

4_Language_function

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LANGUAGE FUNCTION ORIENTED TEACHING

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Abstract:

Being a closed system, language is discussed without considering its context (decontextualization). Being an open system, language is discussed along with its context. The proponents of contextualized language teaching argue that teaching learners the 'closed' system of language is not sufficient. Teachers should also teach language functions. Consequently language teachers commence to incorporate the insights of language functions into language instruction. It is this issue that becomes the center of this paper. More particularly, this paper is intended to provide a somewhat illustrative model of language instruction by revitalizing the 'open' orientation of language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language can be approached from two different points of view. The first point of view deals with a linguistic answer – which is termed as a closed orientation. The second point of view – an open orientation – is related to a human science answer, or extralinguistic context - using Nunan (1999)'s term.

Bell (1981:19) claims that as a **closed** system, "Language is internally consistent but insulated from the environment in which it occurs". He goes on claiming that as an **open** system, language is "interacting with, changed by, and changing its environment" (Bell, 1981:22).

Leech (1983:46) puts forward that language is, to formalists, primarily a mental phenomenon, while to functionalists, language is primarily a social phenomenon. Though these two orientations are completely contradictory to one another, each of them "has a considerable amount of truth". To be precise, Leech (1983:46) points out, " ... it would be foolish to deny that language is a psychological phenomenon and equally foolish to deny that it is a social phenomenon."

The proponents of contextualized language teaching argue that language instruction which centers on closed system is not sufficient. Teachers should also teach language functions. Consequently language teachers commence to incorporate the insights of language functions into language instruction. This particular issue becomes the center of this paper. More particularly, this paper is intended to provide a somewhat illustrative model of language instruction by revitalizing the 'open' orientation of language. Prior to this main point, the paper is firstly attempting to discuss formal orientation and functional orientation of language. Secondly, it is going to put forward the discussion of language functions.

II FORMAL ORIENTATION

Language can be studied independently. By this orientation language is typically regarded as "a closed system" (Wilkins, 1972:70 and Bell, 1981:19). It is closed as it is "insulated from the environment in which it occurs" (Bell, 1981:19). Similarly, Leech (1983:46) claims that language is formally regarded as "an autonomous system". It is "decontextualization which separates sentences from their contexts of use or occurrence and treats them as self-contained and isolated units" (Coulthard, 1985:12).

Listing the difference between formalism and functionalism, Leech (1983:46) puts forward the nature of language viewed by formalists. Language is formally regarded as a mental phenomenon. Language is assumed to derive from "a common genetic linguistic inheritance of the human species". Language acquisition is formally assumed to be "a built-in human capacity". At last, language is formally viewed as "an autonomous system".

As a closed or autonomous system language is form oriented. Language is "sounds, letters, their combinations into larger units such as words, sentences and so forth" (Bell, 1981:19). Simply language is seen as a grammatical, structural system. Teaching a language therefore means teaching the grammar or the structure of the respective language.

III FUNCTIONAL ORIENTATION

By this orientation language is typically regarded as "an open system". It is open as it is "interacting with, changed by, and changing its environment" Bell (1981:22). The word 'environment' is the key to refer to the context dependence. Nunan (1999: 142-143) uses the term organic view – a view of language in context - to refer to this open system.

Listing the difference between formalism and functionalism, Leech (1983:46) puts forward the nature of language viewed by functionalists. Language is functionally regarded as a societal phenomenon. Language is believed to derive from “the universality of the uses to which language is put in human societies”. Language acquisition is functionally believed to be “the development of communication needs and ability in society”.

Language as an open system is pragmatically dependent upon the context where it appears. In other words, language should be explained “by reference to external factors (especially causes and functions)” (Levinson, 1983:40), rather than by internal factors which are the main concern of formal orientation. In short, language cannot be studied independently. How can one know the exact meaning of ‘train’? The contextualized language: ‘The train just left. You missed it again.’ or ‘Their parents train them strictly: no snack while studying’ does help one to mean. How can one know the intended meaning of ‘I am upstairs’? It is not yet really understood until it is put as the response after ‘Mina, could you check who’s at the door?’ The context is indeed needed to make it meaningful.

