

MELANGES PEDAGOGIQUES 1974

P. RILEY

FROM FACT TO FUNCTION :
Aspects of the work of the C.R.A.P.E.L.

C.R.A.P.E.L.

This paper was read at the Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics, Edinburgh, September 1974.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe certain characteristic aspects of the work of the C.R.A.P.E.L. and, in doing so, to outline the overall approach and the conceptual framework on which that work is based. Such an attempt inevitably involves over-simplification, especially when the institution in question is more remarkable for its eclecticism and range than for its championing of one particular view or approach. All labels are libels : I apologize in advance to my colleagues and my listeners for any statements which shortage of space has rendered dogmatic.

Since the functioning of any institution depends directly on its structure, I have found it necessary to begin with a brief description of the nature and organisation of the C.R.A.P.E.L. : this is followed by a discussion of its contributions in one particular area of applied linguistics — the teaching of English to adult, non-specialist learners. Points of more general interest which are touched on are, first, the relationship between the formal organisation of a research institution and the theoretical and practical work which it carries out : and, secondly, I have tried to provide factual information (mostly in the form of notes to the text) concerning other major institutions and organisations in this part of Europe with which the C.R.A.P.E.L. is linked in various ways, in the hope that this information will be useful, as it is probably unfamiliar.

BACKGROUND

The C.R.A.P.E.L. was founded in 1962 by the late Professor Yves Châlon and a group of colleagues working within the Faculty of Letters of the University of Nancy. It is one of a group of four loosely-related linguistics research centres within that University, the others being the Centre de Télé-Enseignement Universitaire¹, the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Linguistiques², and — most recently but most relevantly I imagine to participants at this meeting — the Centre de Recherches sur la Technologie de l'Education Appliquée à l'Apprentissage des Langues Vivantes³.

¹ The Centre de Télé-Enseignement Universitaire de l'Université de Nancy-II is one of a group of seven such centres which together form the Entente Universitaire de l'Est : the others are those of Besançon, Dijon, Metz, Mulhouse, Reims and Strasbourg. Between them they provide a type of Open University service, each centre being responsible for a particular subject which, in the case of Nancy, is English.

² The Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Linguistiques concentrates on non-pedagogical applied linguistics, in particular, the computerised treatment of texts.

³ The Centre de Recherches sur la Technologie de l'Education Appliquée à l'Apprentissage des Langues Vivantes (C.R.E.T.A.A.L.) is scheduled to start its activities by the end of 1974. It is meant to provide a documentation and research centre at the European level, complementing the services provided by centres such as E.T.I.C. Relevant information, in any form, will be gathered and made available at the centre to any individual or institution wishing to use it. Digests of information will be forwarded to interested institutions, and an annual bulletin on European research projects will be published (starting in Autumn 1975). C.R.E.T.A.A.L. will try to develop a classification system which can be applied on a European level and which will serve as a research tool for all the countries concerned. It will also undertake research projects of its own in the use of non-didactic materials in language learning, and will organise seminars aimed at putting together specialists in various relevant technological fields with language teachers and applied linguists.

The range of interests and activities within the C.R.A.P.E.L. is as wide as its name indicates. They include projects on educational technology, micro-teaching, teaching by radio and television, French for immigrants, the description of oral language, materials production and evaluation, language-teaching methods and strategies, and teacher-training : specialised seminars and courses are also provided. The centre collaborates with the Council of Europe, and is a member of the Hasselt Conference⁴, as well as trying to act as a catalyst within the French educational system.

There are usually approximately twelve full members of the C.R.A.P.E.L., membership being effectively by invitation, with an elected Director (at present M. Henri Holec). All twelve members are applied linguists, although their specialised interests vary greatly. All are experienced teachers, and it is very much an expression of the centre's dominant attitudes that all continue to teach during their membership, — usually but by no means exclusively within one of the university departments. Some forty to fifty other people are associated with the C.R.A.P.E.L., most of them being employed as part-time teachers to man the various courses in English for which the centre is responsible, but whose participation in the centre's activities is in no way necessarily limited to teaching, as they are regarded as an invaluable source of new ideas, feedback and recruitment.

