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**THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH
AND
THE FRENCH CAPES ORAL EXAMINATION**

Philip RILEY

R E S U M E

Le CAPES (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle à l'Enseignement Secondaire) est un concours de recrutement de professeurs de l'enseignement secondaire en France. Pour les candidats en anglais, l'examen comporte des épreuves écrites et une épreuve orale de 45 à 60 minutes.

L'article présente une vue critique de cet oral, fondée sur l'analyse d'un cours expérimental donné entre 1975 et 1980. L'absence d'interaction et de test de compréhension, et le nombre restreint de fonctions langagières utilisées en font un instrument inadapté à la mesure des capacités linguistiques ou pédagogiques des candidats. L'article montre que l'évolution des méthodologies et des technologies en didactique des langues n'a eu aucun effet sur l'examen et que celui-ci ne comprend aucun élément de formation professionnel.

L'article conclut sur des propositions concrètes destinées à rapprocher à la fois l'enseignement et le concours des besoins professionnels des futurs enseignants d'anglais.

INTRODUCTION

The author of this article has just completed a doctoral thesis¹ (1981), describing an experimental course which aimed at preparing candidates for part of the C.A.P.E.S. oral examination and which discusses the pedagogical and linguistic implications of the nature of that examination. The greater part of the thesis is taken up by a technical analysis of the complex and unusual type of discourse produced in this particular situation and by a consideration of the materials and methodology which were developed to deal with it. The examination, that is, was accepted on its own terms, uncritically.

To some extent, obviously this reflects the only realistic attitude one single teacher can take towards the *Education Nationale* — the third biggest employer in the world, after General Motors and the Red Army². To some extent, too, it is a matter of simple politeness : after all, no-one is forced against their will to give courses to C.A.P.E.S. students : nor does anyone have the right to thrust “ irrelevant ” material down students' throats, even if it is for their own good. Moreover, the decencies of scholarship have to be observed : the objective description of an experiment excludes personal value judgements, and from the point of view of the discipline — in this case, discourse analysis — there really is no call to go rocking institutional boats.

From the pedagogical point of view, though, things look very different and it was above all in a pedagogical perspective that the experimental course was undertaken : it was an attempt to grapple with certain concrete problems which a particular teacher found himself faced with week after week over a period of five years (1975-1980).

This being the case, it would be both incomplete and dishonest not to comment on the pedagogical aspects of the work in question and in particular the insights it affords into institutional aims and criteria and that is precisely what the final chapter of the thesis aimed to do. It is that chapter which provided the major part of the material for the article below, although for clarity of exposition a certain amount of background material has been added.

¹ “ *A pedagogical application of discourse analysis : methodology and experimentation* ”. Thèse de doctorat du 3^e cycle, UER de Linguistique Appliquée, Université de Nancy II.

² According to the Guinness Book of Records, (McWhirter, 1979).

Background

The C.A.P.E.S. (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle à l'Enseignement Secondaire) is a qualification which entitles the holder to an established post within the French secondary education system. Very roughly comparable to the British " Postgraduate Certificate of Education ", it is usually taken in the years immediately after the first degree.

For the C.A.P.E.S. student specialising in English, the examination includes a number of written papers and an oral examination which lasts 45-60 minutes. During the oral, candidates are supposed to simulate a lesson for a class of 16 year-old pupils, but in fact their audience is a " Jury " of between three and five examiners (secondary school or university teachers of English or members of the Inspectorate). A number of different tasks are included in the examination : reading aloud, elucidating points of grammar, spoken translation into French, and the major part of the time is taken up by what is known as the " Présentation de la Nouvelle ", a 10-20 minute talk on a short story, followed by a " Commentaire de texte " based on a passage taken from the same story, as indeed are all the tasks which have been mentioned. Candidates prepare their performances under examination conditions immediately before going before the Jury.

