Owehvair, egzeptions are zohmtaymes dunn. You must do zees...
- 2 You cannot legulally get toolist visa. It is not light, because berong to Communistic Palty. But you can ask for a special permission. You to do this...
- 1 You commyunist. No gyet vyisa. Got tryy agyain. Take thysis. Fyill in, plyeez.

These examples have been purposely contrived to demonstrate to Americans having limited experience with foreign languages what they themselves might sound like to a foreigner when attempting to communicate in the foreign

language. The visa officer in each example was at least partially successful in communicating the fact that the applicant had to reapply using other procedures, but it should also be obvious that the total information communicated impressions about the speaker's intelligence and social status. As the officer's proficiency decreased, increasing demands were put upon the applicant to interpret the message. It bears repeating that under these circumstances the officer cannot depend on a sympathetic listener for moral and linguistic support.

Improving on the FSI global proficiency ratings

The global rating system summarizes a multitude of data. It is a data reduction system that yields a single global score having a built-in promise of performance of a given language function within a given context with a given degree of accuracy. In the global rating, however, no individual components of the overall performance are broken out. Note that the accuracy component is an essential element of the rating, and for some tasks it may be the determining factor in establishing minimum acceptable job performance. The global rating system implicitly assumes that the ratings fall on a continuum, and that language students can be expected to progress more or less systematically from the lower to the higher levels. While the government schools, with their long and intensive training courses (which may include five to six hours per day of instruction, plus labs and outside assignments, for a year or more) have been generally successful at raising students to proficiency level 3 or better, recent analyses of students who have not met performance standards have led to the discovery of a phenomenon referred to as "the terminal 2." This rating is associated with students who enter training with a Level 2 proficiency but peak out at Level 2+. They do not progress to Level 3, and thus never attain the linguistic skills needed to reach minimum job proficiency standards. A global rating of 2 or 2+ does not distinguish those who promise to improve from those who are terminal at that level. It is the existence of these cases of fossilized language behavior that are of supreme importance in discussing the profession's push toward communication. For this reason, we will discuss these cases both in terms of their identifying characteristics and of what seem to be the common factors in their backgrounds. In order to characterize the typical "terminal 2+" it is necessary to look beyond the global rating, which merely places them at the 2/ 2+ level, and study more analytically the nature of their language skills.

Profiling the terminal 2/2+

With an eye to identifying terminal 2s and otherwise analyzing the constituent components of students' language abilities, the CIA Language School has developed the Performance Profile reporting form (figure 2). This profile