The internal organisation of the C.R.A.P.E.L. is not hierarchical. Rather, it is based on the " project-group " ; that is, the work of the centre is carried out by sub-groups of members, with each group focusing on a particular problem or field, and with an overall equality of groups. Individual groups may be long- or short-lived, and most members belong to several groups simultaneously, his or her role and contribution changing from group to group. Again, the individual member is free to join or leave projects as he wishes, or to establish a new group : it is an essential characteristic of such a work-style that there is no question of " Heads of Department " with " junior staff " working " for " or " under " them. Questions of personality and academic competence apart, the hierarchical-bureaucratic model favours certain types of solution, prevents feedback or at least reduces it considerably, and necessitates the compartmentalisation which is so antipathetic to research in an interdisciplinary field such as applied linguistics.

⁴ The Hasselt Conference on Applied Linguistics was created in 1969/70 to help in the exchange of information and the discussion and comparison of research. At present it includes five applied linguistics research centres : the C.R.A.P.E.L. ; the *Instituut voor Toegepaste Linguïstiek* of the University of Louvain, Belgium ; the *Instituut voor Toegepaste Taalkunde* of the University of Utrecht, Holland ; the Department of English of the University of Lancaster and the University of Trier, Germany. All members of the conference are especially interested in the field of teacher-training and collaborate in the production of radio and television courses.

Organisation in project-groups, on the other hand, facilitates the lateral exchange of ideas and information between groups and, by increasing the operational flexibility of individual groups, enables them to respond more swiftly and directly to the nature of the problem or task under investigation. This is particularly true, of course, where "one-off" problems are concerned. In this way it is hoped that a given group will evolve in response to the needs and aims of the research problem itself, rather than to those of the administrative or academic hierarchy.

COURSES AND STUDENTS

One of the C.R.A.P.E.L. project-groups mentioned concentrates on the specific problems involved in the teaching of English to adults. Directly or indirectly, the C.R.A.P.E.L. is responsible for the provision of English-teaching to some 3,500 learners. These fall into two main categories, "students" and "adults" — the distinction being between those who are and those who are not receiving full-time education. All our learners are "non-specialists", that is, their main subject of study or their profession is not English or English-teaching⁵. The students are normally members of the University or one of the other institutes of higher education: the adults — to whom this paper mainly refers — are recruited for courses run in collaboration with the Mission de Formation Continue: under this scheme, French employers are legally bound to spend the equivalent of 1 to 2 % of their payroll on the provision of educational facilities and courses for their employees. The considerable social and educational shifts implied in this process of expenditure and provision make the problems of adult education in France especially pressing from the pedagogical, practical and financial points of view. Employers can spend their money either directly or with an agency approved by the Mission and the Ministry of Education, such as — for English in the North-East of France — the C.R.A.P.E.L.

Our average adult learner is drawn from the professional middle classes — doctors and dentists, teachers and university lecturers, business executives and their secretaries and correspondents, engineers, bankworkers, computer pro-

⁵ Since the introduction last year of the DEUG (Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Générales) all first and second year students have been required by statute to devote 5 % to 10 % of their time to the study of a foreign language. In the case of Nancy (student population 26,000) this will mean the eventual provision of an extra 4,000 hours English-teaching per year. It will be clear, therefore, that much of what follows below concerning the necessity of autonomy for adult learners is just as applicable to these non-specialist students, if only because neither the teachers nor the money exists to implement these requirements.

grammers and so on. The age-span is very wide — say eighteen to seventy — and there are roughly equal numbers of men and women.

Almost since its inception, the C.R.A.P.E.L. has been working on a series of courses designed to meet the immediate and specific needs of these learners and on the strategies best adapted to their special conditions. This programme, which is now nearing completion, is a major one, requiring as it does separate courses in each language skill — Oral Expression and Comprehension, Written Expression and Comprehension — and at each of three levels, Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced. It is clearly not possible to give here even superficial details of all twelve courses, their contents, methods, state of preparation, aims and objectives : even if it were, it would probably be undesirable as, for a research establishment as opposed to a publishing house, such a task is like the painting of the Forth Bridge, and we have now reached the stage where we are scrapping and revising earlier courses in the light of later theoretical developments⁶. What I will attempt to do instead is to indicate some of the main strands in our overall approach, as it exists at present.

ENGLISH FOR ADULTS : THE C.R.A.P.E.L. APPROACH

As far as possible, we have tried to adopt an approach to the teaching of English to adults which takes into consideration their special characteristics and conditions. That is, our approach has been formulated by accepting the restraints inherent in their situation and not by trying to impose a solution from above. Of course lip-service is frequently paid to this principle, but how often is it truly practised ? Consider just one example : it is widely recognised in the field of adult education that a multiplicity of factors has rendered the traditional class impractical and inadequate as a teaching strategy, yet how often is the response a shrug of the shoulders, a muttered something about “ necessary evils ” — and evening class courses which regularly fold up half way through the year ?