Neither the linguistic model, the methodology nor the materials developed for the experimental course will be described here : we have room only for a bald listing of some of the most striking characteristics of this discourse-type whose complexity presents a fascinating challenge to linguist and teacher alike :

- a) It involves a complex of *texts and meta-texts* : the short story itself, the candidate's notes, his talk, works quoted, Jury reports, etc.
- b) There is a tortuous relationship between *written* and *spoken* forms. The story is written, as are the candidate's notes, which are then read aloud : the candidate's talk is then evaluated on the basis of criteria which (it is argued) are derived from the written form.
- c) Since the candidate does not have time to write out every word of his " Présentation ", some parts are *prepared*, whilst others are *spontaneous*, or at least *unprepared*.
- d) The oral examination is *face-to-face*, yet it is *non-interactive* i.e. it is a single-source discourse, members of the Jury making no contribution.
- e) Despite this, it is a *simulation* of a typical dyadic classroom encounter : the candidate is supposed to be 'teaching a lesson'.

- f) The discourse consists of both specialised and everyday English ; this is especially true at the lexical level, where technical literary-critical terms might also be used non-technically in ordinary conversation.

As both the title of the qualification and the nature of the system of selection (it is a " concours ") show, the aim of this examination is to select those candidates who will make the best secondary teachers of English. The question addressed by this article is whether, in view of the nature of the C.A.P.E.S. discourse as indicated in a-f, above, it is in fact a suitable tool for measuring either candidates' linguistic proficiency or their teaching ability. An even more important question is whether preparing for the C.A.P.E.S. examination is an adequate form of language teacher-training, which is obviously what it is considered to be by the authorities as is witnessed, once again, by the title of the qualification it bestows, and by the absence of any other training programme.

Institutional and pedagogical aims and criteria

Since the discussion which follows is somewhat critical of the CAPES, it is not difficult to anticipate a reaction from some of my French colleagues along the lines of " How can any foreigner hope to understand the CAPES, especially its institutional aspects ? " This is a perfectly reasonable question and it is certainly not indicative just of a hostile or xenophobic stance. The CAPES is an expression of some of the profoundest attitudes in the French social psyche and as such may well be beyond the understanding of any outsider. But, if this is true, by the very same token it is an unsuitable instrument for training and testing teachers of *English* : only the surface structure has any resemblance to English, the discourse remaining in a deep and detailed way quintessentially French. It is a French examination, in English. Before returning to this point, in greater detail, though, let us consider, albeit in a superficial and unsystematic way, some of the unspoken assumptions about the nature of teachers and teaching upon which the CAPES is based and which inevitably influence in a direct, though often unconscious way, the selection of successful candidates :

Traditional teaching is essentially narcissistic. It aims at a reproduction of the teacher's self, a cloning process whereby a group of identical beings is produced — and the species reproduced. Hence the importance of repetition of what the teacher says and does, of his physical position in front of the class, of his role as mirror, model and judge, of his tasks of correcting and keeping discipline : he is the *authority* in the widest possible sense, being both expert and hierarchical superior.

The rule of the survival of the fittest consequently applies : in a sense the Jury is looking for future Jury members. The comment that " A candidate's real aim should be to explain to the Jury why they were so intelligent in picking that particular short story ", though cynical, is by no means wide of the mark. It is only to be expected, then, that any form of selection for this kind of teaching will reflect this underlying socio-pedagogical theory.

What might seem surprising, though, is that these underlying attitudes are often in contradiction with the expressed aims of the educational system and with daily classroom reality. For example, during recent years there has been a consistent movement against *explications de textes* and *commentaires* in the classroom. Yet this is undeniably the core of the " Presentation ". In other words, candidates are still being judged on their ability to perform a task which has been largely abolished.

To the social anthropologist, this fossilised ritual is a fine example of the initiation to an elite, rather like aspirant knights jousting long after the invention of gunpowder. Nor is it pure chance that many of the justifications given for the continued existence of the " Presentation " have an increasing resemblance to those which used to be put forward for Latin : " It helps them think clearly ", " It stretches them ", " They learn to speak in an organised way ", and so on.

There may even be a grain of truth in claims of this sort ; but it shows a complete lack of proportion to use it as a justification for omitting from the CAPES any reference to a large number of topics vital to any future teacher and for which candidates are not even given a bibliography, let alone a course and still less any practical introduction. Psychology, the philosophy of education, language-teaching methodology, applied linguistics, curriculum development, comparative education, materials development and evaluation — the list reads like a syllabus for the language teacher trainee, rather than the series of omissions which it in fact is.