Pronunciation P = _____	Fluency/Integrative FI = _____	Sociolinguistic/ Culture SC = _____	Grammar G = _____	Vocabulary V = _____	Tasks T = _____
FULLY ACCEPTED BY ENS. 5	FULLY ACCEPTABLE TO ENS ON ALL SUBJECTS. 5	USE OF REGISTER, CULTURAL REFERENCES, AND COLLOQUIALISMS EQUIVALENT TO AN ENS. 5	EQUIVALENT TO ENS. 5	EQUAL TO ENS IN BREADTH AND IDIOM ON ALL SUBJECTS. 5	ALL FACTORS INTEGRATED INTO PERFORMANCE EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF AN ENS. 5
RARELY MISPRONOUNCES. 4	HIGH DEGREE OF FLUENCY. EFFORTLESS, SMOOTH, NORMALLY WITHIN RANGE ACCEPTABLE TO NS. 4	RESPONDS APPROPRIATELY ON ALL LEVELS NORMALLY PERTINENT TO PROFESSIONAL NEEDS. TL CULTURE DOMINATES. 4	ONLY OCCASIONAL ERRORS. NO PATTERN OF DEFICIENCY. MAKES USE OF HIGH-LEVEL DISCOURSE STRUCTURES. 4	EXTENSIVE, PRECISE AND APPROPRIATE TO EVERY OCCASION. 4	ABLE TO TAILOR LANGUAGE TO FIT AUDIENCE, COUNSEL, PERSUADE, REPRESENT A POINT OF VIEW, NEGOTIATE AND INTERPRET FOR DIGNITARIES. 4
ACCENT MAY BE FOREIGN, NEVER INTERFERES. RARELY DISTURBS ENS. 3	SPEAKS WITH FACILITY. RARELY HAS TO GROPE. FLUENCY WITHIN OR CLOSE TO RANGE OF NS ACCEPTABILITY. HAS MORE PRONOUNCED ABILITY TO USE PARAPHRASE & CIRCUMLOCUTION AND FEWER FILLERS ALTHOUGH INTERLANGUAGE MAY SURFACE IN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS. CANDIDATE ACTUALLY THINKING IN TL. 3	MAKES FREQUENT APPROPRIATE USE OF TL CULTURAL REFERENCES AND EXPRESSIONS. SOCIOLINGUISTIC INACCURACIES MAY EXIST, BUT DO NOT RESULT IN MISUNDERSTANDING 3	ONLY SPORADIC ERRORS IN BASIC STRUCTURES. OCCASIONAL ERRORS IN LOW FREQUENCY STRUCTURES AND MORE FREQUENT ERRORS IN LESS COMMON, COMPLETE STRUCTURES. 3	BROAD ENOUGH TO CONVERSE AND EXPRESS OPINIONS IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PRACTICAL, SOCIAL, PROFESSIONAL AND ABSTRACT TOPICS. 3	CAN CONVERSE IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL SITUATIONS, RESOLVE PROBLEM SITUATIONS, DEAL WITH UNFAMILIAR TOPICS, PROVIDE EXPLANATIONS, DESCRIBE IN DETAIL, OFFER SUPPORTED OPINIONS AND HYPOTHESES. 3
OFTEN FAULTY, BUT INTELLIGIBLE. 2	OFTEN FAULTY, BUT INTELLIGIBLE. 2	NL CULTURE MAY PREDOMINATE BUT SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CONTRASTS DO NOT OFFEND NS. 2	CAN HANDLE ELEMENTARY CONSTRUCTIONS QUITE ACCURATELY. ABLE TO JOIN SENTENCES IN LIMITED DISCLOSURE. 2	SUFFICIENT TO SPEAK SIMPLY WITH SOME CIRCUMLOCUTIONS IN CASUAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CONCRETE TOPICS SUCH AS OWN BACKGROUND, FAMILY, AND INTERESTS, WORK, TRAVEL AND CURRENT EVENTS. 2	ABLE TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN CASUAL CONVERSATIONS, CAN EXPRESS FACTS, GIVE INSTRUCTIONS, DESCRIBE, REPORT ON AND PROVIDE NARRATION ABOUT CURRENT, PAST AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES. 2
ERRORS FREQUENT. INTELLIGIBLE TO NS USED TO DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS. 1	ERRORS FREQUENT. INTELLIGIBLE TO NS USED TO DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS. 1	SUFFICIENT CULTURAL/ SOCIOLINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE TO DEAL WITH NS USED TO DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS 1	ERRORS FREQUENT, BUT INTELLIGIBLE TO NS USED TO DEALING WITH FOREIGNERS. 1	INCLUDES BOTH CONTENT AND FUNCTION WORDS, BUT LIMITED TO EVERYDAY SURVIVAL AND COURTESY REQUIREMENTS. 1	CAN CREATE WITH THE LANGUAGE, ASK AND ANSWER QUESTIONS, PARTICIPATE IN SHORT CONVERSATIONS. 1
UNINTELLIGIBLE. 0	UNINTELLIGIBLE. 0	NO EVIDENCE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC OR CULTURAL AWARENESS. 0	TOTALLY WRONG OR NONEXISTENT. 0	INADEQUATE FOR EVEN SIMPLE CONVERSATION. 0	NO FUNCTIONAL ABILITY. 0

ENS = educated native speaker NS = native speaker TL = target language NL = native language

Figure 2. Speaking Performance Profile

includes ratings in the traditional categories of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency that are thought to contribute to general language ability. Included with fluency is another skill called "integrative ability" (i.e., the ability to put pieces of the language together and use them to communicate effectively). There is also a nontraditional scale for rating a candidate's sociolinguistic or cultural performance—such as using proper honorifics in Japanese or managing the formal/ informal distinctions of other languages—and another scale of functional language ability labeled simply *tasks*. While this scale is already an integral part of the global rating system, its inclusion in the Performance Profile has the advantage of improving test elicitation techniques. If the raters know that they are to rate on this scale, they consistently include relevant tasks in the interview.

The test raters using the Performance Profile place a single mark on each vertical line to indicate the person's performance level in each area. When connected, these individual ratings chart the examinee's performance profile, as in Figure 2. The profile shown in Figure 2 suggests a global rating of 2+. It also indicates why the candidate is not a 3: he has the vocabulary of a 3+ or even a 4, but cannot perform the functions that a 3 must be able to perform, evidently because he lacks the necessary knowledge of grammar and/or control over it. This pattern of high vocabulary and low grammar is a classic profile for a terminal 2/2+.

In fact, the terminal profile illustrated in Figure 2 is encountered all too frequently in government screening programs. It is important to note that the grammar weaknesses that are typically found in this profile are not *missing* grammatical patterns, which the student could learn or acquire later on, but are *fossilized* incorrect patterns. Experience has shown again and again that such fossilized patterns are not remediable, even in intensive language training programs or additional in-country living experience. Hence the designation *terminal 2/ 2+*.

A terminal profile has also been identified at the I+ level. The terminal I+ has usually learned the foreign language on the streets. Street learners do not need accurate grammar to survive. As a result, they develop and internalize their own communication strategies. Even though most of these strategies are not linguistically correct, they succeed for Level 1 tasks. They do not, however, work at higher functional levels, when more sophisticated communicative tasks are attempted. This means that these inaccurate strategies, which normally consist of fossilized lexical and grammatical structures, have to be *unlearned* before functional language ability can be improved. Once again, remediation in these cases is seldom, if ever, successful.