A strategy which truly respected the special conditions of adults would not seek to impose such a solution, failing as it does to allow for the facts that working people are severely limited as to where and when they can study, that a growing number of professions involve shift-work, that increasing mobility makes people reluctant to sign on for even one year of evening classes, that

⁶ Research is the main purpose of these courses, and since most of them make free use of copyright material, publication is not normally considered. Two courses which have appeared are *Cours Intensif d'Anglais Oral* (1970) and *Cours de Compréhension Orale* (1973), both published by Longman's.

they get tired and ill and married, go on holiday, have most of their free time at the weekends — in short, that they do not lead lives of clockwork routine. The logical conclusion — that instruction for adults should as far and as early as possible be freed from time-and-place restrictions — is just not faced.

A similar consideration concerns the motivation of adult learners : in our experience at least, the adult who undertakes language instruction of some kind does so for relatively precise reasons, usually professional ones. This means that it is possible to define and order his learning priorities according to his ability to use the language in certain precise types of communication situations - using the telephone, for example, compiling a report or abstract, listening to a lecture on his specialisation or asking a question from the floor, making travel arrangements, classifying invoices, describing his work to visitors, or any of the other countless but specifiable uses to which a language can be put.

So far, so good : but a further consequence of this plethora of objectives is the logical one that each individual will have his own particular set.

Not only does this militate against the use, or at least the usefulness, of most courses and textbooks — they are insufficiently specific — but it conflicts with the most basic assumption of traditional *classroom* teaching, namely, that all present need to learn the same things. The first of these factors implies the modular presentation of prepared materials, which will be by and large ephemeral or “over-specialised” : the second, pedagogic autonomy⁷. By pedagogic autonomy we mean self-instruction in the fullest possible sense, including the provision of materials, with the aim of linguistic autonomy within the defined communication situation. In other words, a teaching strategy which respects the special conditions of the adult learner will be one which enables him to teach himself and to be himself.

The main objectives of our courses, then, are linguistic autonomy and pedagogic autonomy. By linguistic autonomy we mean that the learner has reached a level where he is able to deal alone in a psychologically satisfactory way with a particular communication situation. He must feel competent, and to this extent the precise level at which linguistic autonomy is reached will always remain a function of the individual learner's personality. Of course he must also *be* competent : however, there is no question of our trying to produce imitation native Englishmen, (in the very widest sense of social comportment) as even if it were practicable to do so, it would probably not be desirable. This level is rather to be defined in terms of a minimum adequacy, below which there

⁷ For a more detailed exposition of the concept of autonomy, see Cembalo et Holec, “Les langues aux adultes : pour une pédagogie de l'autonomie”, in *Mélanges pédagogiques* 1973, to which this section is greatly indebted.

is a failure in communication, but at the same time taking into account the individual's psychological and sociocultural characteristics. You could say that our aim is to enable the learner to be a Frenchman in English.

In our strategy, linguistic autonomy is acquired in two stages, " Systematic " and " Non-systematic ", corresponding approximately to " Classroom " and " Semi-autonomous " study. During the systematic stage the student acquires the morpho-syntactic base of the language, following a pre-determined order, and usually as a member of a group working with a teacher⁸. The twelve courses referred to above are used mainly at this stage, and the individual's specific objectives are given only very general consideration, — an orientation towards the spoken rather than the written form, for example. As can be seen, taken in isolation, this stage is in many respects highly traditional, making use as it does of prepared texts, classrooms, teachers and groups. Depending on the individual it can take anything between three and twelve months.