Instead, the CAPES candidate receives more lectures on more literary set-books, more translations, more grammar, more dissertations on literary and linguistic topics : academic level is equated with teaching ability, academic content with teacher-training. An elite must have its mysteries : not a word is breathed on those subjects which militate against the idea of teaching as a gift or vocation to be proved through a ritual of suffering. This is the logical consequence of the universities' utter lack of interest or competence in pedagogy (which, of course, largely explains their denigration of it) and of their inability to conceive of the study of language as anything other than an intellectual, academic exercise with no relevance to the outside world and no instrumental value. English is " needed " by a student to pass examinations.

in English, where the highest possible reward will be a (university) teaching post preparing students to take examinations in English... This is *not* an exaggeration : the *only* oral work included in the C.A.P.E.S. framework is training for the oral examination : there is no conversation class, no oral comprehension work, no communicative activities (simulation, role-plays, games) of any kind.

All this is justified by the knee-jerk reaction that " Good teachers are born, not trained ". They have to be, in a system where no training is provided — but what about the rest ? Teaching as a gift, the mystique of teaching, is particularly entrenched in those disciplines which involve the study of a creative activity, such as literature, where it is a glorious non-sequitur to statements such as " Good poets are born, not made " and serves as a pretext for the systematic rejection of any examination of actual teaching practise. " Those who can, do... " The teacher is guru, fount of all wisdom, source of all knowledge. This seems harsh exaggeration, caricature even, until we remember that the CAPES examination is a monologue given in a classroom which is empty of pupils. The symbolism could not be more complete.

It is delightful to imagine what might happen if a candidate for the C.A.P.E.S. started shooting questions at the members of the Jury, evaluating their replies, encouraging them, correcting, and so on — behaving, that is, like a language teacher. One finds it difficult to believe that he would pass the examination with flying colours : this little fantasy, though, is enough to bring out clearly the vast gap between C.A.P.E.S. discourse and ordinary traditional teaching discourse — to say nothing of more recent approaches.

Lest it be thought that these considerations are somehow unrealistic or without any practical repercussions, let us take briefly just two concrete examples of the way in which this view of the teacher-as-model affects the CAPES programme. Firstly, there is the total neglect of the tape recorder : at no moment is it acknowledged that the teacher's voice and accent is in fact *not* the only one to which a learner can be exposed ; it follows that no reference is made to producing, selecting and exploiting materials, authentic or otherwise, for classroom use. Yet most teachers now use audio-visual courses, and their pupils are subject to an incessant bombardment of English through the media.

Secondly, there is the problem of selecting a standard on which to base the model. In the light of the discussion above, it is not surprising to find that the favoured, — indeed the largely obligatory, — dialect is that of an aging upper-class Oxbridge don. Limiting our attention to the notorious problem of accent for the moment, it is not difficult to see that whereas it might be perfectly suitable for a French university teacher to talk English like an English

university lecturer, it is hardly a reasonable or desirable aim for the average teacher or schoolchild. An accent in British English is a social statement; it makes claims about the speaker's status and background and calls out in his interlocutor certain stereotyped expectations and attitudes. True, this will be true of any standard chosen, but the Oxbridge accent is by any criterion, an extreme choice. The work of Giles (1975), and the social psychology unit at Bristol on Accommodation Theory underlines the importance of this point for non-native speakers³. Even the explicitly liberal attitudes expressed in some of the Jury Reports make it quite clear that though certain other accents may be tolerated, the Oxbridge accent is consistently preferred.

Underlying any pedagogical institution is a theory of learning, however inchoate or inexplicit it may be. It is not difficult to show that the theory on which the CAPES "Presentation" seems to be based has little in common with any current model, whether psychological or linguistic. The teacher as sole model, the lesson as monologue, the absence of any reference to pupils throughout the CAPES Course, all point to a view of the learning process which is primitive in the extreme.

In the CAPES model, teaching is still seen as an activity which, somehow, makes learning happen. The idea that learning is something which can only be done *by* a learner and not *to* or *for* him is in complete contradiction with both the social and methodological foundations of the CAPES. Otherwise, how could teaching ability be evaluated in an empty classroom? To say that the model underlying the CAPES is "teacher centered" is a gross understatement: it is learner-centripetal.

This total failure to take into account the learner is by no means unique to the CAPES, of course: it is merely an extreme example of the traditional teacher's role, seen as that of directing an unceasing and unidirectional flow of modelling behaviour onto a passive learner. It is no fluke that this is the sort of thing studied by the classical psychological models of learning which are, of course, models of teaching.

