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TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A TENTATIVE ENTERPRISE

The paper deals with the issue of teaching a foreign language from a dialogic perspective that focuses on the integration of different means of communication. Teaching how to interact in a foreign language does not aim at knowledge of a certain set of verbal devices but at competence-in-performance in dialogic interaction. After an overview of the state of the art in applied linguistics, the activity of teaching is described as a tentative enterprise insofar as it does not necessarily lead to learning. The concept of language as dialogue is explained as dialogic competence-in-performance. Having clarified the basic notions of language and teaching, a foreign language syllabus is proposed that starts from simple action games and proceeds to suggesting a set of utterance variants. Special attention is paid to principles of politeness, to lexical means for predicating and to grammatical means of referring. Finally, general guidelines are offered for more effective teaching that can improve the process of learning.

Keywords: competence-in-performance, learning, language as dialogue, syllabus, action game, politeness.

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1. The issue

In considering the issue of teaching a foreign language we need to think about the concept of language and the activity of teaching. There is no lack of concepts of language nor of teaching. Nevertheless teaching a foreign language is still a tentative and laborious enterprise, never fully successful. The difficulties are due to the complexity of the object language and to the fact that teaching aims at a human capability which cannot be processed as a succession of cause and effect.

In our pragmatic times we know that language means language use for communicative purposes. In my view, communication is always dialogically directed. In this sense I start from a concept of language as dialogue (Weigand 2003). Such a concept however is bedevilled by a problem that has only recently been fully recognized, the problem of the integration of different means of communication. When we communicate, we do not only act verbally. We also use perceptual means of communication, e.g., gestures, and cognitive means, e.g., inferences, which cannot be dealt with separately but must be approached as integral parts of communication.

Language in this sense cannot be taught by teaching syntactic structures and vocabulary. Teaching how to interact in a foreign language does not aim at knowledge of a certain set of verbal devices but at competence-in-performance in dialogic interaction.

The challenge we are facing is the challenge of an endeavour which multiplies the complexities of language by the complexities of an activity called teaching. In the first instance, teaching can be grasped as a communicative activity which is carried out by an expert and which aims at enabling other human beings to achieve new or more proficient skills. It becomes immediately obvious that such an attempt to change human skills will be a highly complex process which is dependent on a multitude of variables, general and individual ones. Purely listing such variables in a compositional schema can only be a first heuristic step. What is needed is to see how these variables are mutually connected in the process of teaching a foreign language.

After this still totally provisional approximation to a complex issue, I will first take a brief look at the current state of research on language teaching and learning before trying to make a fresh start in addressing the activity of teaching and its relationship to foreign languages.

2. Some remarks on the state of the art

In applied linguistics there is a vast literature on language teaching and learning which amounts to a rather confusing *puzzle of multiple aspects*. An underlying understanding of the whole is however missing. *With respect to teaching*, the issues relate to the goal of teaching and to the way how teaching and learning is conceived of. Usually teaching is considered to be informing, transmitting knowledge (Gass & Selinker 2001: 2, 12). Even Coulthard (1977: 101), in the first edition of 'Discourse Analysis' describes teaching as *informing and instructing*, in the second edition (1985²) he does not touch precisely this point any more. Certainly, teaching is something like instructing but this tautology is of no much help in understanding the phenomenon. On the other hand, teaching has to do with informing but nevertheless teaching and informing have two basically different goals.

With respect to the process of *teaching and learning*, we are confronted with the concept of so-called *interlanguages* (e.g., Gass & Selinker 2001: 12). Everybody knows that language learning advances from simple to more complicated and varied structures and is inevitably accompanied by making mistakes. If these mistakes fossilize and hinder or even stop the learning process, this will certainly raise a serious problem but I would doubt whether it can be avoided or overcome by experimentally documenting different levels of 'interlanguage'. For applied linguists however the point about interlanguages is that they may tell us something about how learners learn and indicate whether some kind of language acquisition process is taking place, which may be universal and may also apply to foreign language learners.