Deemphasizing the formal aspects of language becomes the favor of functionalists as they believe that contextualized language instruction is more meaningful to learners thus assisting the learners to gain more language competence. Brown (2001:56) obviously argues, “Students will gain more language competence in the long run if the **functional** purposes of language are the focal point.”

As its name suggests, functional orientation therefore concentrates on the function of language. Showing the close relation between functional orientation and functions of language, Yalden (1987:55) claims: “Once the functional view of language is adopted, it is evident that the central question becomes: what are the functions of language?” Therefore, the discussion on functions of language is worth presenting. We will now turn to this point before the main issue of this paper is revealed.

IV FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Quoted by Bell (1976:84-85; 1981:120) and by Levinson (1983:41), Jacobson (1960) suggests six functions of language. They are as follows:

- 1) *Referential/cognitive* function which focuses on the referential context of the language - the object, topic and content of the discourse.
- 2) *Emotive/expressive/affective* function which focuses on the speaker or addresser to express his emotion.
- 3) *Conative/directive* function which focuses on the speaker's wishes that the hearer do or think as expected.
- 4) *Metalinguistic* function which focuses on the code being used or the language used to talk about language.
- 5) *Phatic/interaction management* function which focuses on the channel or on the establishment and maintenance of contact.
- 6) *Poetic* function which focuses on the way in which message is encoded.

The six function of language above is also termed 'basic components of communicational event' (see Bell, 1976:84-85; 1981:120) or the the six 'more sophisticated view of language functions' (see Levinson, 1983:41).

MAK Halliday (1973) quoted by Wilkinson (1975: 54, 169-173) provides a general account of language functions revealing that language is a part of social behaviour and that it expresses one's attitude. The set of language functions provided by Halliday consists of seven types as follows:

- 1) *Instrumental*. This *instrumental* function shows that language is used for manipulating and controlling the environment.
- 2) *Regulatory*. This *regulatory* function shows that language is used for one's being controlled by others.
- 3) *Interactional*. This *interactional* function shows that language is used for defining and consolidating the group, imposing and showing status.
- 4) *Personal*. This *personal* function shows that language is used for expressing feeling and attitude, reinforcing, creating individuality.
- 5) *Heuristic*. This *heuristic* function shows that language is used for exploring environment, investigating reality, seeking facts, the explanation of facts and generalization.
- 6) *Imaginative*. This function shows that language is used for creating one's own environment, not for learning about how things are but for making them as one feels inclined.

7) *Representational*. This *representational* function indicates that language is used for communicating about something, conveying a message which has specific reference to the processes, persons, objects, abstractions, qualities, states and relations of the real worlds.

Wilkinson (1975:56-57) classifies language functions into three. The first function concerns with the self-expression. In Wilkinson's words, it belongs to *Who am I?* group. The second function belonging to *Who are you?* group concerns with the relationships with others - establishing, maintaining contacts, and co-operating. The third function belonging to *Who/what is he/she/it?* group concerns with the exploration of the world that was, that is, that will be. The following set of language functions of Wilkinson's is worth quoting to clarify the short analysis above (Wilkinson, 1975:56-57):

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Who am I? | 1 Establishing and maintaining self |
| | 2 Language for analyzing self |
| | 3 Language for expressing self (for celebrating or despairing, etc.) |
| Who are you? | 4 Establishing and maintaining relationships |
| | 5 Co-operating |
| | 6 Empathizing, understanding the other |
| | 7 Role playing, mimicry |
| | 8 Guiding, directing the other |
| Who/what is he/she/it? | 9 Giving information |
| | 10 Recalling past events (past) |
| | 11 Describing present events (present) |
| | 12 Predicting future events - statement of intention
statement of hypothesis,
what might happen |
| | 13 Analyzing, classifying |
| | 14 Explaining, giving reasons for |
| | 15 Exploring - asking questions, but in other ways also, by
'sounding out' people |
| | 16 Reflecting on own/other's thought and feelings |

Searle (1976) quoted in Levinson (1983:240) points out five kinds of language functions. The five macro classes of illocutionary acts (see Coulthard, 1985:24) proposed by Searle are:

- 1) *Representative*: to commit speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition of which the typical examples are asserting and concluding.
- 2) *Directives*: to get the addresser to do something (requesting, questioning are its typical examples).