³ At the risk of introducing anecdotal evidence, it is interesting to consider these typical statements by some of the English 'lecteurs' involved with this experiment:

"They have this snotty way of speaking, of course you get used to it, but at first it really gets you."

"They have this mania about their accents: they ask you to say which is the correct pronunciation and you can't even hear the difference."

"I had one the other day, asked me if he should say 'head' or 'had' and because of the topic I said 'had', but when he still looked doubtful I said "Give it to me in a sentence" and he said "Ay hed ay nayce tame."

The results of this state of affairs are so obvious as to barely need mentioning here, in particular the non-interactive nature of the discourse. Again, it sounds almost facetious to point out that no attempt is made in this situation to attempt to define, describe and practise the learners' needs : it is assumed that both the candidates themselves and their future pupils will mainly wish to use their English to do things like discussing short stories. The vast majority of functions for which language can be used lie outside the range of the CAPES course : affective and expressive functions, deictic functions, referential, instrumental and social functions are all omitted : only a few academic, reflective functions are called for : defining, exemplifying, quoting, criticising, giving a sort of "salon" English which must be as far from the real needs and interests of the pupils as it is possible to get. It is highly significant, in this context, that the work of the Council of Europe — indeed the whole of the communicative movement in language teaching — has left this area of the French educational system totally untouched. The system defines the needs of the pupils with reference only to the needs of the system : circular, introverted and incestuous, this process produces language teachers and learners who become incompetent communicators the minute they step outside the classroom. True, some manage, often at the expense of considerable personal inconvenience, to visit an English-speaking country long enough to acquire very high levels of competence in oral English : but this is in spite of the CAPES, not because of it.

Vocational training for language teachers : some suggestions

Since the CAPES has nothing to do with pedagogy and even less to do with secondary schools, one might well ask what use it is. The only answer at present is that it provides a selection system. Its whole purpose is to exclude, not to train : it is just a higher hurdle. This is a pity, since there is clearly a place for vocational training of some kind for teachers : is it possible to imagine a 'CAPES' that would make a genuine contribution to language-teacher training ? This is no place to attempt to set out a detailed programme for such a project, as that would demand time, space and investigation far beyond what is available. Nonetheless, in order to finish on a more constructive note, here are a few pointers which, in the light of the experience gained during the experiment, are felt to be (a) practicable and (b) relevant to preparing secondary school teachers for the demands which their future profession will make on them.

- (1) Such a course should not be discipline- or content-based. Put bluntly, it should not just be a further set of lectures on yet another list of set books. If, by the time they are ready to enter on the CAPES, candidates

have not learnt to read and appreciate literature on their own and for its own sake — usually after seven years in secondary school, two years DEUG and two to three years 'licence' — then one has the right to wonder if they will ever be able to do so. Moreover, for those wishing to further their literary studies, there remain a large number of possibilities for further study : masters' degrees, DEA's etc.

- (2) Such a course should aim at introducing the candidates to fundamental pedagogic concepts and techniques at both the theoretical and practical levels. Topics which enter into such a training include
 - (a) Philosophy of education
 - history of education, comparative education, sociology of education.
 - (b) Applied linguistics
 - language-teaching methodology, current models of language, materials development and evaluation, educational technology, language of the classroom
 - (c) Educational psychology
 - current models of learning, motivation
- (3) Practical classroom experience could be organised on the sandwich-course system, enabling candidates to compare, pool and discuss experiences and to develop their ideas about teaching on both practical and theoretical bases together.
- (4) Where necessary, candidates would have the opportunity to improve their standard of English, written and spoken. Ways of achieving this aim include
 - (a) Visits to English-speaking countries
 - (b) Periods of employment in jobs necessitating the use of English
 - (c) Work on oral comprehension, including the widest possible range of authentic materials
 - (d) Work on oral expression. Apart from basic phonetic and grammatical drills, such work should contain the widest possible range of communicative activities having a teleological dimension ; simulations, games, role-playing, problem-solving etc.

Several practical points can be made here : the sandwich-course system, which is often rejected out-of-hand, should in fact be extremely easy to run in a highly-centralised institution such as the Education Nationale ; what are computers *for* ? It is also worth noting that this is a system of which the Grandes Ecoles make great use, and for reasons which are very similar to those mentioned here.