Both of the terminal profiles discussed above share the common and distinctive feature of low grammatical accuracy and high vocabulary, that is, a level of grammatical control that lags well behind the levels achieved in the other language skills. Most crucially, both terminal profiles have proven to be "learning proof" whenever the grammatical weaknesses identified in the dipping performance profile consist of fossilized incorrect patterns and are

not merely the result of having had no contact or acquaintance in those areas. Experience in government language schools also indicates that failure in retraining efforts is not the result of a lack of motivation. Students in language programs at FSI, CIA, and DLI are highly motivated professionals who know that overall job security, cash bonuses, and future salary increases all depend on their acquiring Level 3 proficiency.

The explanation for the terminal profiles appears to lie in what cognitive psychology calls *proactive interference*, in which the prior learning of task A interferes with the current learning of task B. It has been demonstrated that the more similar the tasks A and B are, the greater is the negative interference of the former on the latter. The degree of interference corresponds to the strength of A, which in turn depends on the duration and frequency of practice at that task. If proactive interference underlies the learning disabilities of the terminal 1+ and 2+ students, then there should be identifiable features in the background of each that inhibit their continued language development. Fossilized or terminal language development has been found to be the most commonly shared feature in the language-learning experiences of these students.

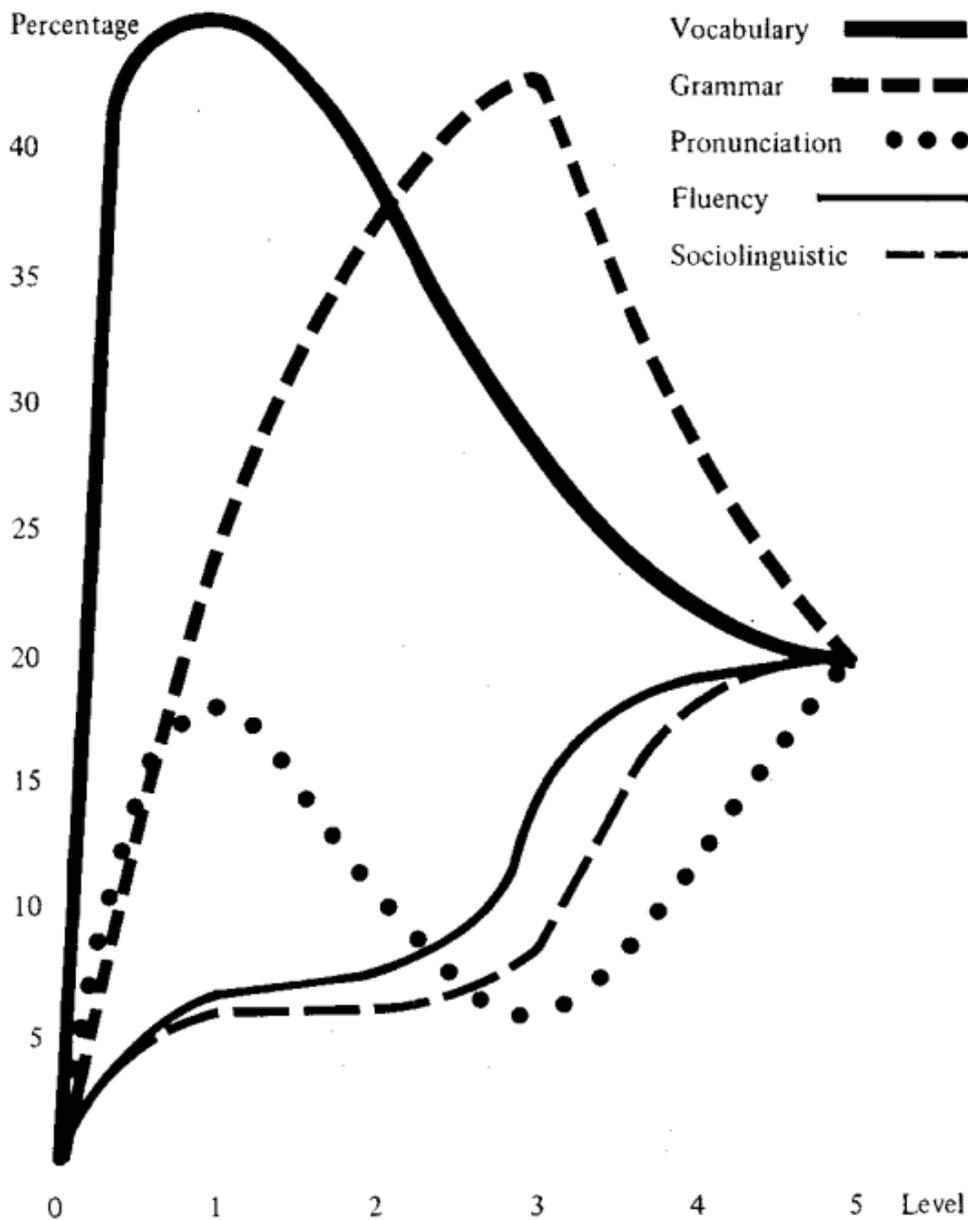
It has already been mentioned that fossilized structures are a chronic problem among street learners of languages, such as students or servicemen stationed overseas. Americans are not the only ones who suffer from this type of experience. Foreign workers such as the *Gastarbeiter* in Germany and foreign students and workers in the U.S. also develop terminal proficiency profiles. In testing the language proficiency of pre-service language teachers at the University of Minnesota, one of the authors encountered terminal cases among those who were applying to be foreign-language teachers. Most terminal cases had begun their language training in unstructured overseas work or study settings, but some had had only school learning experiences. The terminal cases whose foreign-language background had included only an academic environment all came from language programs that either were taught by instructors who themselves had not attained grammatical mastery of the target language—and hence were unable to guide their students into correct usage—or by instructors who had chosen not to correct their students' mistakes for philosophical, methodological, or personal reasons.