As far as I see there is only one type of approach to *learning* that can claim to cope with the issue of integrated, mutually dependent variables, namely the *connectionist perspective on development*, described, for instance, by Elman and others (1996) in their book on 'Rethinking Innateness'. Integration means interaction. Change of abilities according to this view 'arises through the interaction of maturational factors, under genetic control, and the environment' (p. 1f.). Up to recent years this position, which goes back to classic developmentalists such as Piaget, has been lacking a solid theoretical basis. Recent developments in the neurosciences and in computational modeling however suggest that a 'theory of emergent form may be within our grasp'.

With respect to language the situation in applied linguistics is even worse. Again a solid understanding of the phenomenon is lacking. But this does not seem to cause problems, on the contrary, it seems to be fostered by applied linguists because it offers the chance of creating and maintaining a new discipline. Thus, for instance, Widdowson (2003), puts forward a linguistic view of language as a sign system that is simply out-of-date. Moreover, he seems to assume that he has the authority to tell linguists what they have to do, e.g. (pp. 7 and 10f.):

> If linguistics could provide us with representations of experienced language, it would be of no interest whatever. Linguistic accounts of language only have point to the extent that they are detached from, and different from, the way language is experienced in the real world.

> To my mind, then, it is not within the brief of linguists to make useful theories. ... So the linguist, qua linguist, is not in a position to judge what use might be made of linguistic theory and description. Their usefulness potential is for others to realize.

For such a distinction between theory and practical use, Widdowson refers to physics and the construction of the atom bomb and completely ignores the fact that this case is quite different from the relationship between linguistics and applied linguistics. The construction of the atom bomb did not change the laws of physics but was based on them. On the contrary, what Widdowson has in mind amounts to influencing and changing linguistic theory. He emphasizes the gap between theory and practice in order to attribute the goal of 'appropriation of linguistics for educational purposes' to applied linguistics. 'Appropriation' according to him 'involves a process of mediation whereby the linguist's abstract version of reality is referred back to the actualities of the language classroom. And this essentially is what applied linguistics seeks to do' (p. 8).

Besides Widdowson's thesis of a self-determinating pan-syllabus of mediation there are multiple other partial syllabuses for almost every linguistic type of approach, e.g. focusing on knowledge of rules and the human mind according to generative guidelines (Gass & Selinker 2001), or focusing on form versus meaning (Ellis 2001) according to the basic structuralistic dichotomy, or the lexical syllabus being based on different lexical models (e.g., Lewis 1993; Sinclair 1998). Communicative aspects are mostly dealt with separately and added to the grammatical syllabus,

e.g., by Gumperz (1996) who focuses on the sociocultural context. A new perspective is offered by the use of corpora in language teaching (e.g., Sinclair 2004).

A few researchers are aware of the fact that language-in-use or dialogic interaction does not result from an addition of sign system and communicative factors but represents an integrated whole. Consequently, a teaching syllabus has to start from a communicative or dialogic basis (e.g. Lorenzen & Taborn 1983). In this respect, 'communicative grammars' or 'grammars-in-use' can be considered a promising step though they often lack a consistent theoretical basis and focus on single expressions such as modal verbs (e.g. Murphy 1994; Leech & Svartvik 1975). Wilkins' notional syllabus (1977) however is an outstanding exception with a solid speech act theoretical basis.

The most confusing features of the current state of research in applied linguistics are, on the one hand, the arbitrarity of the puzzle and, on the other hand, the complacent claim of applied linguists that they know better than linguists what linguistics is about. Instead of relegating linguistics to the abstract field of artificial theory and creating a new discipline of mediation between theory and practice, reflection on the nature of the phenomena language and teaching are required. What we need are not polemical remarks but interdisciplinary cooperation on the basis of a solid linguistic theory of language use which starts from the nature of the phenomenon and is applicable to practice. It is only the nature of the phenomena of language and of teaching which is capable of disentangling the *puzzle* and making the underlying *mosaique* transparent.

3. The phenomenon of teaching

In an article which appeared about 15 years ago on 'Fundamentals of the Action Game of Instructing' (Weigand 1989), I described teaching as a specific action game like other action games such as informing or arguing. Rethinking teaching again I believe we can no longer regard teaching an action game like others. Certainly, it is an action game but a very specific and complex one.