Again, the type of work referred to under (c) and (d) above need result in little or no increase in teaching hours : oral work of this kind can be carried out successfully in sound-libraries or in self-organised groups (Cf. Riley and Sicre 1978). Indeed, such work would also be an excellent pedagogical preparation for future teachers.

An oral examination for future language teachers

Within the context of a syllabus such as that which has just been sketched above, what would be the status and nature of the oral examination ? If, indeed, there is to be one : it might well be argued that the sandwich-course system provides such excellent conditions for continuous observation and assessment that no " one-off " type of test or examination would be called for.

However, the CAPES is not just an examination, nor even just a qualification : it is a *concours*, and it is difficult to reconcile this competitive dimension with any kind of continuous assessment, though admittedly many of the objections are psychological. On the other hand, one of the main objectives of the present examination is to test teaching ability or suitability, and there is no way in which that can be done in the space of an hour.

Under these circumstances, the most reasonable thing to do would be to separate the assessment of candidates' teaching ability from their proficiency in English. Teaching ability would be evaluated by

- 1) Observing the candidate in the classroom over a fairly extended period of time
- 2) Examining the candidate's performance in various vocational tasks, such as preparing materials for a specific group of learners
- 3) Examining the candidate in the various course components ('Applied Linguistics', 'Philosophy of Education' etc.).

This arrangement has two main advantages : firstly, it acknowledges the fact that there simply does not exist any known, objective way of measuring or predicting teaching ability. Secondly, it leaves the oral examination slot available for the testing of the candidate's competence in *what is to be taught* rather than in how to teach it.

What shape would such an oral examination take ? In the light of earlier discussion, we might draw up a list of some of the major characteristics

- A) It would test the candidate's listening *comprehension*, not just his expression
- B) It would include some kind of *interaction*
- C) It would involve a wide range of *language functions*

Listening comprehension

A wide variety of techniques is now available for the testing of listening comprehension and no attempt will be made here to pre-empt what would have to be a carefully-researched decision as to the specific tools employed (multiple-choice questions, transcription, filling in graphs etc.). However, it is worth noting certain general points which would have to be taken into account in the construction of such a test :

1. The audience for such a test is such that it can be narrowly focused for level (i.e. there is no need to distinguish beginners from intermediate etc.). It is an 'advanced' test. This in turn implies that there is no need to test micro-skills such as phonemic discrimination.
2. The test will be essentially one of discourse comprehension : it should therefore cover as wide a range as is practicably possible of different discourse types (radio documentary, casual conversation, railway station announcements, debate etc.). With the emphasis firmly on *interactive, authentic* recordings.
3. Candidates will, therefore, be expected to deal with difficulties such as hesitation, anacoluthon, audience laughter, high speeds of delivery and a variety of accents.
4. In order to test candidates' communicative competence, techniques which encourage listening *for* and not just listening *to* will be favoured. Examples of such techniques include adding items to a picture, following directions on a map or in a maze, recognizing descriptions of particular objects etc. The same techniques can also be used for testing a subject's ability to identify information, — using a set of figures or statistics to fill in a graph, or a railway timetable to plan a journey etc.
5. It would also be perfectly feasible to ask candidates to identify particular functions (perhaps on a multiple choice basis) or to discuss paralinguistic features such as key, intonation and voice qualifiers. This can be done by asking questions such as " Is A agreeing/disagreeing with B here ? ", " Is A implying that he has/has not already read *Middlemarch* ? ", " Is A pleased, surprised, angry ? " etc.

Two further remarks on this type of comprehension test : first, it has the enormous advantage that it can be administered to a very large number of candidates, simultaneously or otherwise, over loudspeakers in a hall with reasonable acoustics or in a language laboratory. Secondly, being a recording, it is identical for all candidates which ensures, if not total objectivity, then at least a reasonable measure of fairness. In fact, if the time taken by this listening comprehension test for *all* candidates is 30 minutes and the time taken by the expression test (see below) is also 30 minutes, then between half and one-third of the time taken by the present arrangements could be saved. Objections to the effect that it would be too time-consuming are untenable, whilst those who protest that such a system would present unsurmountable technical difficulties should be referred to the arrangements made for testing candidates for their driving or hunting licences.