Analyzing the factors of communicative competence

In 1978 the Research Committee of the Interagency Language Roundtable, an unofficial colloquium of approximately thirty government agencies involved in foreign-language teaching, began investigating the relative contribution of factors (i.e., subskills) to global language proficiency. It was proposed at that time that the relative contribution of the profile sub-skills is not constant across the full range of language proficiency acquisition. Vocabulary is obviously more essential than is grammar for successful per-

formance at Level 1 tasks. At Level 5, all elements or subskills must be considered essential to one regarded as an educated native speaker. We assumed that somewhere in the middle of the proficiency scale there would be a relationship expressible in terms of the regression equations calculated at FSI two decades ago by Rice (12) and expanded upon recently by Adams (1). These assumptions led to the construction of a Hypothesized Relative Contribution Model (Figure 3), which posited a fluctuating relative importance of subskill factors contributing to global language proficiency. Levels of global proficiency make up the horizontal axis of the model, while the

Figure 3. Hypothesized Relative Contribution Model



vertical axis shows the hypothesized percentages or relative contributions of each subskill.

In interpreting Figure 3, it is important to remember that the height of a curve at any given proficiency level indicates relative contribution for each subskill. The fact that the vocabulary curve drops as it approaches Level 5 does not mean that less vocabulary is needed, but that in comparison to the other four contributory skills, vocabulary declines in relative importance. Because this is a graph of relative contributions, the values of the five curves at any given level always total 100%. At Level 1, the most important component of the 100% is hypothesized to be vocabulary, followed by sufficient grammar to create with the language, and a *minimum* threshold level of pronunciation sufficiently accurate to be understood. Fluency—as measured in terms of words per minute—and sociolinguistic elements are not yet crucial, because at this level one is concerned with listeners who are used to dealing with foreigners, and the expectations of both the speaker and the listener are quite low.

According to the hypothesis, at Level 2, these relationships would shift. The relative contribution of grammar would increase, as the required linguistic tasks (i.e., the range of linguistic functions to be mastered) became more complicated. At the same time, the relative importance of pronunciation would begin to decline after reaching the minimal level required to be understood.

Although few students in academic language programs, including language majors, reach Level 3, government intensive language training programs often achieve this goal. Based on our vast experience, we hypothesized that by Level 3 the relative mix of contributing subskills would change drastically. Grammar would be more important than vocabulary, and the importance of the subskills of fluency and sociolinguistic sensitivity would have increased. Although one could still succeed with a foreign-sounding pronunciation, it would be necessary to possess sufficient sociolinguistic skills and fluency so as not to offend or bore one's listeners.