- 3) *Commissives*: to commit the speaker to some future course of action (promising, threatening, offering are its typical examples).
- 4) *Expressives*: to express a psychological state (thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating are its typical examples).
- 5) *Declarations*: to effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (excommunicating, declaring war, firing from employment are its typical examples).

The following set of language functions is taken from the one of Bell's (1981). Bell (1981:119-120) maintains three kinds of language functions. Firstly and primarily, being *cognitive*, language is used for conveying information, focusing on the context in which the message is transmitted, referring to objects and concepts. Secondly, being *indexical* (using Abercrombie's term) language is used for telling about the speaker (his age, sex, social class, level of education, his attitude to the topic and to other participants). Thirdly, being interactive (having *interaction management*), language is used for conveying participation in the process of communication.

Cook (1989:25-26) considering the seven ⁴elements of communication (addresser, addressee, channel, message form, topic, code and setting) puts forward seven sorts of language functions. They are as follows:

The emotive function: communicating the inner states and emotions of the addresser ('Oh no!', 'Fantastic', 'Ugh!', and swear words used as exclamations).

The directive function: seeking to affect the behaviour of the addressee ('Please help me!', 'Shut up!', 'I'm warning you!').

The phatic function: opening the channel or checking that it is working, either for social reasons ('Hello', 'Lovely weather', 'Do you come here often?') or for practical ones ('Can you hear me?', 'Are you still there?', 'Can you see the blackboard from the back of the room?', 'Can you read my writing?').

²
The poetic function: in which the particular form chosen is the essence of the message. (The advertising slogan BEANZ MEINZ HEINZ would lose its point if it were paraphrased as 'If you are buying beans, you will naturally buy Heinz'.)

³
The referential function: carrying information.

The metalinguistic function: focusing attention upon the code itself, to clarify it or to renegotiate it ('What does this word mean?', 'This bone is known as "femur"', ' "Will" and "shall" mean the same thing nowadays'). This book has largely metalinguistic function.

²
The contextual function: creating a particular kind of communication ('Right, let's start the lecture', 'It's just a game').

The language functions put forward by some linguists and sociolinguists have been depicted. The synthesis of those language functions is now worth presenting. It appears in the next paragraph.

Jakobson's *referential/cognitive* is the same as Halliday's *representational*, Wilkinson's *who/what is?*, Searle's *representatives*, Bell's *cognitive* and Cook's *referential*. Jakobson's *emotive, expressive, affective* is the same as Halliday's *personal*, Wilkinson's *who am I?*, Searle's *expressives and declarations*, Bell's *indexical*, and Cook's *emotive*. Jakobson's *conative/directive* is the same as Halliday's *instrumental*, Wilkinson's *who are you*, Searle's *directive*, Bell's *indexical* and Cook's *directive*. Jakobson's *metalinguistic* is the same as Halliday's *heuristic*, and Cook's *metalinguistic*. Jakobson's *phatic interaction* is the same as Halliday's *interactional*, Wilkinson's *who are you?*, Bell's *interaction management*, and Cook's *phatic and contextual function*. Jakobson's *poetic* is the same as Halliday's *imaginative*, Wilkinson's *who am I?*, and Cook's *poetic*. Halliday's *regulatory* is the same as Searle's *commissive*. This particular sort of language function can actually be pondered as directive function of language as it is related to doing things. It can consequently be combined as one sort of language function.

The following table is presented as the summary of the discussion on the previous paragraph:

Language Function Proponent	Kinds of Language Function					
Jakobson (1960)	<i>referential, cognitive</i>	<i>emotive/ expressive/ affective</i>	<i>conative/ directive</i>	<i>meta-linguistic</i>	<i>phatic interaction</i>	<i>poetic</i>
Halliday (1973)	<i>representational</i>	<i>personal</i>	<i>instrumental and regulatory</i>	<i>heuristic</i>	<i>interactional</i>	<i>Imaginative</i>
Wilkinson (1975)	<i>who/what is he/she/it?</i>	<i>who am I?</i>	<i>who are you?</i>	-	<i>Who am I?</i>	<i>who am I?</i>
Searle (1976)	<i>representatives</i>	<i>expressives and declaration</i>	<i>directive and commissive</i>	-	-	
Bell (1981)	<i>cognitive</i>	<i>indexical</i>	<i>indexical</i>	-	<i>interaction management</i>	-
Cook (1989)	<i>referential</i>	<i>emotive</i>	<i>directive</i>	<i>meta-linguistic</i>	<i>phatic and contextual</i>	<i>poetic</i>

The table above closes the language function discussion. It is then high time we turned to the main issue of this paper. It highlights the exemplification of language instruction by revitalizing language function.

V LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS REVITALIZED FOR LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The formal orientation of language has been depicted above and so has the functional orientation. The writer will now focus more closely on pedagogical concerns. Some of the different ways of revitalizing the 'open' orientation of language follow.

In the teaching of adverb of frequency, one exercise type is unscrambling words to form grammatically correct sentences. This is intended to check the learners' mastery of putting the adverb correctly in the right place. One way to activate the functional use of language is to add another exercise type to continue the previous formed sentences. Here is the typical exercise:

Scramble the words in brackets!

1. Are you (late, class, for, ever)? _____?
2. Are you (sleepy, ever, class, in)? _____?
3. Are you (sad, holidays, ever, during)? _____?
4. Are you (at, ever, hungry, night)? _____?
5. Are you (to, your, do, homework, ever, lazy)? _____?
6. Are you (in, ever, class, serious)? _____?
7. Are you (ever, from, absent, class)? _____?

After asking the learners to do the above exercise individually, they can be encouraged to form pairs to deal with the following exercise:

Now form pairs. Make a question and answer dialogue. Use the adverbs of frequency (*always, usually, often, sometimes, seldom or never*).

- e.g. A: Are you ever late for class?
B: Well, I'm seldom late for class

The additional exercise indicates implicitly the referential function of language revitalized in the teaching. The students are involved in asking and giving information.

In the same grammar instruction about adverbs of frequency, forming the following exercise type is expected to incorporate the other functions of language.

Respond to what your partner says to you. First of all, find a partner and ask your teacher a set of cards to play with. Student A takes the card and based on what is written on the card shouts it to student B. Student B responds angrily and student A apologizes.

- e.g. A: (gets a card on which 'Peng, Gepeng' was written and shouts) Peng, Gepeng!
B: Never call me 'Gepeng'!
A: Oh, I'm sorry. I'll never call you "Gepeng" again.
B: Oh oo... what a friend I have!

Implied in the above exercise type is that the directive function of language is inserted when B is guided to respond *Never call me 'Gepeng'!* and when A continues *I'll never call you "Gepeng" again*. Another function - personal function of language - is shown in B's *Oh oo... what a friend I have!* It shows that B expresses his/her feeling. B is thanking A because A promises not to do the thing disliked.

The poetic function of language is incorporated in the following exercise type:

Work in groups to complete the imaginative exercise! Have fun with language!

I have never seen _____
|
never
never expect it, of course!
I sometimes hope to _____
|
but
I will always
always _____

e.g.

I have never seen a man with 4 ears
|
never
never expect it, of course!
I sometimes hope to play with tigers
|
but
I will always
always want to play with Mickey Mouse

VI CONCLUSION

This paper has put forward the review on formal vs. functional orientation. It goes on presenting the discussion of language function. This paper has then provided a model of how the language function can be incorporated in the teaching. The model presented is merely illustrative to encourage teachers to find other alternatives in keeping language as the 'heart' of the teaching.

To make the attempt successful, teachers need to be creative especially in the discussion in the classroom. As an example, when dealing with the exercise type as exemplified in

A: Peng, Gepeng!
B: Never call me 'Gepeng'!
A: Oh, I'm sorry. I'll never call you "Gepeng" again.
B: Oh oo... what a friend I have!

The teacher can discuss who A is, who B is (discuss what the relation between A & B is) and more importantly the discussion should lead students to learn that B gets annoyed hence instructing A not to do something, that A apologizes before committing him/herself to do something, and that B eventually expresses his/her gratefulness. The discussion in each exercise type, in conclusion, is very essential. It should lead students to know the function of language; it should lead students to learn to mean.

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