Oral Expression

What means are available to us at present for testing oral expression, bearing in mind that we wish the test to be both interactive and to cover a range of functions ? At present a plethora of role-playing and simulation techniques is being developed, and there seems every reason to believe that some of them would be suitable for the purposes being discussed. Prior to this, though, some list or repertoire of functions and discourse types (Cf. *Un Niveau Seuil*) would need to be drawn up, with simulations etc. being chosen for their efficiency in eliciting the functions in question.

This may sound clumsy, but in fact it is very easy indeed to put into operation : as an illustration, let us imagine that our repertoire includes the following functions/discourse types :

- A) Requesting and obtaining information/telephone
 - B) Instructing/face-to-face with an equal
 - C) Giving information/face-to-face with a group
 - D) Giving information/face-to-face with a superior
- A) Could be dealt with by handing the candidate a card bearing the instructions " You wish to travel from London to Liverpool next Thursday, but have heard there might be a strike. If absolutely necessary you could go on Wednesday evening, but only if there is a train after 18.30. In any case you have to be in Liverpool by 17.00 on Thursday at the latest. Phone Passenger Enquiries at Euston and ask for the information you need. "

The same technique can be used for making appointments, reserving theatre seats or hotel rooms, leaving messages, warning etc. etc.

- B) Could be dealt with by handing each candidate a set of coloured geometrical shapes and one of a set of cards, each showing a different possible arrangement of those shapes. The candidate is supposed to instruct a peer (why not the next candidate ?) as to how to arrange the shapes on a table-top in such a way as to reproduce the arrangement illustrated on the card, which is not shown to the person being instructed.

Far more complex variations on this technique are possible, of course, such as adding to drawings, following mazes or assembling a piece of machinery. This example has been given for clarity of exposition.

- C) In this case, the candidate could be given a card of the following kind.
" You are the organiser of a residential course for teachers. The members have just arrived and you are going to speak to them in the dining hall. Your speech must include the following information :

Breakfast 8.00 (canteen)

Tea (staff room) 10.30

Lunch 13.00 (canteen)

Coffee 14.00

Tennis, T.V., bar etc. etc. Check that everyone has understood. Any vegetarians or special diets ?
Who needs attendance certificates ?

- D) Could be simulated with the examiner, who could interview the candidate for a job or fill in a census form with him.

Such a list could be got through at an average of 30 minutes per candidate.

Given the purpose of the test in question and given the candidates' background, it would also be reasonable to include exercises involving explicit and conscious manipulation of functional realisations. For example, a candidate could be given a sentence and then asked to read it as a threat, a request for information, as an exclamation of surprise, a complaint etc.

Though sketchy in the extreme, enough has been said, I hope, to indicate that there are valid alternatives to the present CAPES oral examination arrangements, and ones which are economic and practical and which include functional variety, interactivity, and comprehension i.e. which relate to the uses to which language is put outside the classroom in ways which might be used to teach them inside it.

A French examination in English

The amazement of the Englishman who learns that there are no formal debates in French lycées is only equalled by the consternation of the Frenchman who has just heard that English children never do a 'dictée' in their lives (except when they are learning French !). This pedagogic ethnocentricity is as deep-rooted as any subconscious social presupposition can be : it reflects attitudes to the nature and status of the language which are direct and detailed repercussions of the sociopolitical structures of England and France. It would be ridiculous to expect a country which has an *Académie* to behave like one which does not. The centralisation which so strongly favours linguistic standardisation (Fishman 1971, Ferguson 1971) also provides the means by which that standardisation is to be brought about : the French secondary school pupil spends 4-5 times as long each week on the study of his mother tongue as does the English child (7-8 hours as against 1½-2). Breton activists regularly dynamite French T.V. masts ; the Welsh have just been awarded their own T.V. channel. These are related phenomena ; and so is the fact that there is no English equivalent of the CAPES examination (or rather *concours* — for which there is no real equivalent either !)

There are profound social, psychological and linguistic differences, then, between the English and French societies and between the institutional and pedagogical practises to which those differences give rise. In the CAPES, though, we have an example of cultural clash ; the language of the one society is being used in a functional framework established by a different society. This is very nearly a definition of one of the more common forms of Schizophrenia, or at least of one of its most common symptoms, the looseness of fit of cognitive categories (Bannister and Fransella, 1977).