Let us first pose the question whether transcriptions of authentic school lessons can be our starting point in this issue. In the linguistic literature, mainly of sociolinguistic and conversation analytic provenance, authentic discourse of school lessons is taken as discourse of teaching and minutely analysed. For a few seconds of speaking more than twenty pages

of transcription and description are needed. In the end, it becomes obvious that the authentic text does not really deal with teaching but, for instance, with disciplinary problems or with planning the next school party or the like. The alleged methodological exigency of starting from so-called empirical 'data' turns out to be a methodological fallacy insofar as it is not at all clear what 'data' really are. There is no empirical evidence as such. The only starting point has to be the attempt to understand the phenomenon (Weigand 2004b).

For professionals of language teaching and for applied linguists, however, analysis of classroom interaction can provide valuable insights into how teachers really see the teaching process, i.e. how they put a methodology that they have learnt theoretically into practice. It can also show up differences of approach and point to good classroom practice and procedures which will facilitate the language learning process. Moreover, it demonstrates how learners respond to language learning situations and how they interpret various types of teaching techniques, communicative, functional, grammatical ones.

Teaching undoubtedly is some sort of intentional activity. The question for us is whether teaching as intentional activity represents an action game like the other ordinary games, for instance, representative or directive ones. Usually action is based on the concept of *intention* (Anscombe 1957). But does this suffice? If we intend to move an object from one place to another but do not succeed because the object turns out to be too heavy, did we carry out the action of moving? It seems that having the intention does not yet make up action, there must be some *effect* caused by the intention. Otherwise the intention is restricted to the attempt to act.

Let us now compare more precisely ordinary speech acts with speech acts of teaching. A representative speech act, for instance, expresses a claim to truth related to a specific proposition. By producing, e.g., the utterance *communication is always dialogic* the speaker expresses his/her claim to the truth of the proposition. Speaking in this sense is acting:

Table 1: Speaking as acting

speaking	=	acting
utterance		representative speech act
Communication is always dialogic.		CLAIM TO TRUTH [always(dialogic(communication))]

In contrast to orthodox speech act theory, I do not consider the single act as an autonomous communicative unit. Communication proceeds in sequences of initiative and reactive acts. By the very functional structure of the initiative act a certain expectation for the reactive act is set up: in our case, the representative speech act aims at a reactive speech act of acceptance. In general, the action principle thus entails the dialogic principle proper in the sense that the speaker expects the interlocutor to take up the very claim of the initiative act in accepting or rejecting it:

Table 2: Basic dialogical speech act types

representative	↔	acceptance
directive	↔	consent
explorative	↔	response
declarative	[↔	confirmation]

But where does teaching fit in? In contrast to ordinary speech acts, speaking is not yet teaching, nor can the goal of teaching, namely learning, be rationally or conventionally derived from teaching:

Table 3: Speaking, teaching and learning

speaking	=|=	teaching
teaching	←|→	learning

Even if we can presuppose that teachers have the intention of enabling their students to improve certain abilities, i.e. to learn, there is nevertheless no guarantee that learning will be achieved. There is no speech act nor sequence of speech acts of the kind that speaking counts as teaching. The intention of the teacher therefore can only be considered as an *attempt to teach* by the use of ordinary speech acts such as asking, informing, and requesting:

Table 4: Teaching as tentative action

attempting to teach	→	learning
by asking		
informing		
requesting		

In the process of teaching, the ordinary action games of asking, informing and requesting are modified as we, above all, know from the so-called *teacher's question*. Teachers are not in need of knowledge but ask questions the answer of which they already know. They pose these questions in order to guide the process of learning.

In the same way as speaking does not yet count as teaching, the intentional attempt to teach does not necessarily lead to learning. We here address the often cited gap between the efforts taken by the teacher and the results demonstrated by the learner. Even if we can assume that teachers expect their students to learn, this type of expectation remains the *hope* that learning is made easier. We are confronted with an old problem of speech act theory, namely the problem of *perlocutionary* psychological effects. Learning as the result of teaching seems to be some sort of perlocutionary cognitive effect that in the end is not in the intentional reach of the teacher. It is not as simple as with normal speech acts: produce the utterance and the effect will be there. The effect is desired, intended, at best approached. Whether it really occurs needs to be tested. *Tests* therefore become an essential part in the process of teaching and learning.