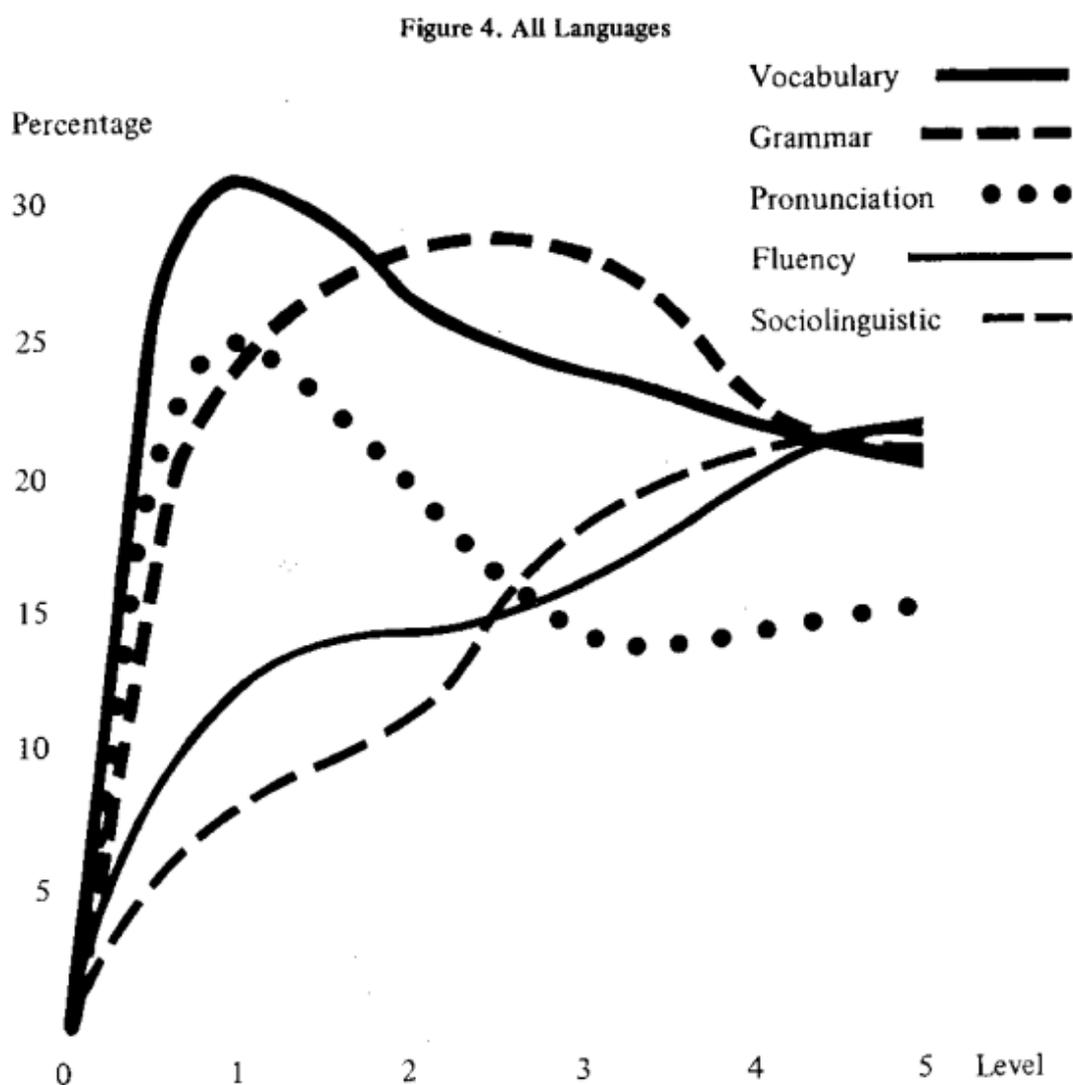
At Level 4, it was hypothesized that the curves would begin to coincide, as functional performance approached the level of the educated native speaker, who by definition would control each of these language aspects perfectly. On the assumption that a person whose language was lacking in any one of these areas would not be judged to be an educated native speaker, we judged that all subskills would contribute equally to the global performance rating of Level 5. Thus, all component curves converge at this level.

Verifying the hypothesis

At the time the Roundtable group posited the Hypothetical Model of Relative Contributions, no data base that contained both global ratings and

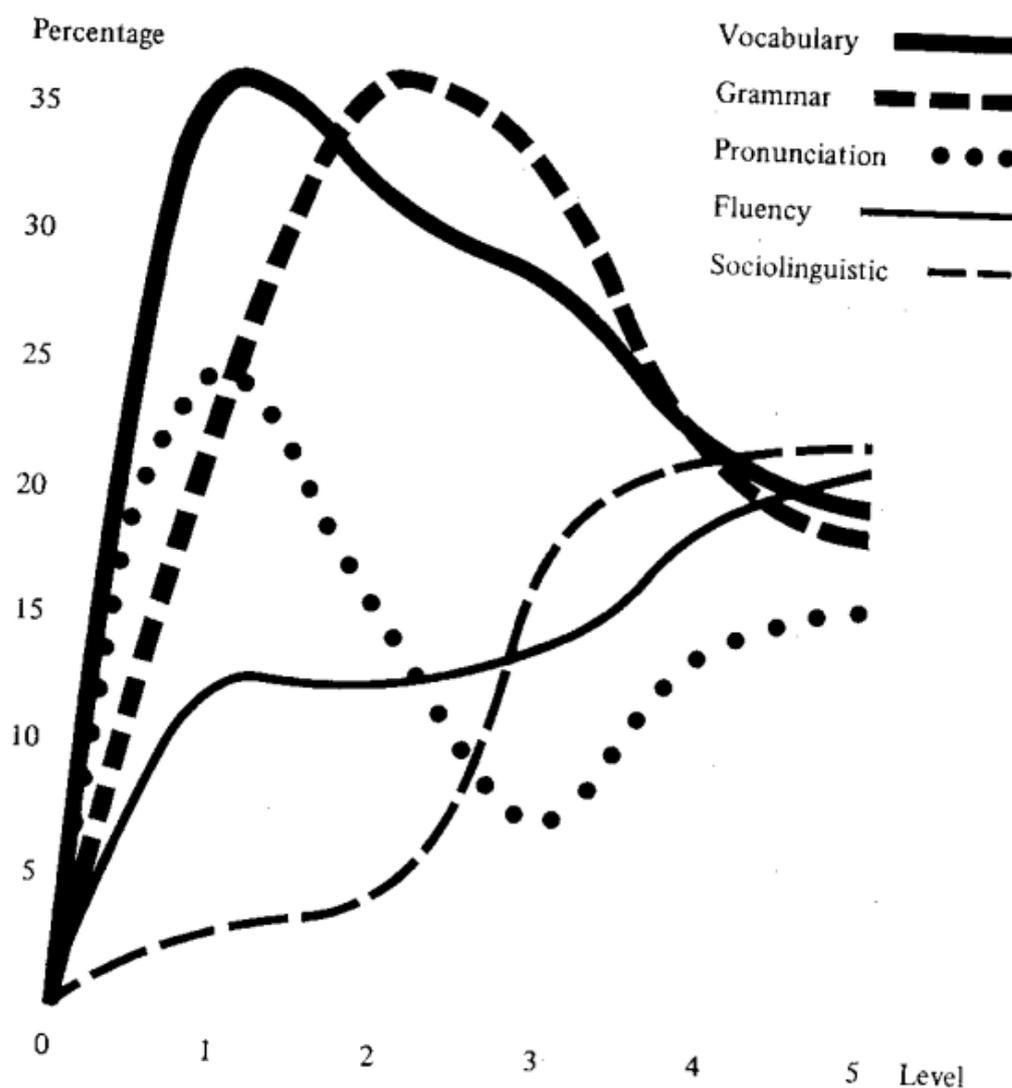
subskill scores for the factors identified yet existed. In order to verify or refute the hypothesis, some fifty foreign-language teachers representing seventeen of the languages taught in the CIA Language School were asked to rate the relative importance of the contributory skills for each proficiency level on an instrument that paired each subskill with every other subskill. All of these teachers were members of the Language School staff, and thus were very familiar with the proficiency level definitions. Each was given a rating sheet for each of the levels, 1 through 5, and for each pair of subskills each teacher circled the one thought to be the more important in the global proficiency rating at that level. If they were believed to be of equal importance, a single circle was drawn around both subskills. These judgments were converted to percentage values, and a graph was constructed of the relative weightings given to each subskill for each level (Figure 4).