For the moment, though, one is reduced to stating the obvious, namely, that to use a language to refer to objects and to carry out operations which are foreign to it is to risk some degree of semantic distortion : it follows that the ability to carry out those operations is no proof of the capacity to function normally in the language. In other words, being able to use English for purposes to which it is never usually put is no guarantee that one is able to use English in " ordinary " situations.

To a limited extent, this is confirmed by the fact that in every year between 1975 and 1979 there were cases of native speakers failing the oral examination.

Given the overall pass-rate for the examination, this is hardly surprising, though it is to be noted that such cases occurred even when the percentage

of passes was many times higher than it is now. Still, it must be accepted that certain parts of the examination such as the oral translation into French and the grammatical explanation, do not automatically privilege the native speaker of English. There are, then, some perfectly valid reasons why even people with native mastery of the language might fail the oral.

Nonetheless, a small experiment carried out early in the period in question, confirms the belief that a *majority* of native speakers would fail the " Presentation ". In this experiment, the video-recordings of simulations made by English-speaking 'lecteurs' were shown to a number of French university teachers who had first-hand experience of the CAPES. Not one of the people questioned 'passed' more than three of the simulations, the average being lower of course. Most significant of all, though, was the fact that the two teachers who had experience as CAPES Jury members agreed in passing only one of these simulations. Moreover, there was considerable agreement amongst all teachers as to why the majority failed. The three most important reasons were :

- (a) A failure to organise their material
- (b) Poor content
- (c) Unsatisfactory delivery, in particular bad grammar and too many hesitations.

Let it be clearly understood that they were not 'wrongly' or 'unjustly' failed within the terms of the CAPES and by its criteria. Of the twenty-odd lecturers who worked in Nancy during this period, I found two capable of producing anything like acceptable simulations. The academic and pedagogic standards of the average lecteur leave much to be desired (in particular their almost total ignorance of the structure of their own language) but this does not alter the force of the points being made here that CAPES candidates are expected to do things in English which English speakers do not and cannot do.

This point has been made, and fairly made, in the 1976 " Rapport sur la maîtrise de l'anglais parlé " :

" Il y a toujours un certain nombre de candidats anglophones. Il faut leur rappeler que leur origine ne les garantit pas absolument contre la contagion des gallicismes, et que parler sa langue maternelle ne dispense pas de parler juste, de parler clair, dans un registre adéquat et au niveau de langue qui convient. "

These points are incontrovertible ; yet even here there is a confident reasonableness in the existence of accepted norms which is, well, French.

And it is this which counters the obvious objection here, namely that the majority of French candidates and the majority of English candidates fail for exactly the same reason — “ poor organisation ” etc. If the “ Presentation ” were in any sense a real test of English, i.e. of the way in which native speakers would organise their text, the native speakers ought, by definition, to have the necessary competence. If anything, they seem to have more, not less difficulty organising their materials satisfactorily, though this too can only be an impressionistic judgement.

We are now touching on what are, from the strictly linguistic point of view, profounder differences between French and English academic discourse. It is no secret that the overall organisation of French and English texts differs greatly in many domains, whether in scientific articles (Cf. Veylon 1975, Régent 1980) or in school essays.

Indeed, one is almost tempted to see the very insistence on organisation, order, logic coherence etc. as in themselves manifestations of criteria which are essentially French. The linear, systematic development of a *commentaire de texte* contrasts strikingly with the associative procedures of *practical criticism*. This point is clearly brought out by a comparison of the instructions given in widely-used manuals in French and British secondary schools and universities : time and time again, the English author recommends some kind of thematic procedure whilst the French approach is rigorously sequential. Compare, too, the rhetorical models which are taught in French schools (thesis, antithesis, synthesis etc.) for which there is no current English equivalent.

These generalisations, for they are and can be no more than that, serve to highlight the 'Frenchness' of the CAPES examination, a quality which is not just due to the situational, social and institutional differences which have been mentioned earlier, but also to differences in *Weltanschauung* ; the CAPES candidate is a Frenchman, talking to other Frenchmen, he is not a perfect imitation Englishman and it is unrealistic to expect that he ever will be. This being the case, it may well be objected that many of the criticisms expressed here are unfounded : after all, the type of 'communicative' approach which has been advocated in these pages has as a direct corollary the idea that language learners should aim at a competence which enables them to be themselves in a foreign language — is this not what the CAPES candidate is doing ?