During the non-systematic stage, the student is able to choose from a wide range of options : the materials are designed to meet specified needs and objectives, such as " Oral Comprehension : Conferences, scientific ", and they are independent of one another. The learner can follow one course or several courses at a time and in any order he wishes. Although he works alone, or in a small unsupervised group (" autonomy " is most definitely not synonymous with " isolation ") advice and information are available to him, by telephone, or perhaps through radio broadcasts, or on his visits to the sound library⁹. Since the learner is now working on prepared self-access materials, it is best to describe his pedagogical situation as one of semi-autonomy. However, one of the main purposes of the self-access materials will be to show him the materials and techniques which are available to him, that is, to prepare him for full autonomy. Once a student has been introduced to, say, a recording of a relevant radio broadcast and has been shown how to use it efficiently, he is often in a position to make further such recordings for himself. In doing so, he has made the transition from semi- to full pedagogical autonomy. It is perhaps important to emphasise that level of attainment and level of autonomy do not necessarily correspond : a beginner can be highly autonomous, an " advanced " student might be completely dependent on a formal classroom course. It follows, too,

⁸ The French term used is " animateur " for which I can find no precise English equivalent : opposed as it is to " enseignant " and " professeur ", it attributes a very different role and status.

⁹ This in turn implies a new type of post, or at least a new type of role for the " teacher " (see note 8), a role which is something like a cross between librarian, course adviser and materials developer. For want of a better term, we call the person occupying this position a " Matérielliste ". Of course, there is no reason why the same person should not be both an " animateur " and a " matérielliste ", but the two pedagogic roles — one at the systematic, the other at the non-systematic level, are to be clearly distinguished.

that the same course materials — no matter at what level they are aimed — may be used by students working semi-autonomously.

The strategy which has been outlined, with its emphasis on the development of autonomy and the provision of self-access materials, demands a well-equipped and well-stocked sound library : we are fortunate in having this, as well as a new " vidéothèque " and ample amount of ancillary equipment, such as rapid-copiers and cassette-players for home-loan use¹⁰.

For a learner to become truly autonomous, certain preparatory steps need to be taken and certain conditions need to be met. First, he must be prepared both from the psychological and technical points of view. Psychologically, he must be capable of a degree of objectivity concerning the process and progress of his learning, and this means in particular that he must fully accept the absence of a teacher¹¹. Technically, he must have at his disposal a range of methodological tools (eg. the use of the radio broadcasts mentioned earlier), including some descriptive knowledge of such linguistic concepts as register, grammar and lexis.

The conditions which must be met include the ability to define his objectives, his working conditions and the content and method of working, as well as to evaluate and adjust his progress. To meet these conditions, and to prepare the learner in the ways mentioned above, an increasing number of activities are introduced during the non-systematic stage which are directed at the acquisition of pedagogic autonomy. These include group sessions devoted to the topics which have been indicated, as well as practical demonstration of different kinds of exercises, exchange of documents and information and so on.

MATERIALS

In the preceding section, I have tried to show that a practical alternative to the " evening class system " is available and that it is one which respects the special conditions of the adult learner. Such a system stands or falls by the

¹⁰ In very general terms, the strategy described here does not, however, cost more than an " equivalent " classroom course strategy.

¹¹ Formulated thus, this statement is not quite true, of course, as the learner becomes his own teacher, the two roles remaining distinct if the condition of objectivity is to be fulfilled. It is also true that in our experiments we have regularly encountered strong resistance to the concept of autonomy from students (— and teachers !) reared on traditional classroom + teacher evening courses.

availability and quality of the materials provided : and it will have been obvious to you that there is a major gap in the schema, for whilst the systematic stage is largely provided for by our twelve courses, and our autonomous stage completely provided for by definition, I have given no explanation as to how the massive amount of materials for the non-systematic, semi-autonomous stage is to be prepared and acquired.

A very high proportion of the items is collected — as it is in any library — by direct purchase, inter-library loan, and institutional gifts or exchanges. Again, a considerable amount of material is produced by the teachers working with the C.R.A.P.E.L., much of it aimed at the specific needs and problems of individual learners. But for the moment I would like to focus on a small but burgeoning supply of materials produced within the C.R.A.P.E.L. by another of our project-groups.

This project group is the Commission de Langue Orale, a group of applied linguists whose specialised interests include grammar, phonetics, psycholinguistics, the philosophy of language and sociolinguistics, but who share a common interest in the description and definition of spoken language, and in face-to-face communication and interaction¹². To pursue these interests a corpus of authentic, spontaneous materials has been gathered for study and analysis¹³. But although the immediate interest of the group is linguistic research of a theoretical nature, the application of that research in the form of materials is also a primary motive : the overall objective of this project is, then, “ d’essayer d’améliorer la compétence de communication par l’apprentissage sociolinguistique des fonctions de discours et un entraînement psycholinguistique ”. This means that the overriding theme of the theoretical research is the isolation, study and description of language functions : consequently, the materials produced by this group concentrate on different aspects of communicative competence, such as “ Demande d’information ”.