There are obviously action games such as teaching which use ordinary speech act sequences in order to influence the cognitive abilities and attitudes of the interlocutors. Advertising also belongs to this type. *Advertising* uses ordinary speech acts of directives, representatives, or exploratives with the intention of changing behaviour. Whether this intent will really have an effect is however not in the actual reach of the advertising company. Advertising thus, like teaching, inevitably remains an attempt at influencing behaviour.

At this point *didactic questions* about how to support the learning process come in. The teacher is supposed to be an expert, i.e. to have a higher degree of competence than the students in the subject matter to be taught. He therefore has to make efforts to present and explain the subject matter in a way that it can be grasped by the learner. I call this essential didactic exigency *matching horizons*.

Teaching a foreign language is not simply a matter of rules nor a matter of knowledge as, for instance, Gass & Selinker (2001) make us believe, since language use *goes beyond knowledge of rules* and to a large extent is simply *use*. Language acquisition happens in language use. Teaching a foreign language needs to make *conscious* what native speakers have learned in language acquisition in large part *unconsciously*. It is

ordinary language use not artificially constructed models which will give us guidelines for our understanding of the nature of language.

4. The phenomenon of language

The object of teaching in our case is a foreign language. In order to understand a foreign language we need to compare it with our mother language. As mentioned above I consider language to be the human ability to speak, an ability which cannot be separated but is always integratively used with other human abilities in dialogic interaction, among them the abilities to think and to perceive. Human beings are able to orientate themselves as social individuals in ever-changing surroundings in an adaptive and constructive manner. They are not the victims of the complex; on the contrary, they are able to master it by means of their dialogic competence-in-performance. Such a concept of language inevitably goes beyond the narrow scope of traditional linguistics as the science of language structure and necessitates a genuinely interdisciplinary approach (Weigand 2002a).

The history of linguistics is full of differing concepts of language. They are mostly set up rather arbitrarily. In contrast, the concept of language as an integrated part of dialogic competence-in-performance is justified by the survival needs of the species. To consider the human species simply as the symbolic species falls much too short. It is communication, not the creation of signs which guarantees the survival of the dialogic species.

Foreign languages are not simply different languages, separate from our mother language. We can understand our mother language fully only if we know a foreign language, i.e., language comparison becomes a constitutive feature of analysis of every individual language. For instance, in order to know the meaning of *high* in English you need to know how it is used in English and how this meaning is expressed in a foreign language, for instance, in German. The English phrase *with high seriousness* is to be translated into German by using the so-called antonym *tief: mit tiefem Ernst*. Language comparison thus draws our attention to essential descriptive consequences which would otherwise remain hidden.

In any case, we have to refrain from contriving definitions and codes. Methodology has to be derived from the object not vice versa. In order to address an integrational complex object we need a key with which to open up the whole and we need to know the minimal communicatively

autonomous unit. The minimal unit in which interaction can take place is the cultural unit of the action game with human beings at the centre who act and react by means of their communicative abilities. There can be no separation of text and context, of language and interaction nor of language and culture. The *key* to opening up the integrational whole has to be a crucial feature of human beings' behaviour. In my view, it is basic needs, interests and purposes which are fundamental to human actions and, in the end, are verified by survival needs.

In the action game human beings negotiate meaning and understanding by means of principles of probability. They use rules and regularities as far as they go in order to structure the complex, but even the use of rules is dependent on probabilities which are the basic condition of performance. There are different types of probability principles: constitutive, regulative and executive ones. Constitutive principles – the action principle, the dialogic principle proper, and the coherence principle – constitute human dialogic interaction. They operate at the level of speech act categories such as representatives, directives, exploratives and declaratives and focus on basic premises of the concepts of action, dialogue and coherence. The Action Principle is based on what makes up action, namely the correlation between purposes and means. Practical actions have a practical purpose that is pursued by practical means, communicative actions have a communicative purpose pursued by communicative means. The Dialogic Principle proper bears on the fact that every communicative action is dialogically oriented and is not autonomous. It is the very functional structure of the initiative act that indicates what reactive act can be expected. The Coherence Principle is based on the integration of different communicative means, verbal, cognitive, and perceptual. It is human beings who therefore establish coherence in their minds in trying to understand the interplay of different types of communicative means (Weigand 2000).