In general, the rankings made by the teachers supported our hypothesis, although the relationships were less exaggerated than we had supposed.



There were also some interesting deviations from the hypothesized model. The sociolinguistic and fluency factors were more important than we had predicted for Level 3, and the shape of the pronunciation curve was also a surprise. Pronunciation was judged more important at Level 1 than had been predicted. It tapered off as predicted, but then did not rebound at the upper levels. Several plausible explanations for these variations were suggested. First, the initially high importance of pronunciation could have been a result of having included tonal languages in the sample. Second, the lower relative contribution of pronunciation at Level 5 might have reflected the fact that some languages contain widely divergent, but equally acceptable, regional differences in pronunciation. In order to account for these possibilities, a graph of the relative subskill contributions for global language

Figure 5. German



proficiency ratings in German alone was also prepared. Indeed we did find evidence to support the above explanations. The results of the German-only analysis (Figure 5) came even closer to the hypothesized model than did the total language mode.

Curricular and methodological considerations

The application of this hypothesized model of oral proficiency to curriculum design is quite straightforward. If the goal of the curriculum is to produce Level 3 speakers of a language, then the concentration on language subskills in the curriculum should be representative of their relative importance in performing Level 3 tasks. Grammar skills would be an important part of the curriculum. If the goal is to produce students with Level 1 survival skills, then the optimum curriculum mix would be entirely different, with a primary emphasis on the teaching and practice of vocabulary.

The ultimate goal of instruction is thus the deciding factor in establishing the factor mix for a particular curriculum. The key word is *ultimate*. While the most efficient way to achieve survival level proficiency would be a course that stressed vocabulary, our experience indicates that such a course would work to the disadvantage of students who wished to develop higher levels of proficiency. Students entering such a program would have to be warned of its potentially negative effect on their long-range aspirations. Whatever decisions are made, however, performance profile factors can provide useful information for both teachers and curriculum designers.

We have presented evidence based on experiential but consistent data representing many different people in different circumstances to suggest that certain methodological decisions or philosophical positions relevant to foreign-language teaching have important long-term consequences. These consequences transcend the general proficiency level of foreign-language students at arbitrarily selected interim points during the process of achieving true communicative competence. Data reported elsewhere in the literature show that in programs that have as curricular goals an early emphasis on unstructured communicative activities—minimizing, or excluding entirely, considerations of grammatical accuracy—it is possible in a fairly short time, say, not later than the fourth semester, to provide students with a relatively large vocabulary and a high degree of fluency, as measured by the delivery rate in words per minute. Moreover, these skills can indeed be used successfully by students, in combination with certain auto-generated communication strategies such as pidginization, elaborate mime, and gesture to realize a measure of authentic communication. Since "communication" is the *sine qua non* of language study, it would be difficult to quarrel with approaches that promise these kinds of results, if only the same approaches did not also carry such undesirable side effects. For these same data suggest that the premature immersion of a student into an unstructured or "free" conversational

setting before certain fundamental linguistic structures are more or less in place is not done without cost. There appears to be a real danger of leading the students too rapidly into the "creative aspects of language use," in that if successful communication is encouraged and rewarded for its own sake, the effect seems to be one of rewarding at the same time the *incorrect* communication strategies seized upon in attempting to deal with the communication situations presented. When these reinforced communication strategies fossilize prematurely, their subsequent modification or ultimate correction is rendered difficult to the point of impossibility, irrespective of the native talent or high motivation that the individual may originally have brought to the task. Experience shows that even if students "learn" (as distinct from "acquire") grammatical rules later on, they find themselves quite unable to do what they know.