Not really. Partly because the CAPES remains blessedly innocent of such scruples and inklings, partly because, when all is said and done, the model and aim remain the native speaker, perfect in all respects.

A sole example of the effects of this aim will have to suffice. It is the phenomenon known as *lathophobic aphasia* (Stevick, 1976). This impressive piece of jargon means "an unwillingness to speak for fear of making mistakes". Symptoms range from silence through stuttering to an inordinate concentration on the quality of high back vowels — all at the expense of fluency and content. Causes of this malady are, of course, not far to seek; they include a dozen years conditioning in a pedagogic system which equates learning with teaching, teaching with correcting and correcting with punishing, where "wrong" is at once a linguistic and moral judgement; where oral work is non-interactive and non-communicative, being often limited to reading, repetition or pronunciation drills; and where even this work is carried out either in complete isolation, in a language laboratory, or in public, i.e. in front of the whole group, small-group exercises never being made the slightest use of (indeed even pairs-practice was a completely new technique to nearly all the students involved in this experiment, — and this for future language-teachers).

The only real proof of these admittedly swingeing criticisms is the recordings of simulated "Presentation" made by students as part of the experimental course: this is not in contradiction with the earlier criticisms made of the value and nature of the CAPES examination, in the sense that if candidates cannot do what they have been supposedly prepared for over a considerable length of time, how on earth can they be expected, on that basis alone, to do anything else? One does not need to cite the extreme examples recorded — students weeping, walking out, just giving up or reverting to French — to back up these remarks; it is just as easy to point out that of the 700 (approx) recordings made less than a dozen have any semblance of ease or fluency (as opposed to being accurate, well-constructed etc.).

Finally, there are very strong reasons for arguing that the aim of the CAPES is to produce a kind of 'babu English' in the technical sense discussed by Widdowson (1977 b) where it is described as a variety of language in which the poetic force (as opposed to the referential force) is dominant, where "how you say something becomes more important than what you say" and is "characterized by self-conscious elaboration of phrase...", being essentially expansive rather than reductive. Widdowson situates it at the extreme end of a cline starting with pidgins and passing through creoles: "It might be described as an elaborated code of a kind". This leads him to compare it with Bernstein's notion of the elaborated code which is, of course, seen as a very different mode altogether, since the elaboration is there "represented as a more efficient instrument for conveying meanings". He goes on to quote (though with certain reservations) Labov's pointed attack on Bernstein's ideas:

“ Is the 'elaborated code' of Bernstein really so 'flexible, detailed and subtle' as some psychologists believe ?.. Isn't it also turgid, redundant, and empty ? Is it not simply an elaborated *style*, rather than a superior code or system ” (Labov, 1969).

In that article, Labov goes on to compare the performances of speakers of restricted and elaborated codes, finding that the restricted code users are far more effective language-users, the resulting main characteristic of the elaborated code being, in his view, verbosity. Underlying these very different attitudes to, or interpretations of 'babu', 'elaborated code' and so on, there are clearly differences in social or political standpoints on class : this seems to be particularly true as far as Labov is concerned.

Widdowson (1977 b) suggests that, in order to avoid the value-judgements, pejorative or otherwise, which are inherent in these terms, we should use Halliday's term 'deflection'. On the basis of recent work on the common characteristics of contact vernaculars (eg baby-talk, foreigner-talk, pidgins Cf Ferguson 1971, Kay and Sankoff 1974, Hymes 1971, De Camp and Hancock 1974), he argues, then, that “ an increase in referential force will result in a reduction of surface complexity... (it) moves language in the direction of deviation towards the simplicity of direct reference. Poetic force, on the other hand, moves language in the direction of deflection towards complexity of message form ”. It seems reasonable to argue that “ literacy provides the conditions which favour the development of babu. Written language is of its nature independent of immediate context and something, therefore, that can be fashioned in detachment as an artefact ”. Finally, he drives in the pedagogical nail hard : “ ... babu is not only a phenomenon of theoretical interest for sociolinguists : it is also one which has considerable significance for language teaching. We might consider, for example, the notion of error. This has almost always been associated with deviation, the extent to which the learner's 'interlanguage' does not match up with the standard code of the target language as a means of expression. Thus the learner is said to make errors if the message form of his utterance is non-standard, even though it might be referentially effective. But what if the learner's message forms are correct but contain no content worth expressing ? ”

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