Even from the necessarily brief descriptions I have given, it will, I hope, have been evident that the two project groups I have mentioned, whilst preserving their separate interests and identities, do overlap at a number of important points. Of course, the most important is the most obvious — that one group

¹² For fuller discussion of the work and approach of the Commission de Langue Orale, see “ Le discours oral ”, in *Mélanges pédagogiques 1972* and “ Vers un enseignement de l’expression orale en anglais ”, in *Mélanges pédagogiques 1973*.

¹³ Great care has been taken to obtain a consistent, controlled corpus. Note that “ authentic ” throughout this article is used in the sense of “ not prepared for pedagogical purposes ”, while “ spontaneous ” “ ... ne signifie pas ici “ non surveillé ” mais *improvisé dans le hic et nunc de la communication*. Ceci implique le déroulement concomitant de l’encodage et de la communication et, partant, l’absence de retour en arrière et d’effacement ” (“ Le discours oral ”, p. 5).

produces materials which the other group can put to use. Obvious or not, it is important to make it, because it highlights the way in which group-project research structure, with its ease of lateral exchange, facilitates a fruitful, ongoing co-operation. Each group, for its own reasons, is interested in highly specific aspects of different communication situations giving rise to a coincidence of interest rather than to compartmentalisation.

Again, both projects require a corpus of recorded materials, one as a basis for self-access materials and a sound library, the other for scientific analysis. Perhaps a less immediately obvious consequence of this is that both groups share a commitment to the production of materials based on and incorporating only *authentic* documents. Whereas it is now generally accepted that, for reasons of scientific methodology, authentic materials are essential to analysis, the implications for language teaching, or even for applied linguistics in the wider sense, are not always faced. The majority of courses and materials being produced are still based on the intuitions of the authors and even when these are supported by sophisticated theories they idealize and simplify both performance and structure to the point of misrepresentation¹⁴.

I am afraid that I must risk labouring this point, as it is one that is seldom taken completely seriously, even though occasional lip-service may be paid to it : when we say we believe that only authentic materials should be used, we mean *only* authentic materials. That is, not just the odd chunk thrown in from time to time for a bit of local colour, but the whole of the material in the target language : this is especially true for listening comprehension work, above all at the advanced and intermediate levels, but it is not pure fantasy to envisage a course where even, say, production drills for beginners were so constructed. Of course this is the statement of an ideal, and it is not always practically feasible ; the utterance in the corpus may be very poorly recorded, or there may not be enough examples to provide a drill. But in general it is both possible and desirable to produce materials for all language skills and at all levels exclusively on and from authentic recordings.

As can well be imagined the production of such materials is enormously time-consuming : so much so that it is often thought to be impossible. It requires, first, the establishment of the corpus — and some kinds of recordings are notoriously difficult to obtain, partly for technical reasons, partly because of “ observer effect ”. The recordings must then be subjected to various kinds of analysis,

¹⁴ For a fuller exposition of the arguments in favour of the use of authentic materials see Riley, “ The language laboratory : implications of the functional approach ”, in this volume.

which, in turn, necessitate a complete transcript. The work of searching, classifying and filing then has to be done before tasks of editing and montage can be carried out : the whole process can be fairly described as slow, technical and laborious. Using authentic documents is not just an easy way out of writing your own materials.

It is this process, then, which is undertaken by members of the Commission de Langue Orale¹⁵. And it is this process — the transformation of the raw material of the corpus into teaching materials designed to exercise certain aspects of communicative competence, but adapted to a particular strategy — that we can describe as “ from fact to function ”. Within it, we have distinguished two sets of facts and functions : the linguistic facts of the corpus and the communicative functions on the one hand, and the pedagogical facts — the situation of our adult learners — and pedagogical functions, the strategy of autonomy, on the other. The correspondence between the two is rendered even neater by the fact that, since no taxonomy of functions exists, descriptions of functions cannot be ordered and must by and large be dealt with separately : this modular treatment fits in exactly with the requirements for self-access materials described earlier. Each set is the major field of interest of one of the two project-groups I have been talking about : taken together, they form an interlocking system where the flow from linguistic theory to pedagogical application is facilitated by the structure of the institution in question.

¹⁵ To eliminate any suspicions that we must be forced to skimp on this work, I should mention that we do in fact have a fair amount of secretarial and mechanical assistance.