What about programs that from the early stages place a higher premium on linguistic or grammatical accuracy? Our preliminary interpretation of the data shows that at a corresponding point in the learning process, that is, after four semesters of instruction, although the vocabulary and fluency profiles are relatively lower than in the preceding case, the accuracy profile is much higher. Thus, although the performance levels for the three components—vocabulary, grammar, and fluency—are different between the two groups, the overall (i.e., global) ratings are comparable. The important difference between the competing profiles is the prognosis for each.

Allowing room for individual differences, the data suggest that members of the group that have arrived at the 2/2+ level through street learning or through "communication first" programs are either unsuccessful at increasing their linguistic ability or tend to show improvement only in areas in which they had already shown high profiles. An instructor at the DLI expressed despair over a student who after six months of intensive instruction in German had learned nothing but vocabulary. She was relieved to learn of the terminal 2+ syndrome, and subsequent conversations with her confirmed the terminal profile of her student. Grammatical precision seems largely unaffected, not only by additional classroom time but even by further in-country experience. The prognosis for members of this group is negative, and they tend to make up virtually all of the terminal 2s.

Members of the group that have arrived at the 2/2+ level through "accuracy first" programs, however, typically show the opposite prognosis. The expectation is that these individuals will continue to build on the skills they already possess, and will later learn or acquire additional skills necessary to progress upward beyond the 2/2+ level. What are the implications of these interpretations for curriculum and program planners?

While the data clearly show the need to attend to the grammatical or linguistic control that natives and competent non-natives exercise in their use of the target language, we must also recognize that many factors enter into considerations of any methodological or curricular alternative. As a minimum, such considerations must take into account the student population,

student and community expectations, motivation, staffing strengths and weaknesses, short- and long-term program objectives, and matters of articulation. In addition, how we perceive available options and choices to be made depends in part on the perspectives we assume, and also on the form in which we verbalize them.

Quite possibly every human being secretly embraces the fantasy of being multilingual. If we use the traditional clichés to verbalize this fantasy, a program that promises a "conversational approach" with "emphasis on oral communication" will certainly be perceived more positively than one that offers "a firm grounding in the major grammatical structures" of the target language. With this wording the latter program has a terminal public relations problem as serious as the former's terminal learning problem.

In the area of student motivation, evidence abounds that students enjoy, and presumably are motivated by, speaking the target language more than they enjoy and are motivated by learning its grammar. But here again, clichés have carried the burden of the message. It is entirely reasonable to assume, and to investigate the implications of the assumption, that the fundamental wellspring of such enjoyment and motivation may be the student's perception that speaking the language is an enabling process through which the fantasy of true bilingualism is to be realized. This recognizes only that students do not necessarily know what is best for them.

Let us consider now the question of program objectives. It sounds reasonable to argue that "since we're going to have the students for only a limited time, and since they're not likely to become genuinely fluent speakers of the target language as a result of our program alone, then it's better to provide them with what they'll be happy with, with what they can probably handle with relative ease, and with what our staff can reasonably be expected to deliver in the time available." Yet, what sounds so reasonable may in fact condemn the student-client to a proficiency level far below the one to which he or she aspires.

When we recognize that the typical university-level foreign-language major graduates mostly 2s or 2+s, then the program-terminal level of student performance is not at issue, for students can reach this level by either route. What is at issue is whether we opt for a program that produces a terminal 2/2+ or for one that produces a 2/2+ capable of going on under different circumstances—intensive instruction, foreign study or residence—to become a 3, a 4, or, in rare cases, even a 5. Viewed in this light, matters of public relations or short-term effect on student motivation take on a different cast, and the complementary notion of professional ethics moves into the foreground.

What may be needed is a two-track curriculum, with an unabashedly communicative syllabus for students whose terminal objective is to function marginally well in the target language, and a linguistic competence tract for those who aspire to using the language professionally. The former approach might attract greater number of students (6), and in fact allow for the luxury of offering the second. The danger in the two-track approach, of

course, is that a student who completes the “communicative track” and has become genuinely excited about the target language may find it impossible to switch over. Evidence suggests that four semesters of instruction are enough to produce a terminal profile, and the time needed may in fact be less than that. And the bottom line might be that the student’s ability to communicate would not be materially better than if he or she had taken the other track from the beginning.

Conclusions

The first conclusion is that the hypotheses that we have presented, and their interpretations, must be subjected to rigorous research, designed to confirm and validate them. The existence of terminal profiles must be independently verified, and—in a related step—every effort must be directed at identifying the factors that lead to such profiles. The fundamental problem with undertaking such research in the normal university setting is that most programs never reach beyond the Level 2/2+ proficiency. One of the authors recently attempted to structure an advanced Spanish conversation course around a typical Level 3 task: presenting a viewpoint, defending that viewpoint, and attempting to convince others of its validity. It turned out not to matter whether positions were assigned at random or were chosen by the students out of their own systems of belief. None were able to perform the necessary language functions; they were limited to stating and restating their own opinions, saying in effect, “It’s right because I believe it to be right.” No one was able to restate the opposing viewpoint, interpret it in the context of some situation, and show up its shortcomings. The course was not a triumph, even though the students were anxious to master the language functions at issue. This again is only experiential verification of the phenomenon. What is needed is empirical research into the matter.

The ideal research design would be a longitudinal study based on a random selection of a population of students already at the 2/ 2+ level. They would be exposed to a variety of language training programs that would include all the variables of pacing, intensity, and methodology, and would ultimately be evaluated on their ability to handle multiple language functions. This design is doubtless impossible to realize.

There are ways, however, to get into the most fundamental issues. The best place to start would be at an institution that was admitting students at the 2/ 2+ level, and expecting to raise them to the 3/3+ level. Perhaps the NDEA institutes of the 1960s would serve as an example of this. Nowadays, the Foreign Service Institute, the CIA, or the Defense Language Institute might be the more obvious choices, although there are a few university programs that fit the criteria. The design would call for pretest and posttest data, which would divide the population into the improvers and the non-improvers. The key would be to ensure that the testing were adequate to the task. Evaluation would fall into three categories.

A macro-analysis would be done, probably in the form of an FSI-type Performance Profile. This would be complemented by a micro-analysis in the form of an achievement/diagnostic test such as the National Teacher Examination for foreign languages. In this way a profile of the relative strength of grammatical mastery versus vocabulary could be developed. A third component would characterize as accurately as possible their previous learning experiences in the target language. These data would be subjected to statistical procedures such as discriminate analysis, so that crucial factors in the students' prelearning experiences could be identified. For the posttest phase, real communicative competence would be measured, again on a Performance Profile, in terms of true-to-life simulations of multiple language functions. It is possible that the ACTFL/ETS workshops mentioned in the first chapter of this volume will contribute material for a research design such as this.

The issues we have addressed are substantive, although what is at stake is less an either/or proposition than a matter of priorities. A curricular or programmatic decision to strive for linguistic accuracy from the beginning of a program in no way excludes an approach or methodology in which the target language is used as the medium of instruction and for authentic, if relatively more constrained, communication. No reasoned interpretation of the data suggests a return to grammar-translation or classical mim-men audio-lingual methodologies. What is implied is the systematic recognition of the *ultimate* role that linguistic accuracy plays in the achievement of true communicative competence, in which it truly does matter *how* the message is transmitted.

More research into the phenomena under discussion is needed before decision making in these areas can become routine. The assumptions that underlie our interpretation of the data are that classroom experience should aid the students in achieving linguistic accuracy and simultaneously in developing true communicative competence. Students who are under pressure or in an emergency situation—in a classroom or a foreign country—will naturally resort to certain predictable communication strategies of the type already considered, regardless of the pedagogical model to which they are or have been exposed. These strategies will for the most part be at least partially successful, especially when dealing with the elementary Level 1 and 2 tasks presented in beginning language programs. However, those strategies that appear to succeed in spite of the linguistic system of the target language do not need positive reinforcement in a formal educational setting; they should be understood, interpreted, and accepted for what they are: survival strategies. Quality instructional time should be given over to encouraging the acquisition of communication strategies that are not only successful at the survival level but are also linguistically and culturally adequate for more serious and complex tasks.

In order to interpret these preliminary indications into a testable pedagogical model, it may be helpful to posit an output hypothesis analogous to Krashen's input hypothesis (9). According to the latter, acquisition is facilitated

when input is provided to the students at a level just beyond their current receptive competence. If input is provided at too advanced a level, its meaning is not accessible to the students; it ceases to be comprehensible, and acquisition fails to take place. Analogously, students may acquire oral skills when they are encouraged to use the target language in communicative tasks that are also just beyond their productive competence. When the communication demands made upon the students are too far beyond their current competence, they are forced to adopt or invent communication strategies that lead to fossilization and ultimately prove self-defeating. For this reason it is important to match the communication task to the students' performance level. In the same sense that it is meaningless to declare a student communicatively competent—without specifying the language functions that he or she is competent to communicate—so it is meaningless to declare any situation a communicative setting. A situation is a useful communicative setting only when the language functions it elicits are appropriate to the performance level of the students. Thus, the choice of communication task is a critical step in implementing the output hypothesis.

We hypothesize that if students develop both receptive and productive competence at a pace that allows for reasonable internalization—albeit under heavy monitoring at first—then ultimately it will be easier for them to activate skills that are measurably present, though passively, than it will be for them to dismantle reinforced or fossilized skills and replace them with different ones. We base this hypothesis on practical experience and also on the construct of proactive interference, which becomes more likely as a function of the degree of internalization of the earlier responses and the degree of similarity between competing tasks. It is when students are regularly rewarded for linguistically inaccurate but otherwise successful communication of meaning or intent that the threat of proactive interference in the form of fossilization looms largest. Given the profession's goal of communicative competence, this problem cannot be ignored, and must not be taken lightly.

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