Regulative principles mediate between different human abilities according to cultural parameters, for instance, between reason and emotion or between the interest of the individual and respect towards the other human being. It is precisely this principle of regulation between self-interest and respect or politeness towards the other human being on which Principles of Rhetoric are based. Both components of this Regulative Principle, trying to defend effectively one's own interest and respecting the interests of our fellow beings, are necessarily connected as a result of the double nature of human beings as social individuals:

Table 5: Principles of Rhetoric

EFFECTIVENESS   ↔   RESPECT/POLITENESS
self-interest   interest of the other

Finally, there are executive principles which result from specific interests of individuals or institutions and are not usually explicitly expressed but can be detected as cognitive strategies underlying the dialogue (Weigand 2006b). They open up the vast field of complex action games which needs to be investigated theoretically in a more profound way and with reference to authentic action games. Insofar as interlocutors can use them as deliberate strategies to achieve their interests and purposes, executive principles represent a sub-part of Rhetorical Principles in general. In any case, they are principles of sequential structure, either dependent on speech act categories such as explorative sequences of clarifying or independent of specific speech act categories such as strategies of evading or insisting.

5. The foreign language syllabus

With the theory of dialogic action games we have an approach which combines theory and practice insofar as it is a theory applicable to practice. We can, for instance, describe what jurists do in the area of legal argumentation, what businessmen do in the area of business communication or how the media are used in the area of media dialogues. Teaching a foreign language however means designing a *foreign language syllabus* which I consider to be a technique by which the natural object of language-in-use is transformed into the subject matter of the classroom.

As I see it, there are in principle two alternative methods: focusing on language use versus focusing on language system. Focusing on use does not necessarily mean not focusing on rules. In its extreme form, however, focusing on use simply means communicating or trying to communicate by renouncing analysis. Many foreigners *learn* a foreign language in this way by living and working abroad and seemingly imitating what they hear and perceive. However whether these learners really learn by 'imitation' is doubtful since it is not clear what they might be imitating. It is of interest whether any language acquisition processes may still be operating in these learners and what strategies they may apply. A study of pid-

gins may have something to offer here. This way of learning in untutored and unstructured situations, however, has little to do with teaching. In any case, however, using the foreign language as far as possible as language of the classroom certainly is a valuable means for memorizing and practising language-specific routines.

The other extreme, focusing on the rule-governed language system necessarily presupposes a type of linguistic analysis that cuts the integrational object of language into pieces and changes it to a compositional one. Such a type of linguistics seems to be preferred by some applied linguists because it allows them an own area of 'mediation' or 'of making linguistics useful' as Widdowson (2003: 8) calls it. One might wonder about the fact that even in this way learning happens to some degree. The reason is that human beings equipped with the ability to learn will anyhow manage to learn even if the teaching conditions are not the optimal ones.

In my view, we cannot ignore the fact that teaching a foreign language has to take account of the *nature of the phenomenon language* as part of a complex integrated whole. In this sense, I am now going to sketch a *foreign language syllabus* which - as teaching and learning proceeds in time - necessarily has to deal with the complex whole to some degree step by step. The steps however are basically steps of increasing complexity by starting at the very beginning from the whole and always keeping track of it when focusing on components as they are related to the whole.

5.1. The starting point: Interaction means action and reaction.

The core and *starting point* of the syllabus has to be the view that by using language we interact. Interaction has to be made transparent at the universal level of meaning as action and reaction. The 'things we do with words' are negotiated at the level of interaction by making claims and fulfilling these very claims, i.e. by initiative and reactive actions. These interactive claims represent the key concepts for human dialogic interaction. We make claims about what we consider to be true and we make claims about what we want our interlocutors to do in convincing or persuading them or in influencing their action and behaviour, in any case expecting a reaction that corresponds to our claims. From here the syllabus should start with very simple examples, related to the communicative needs and purposes of the pupils, for instance, a request of the following type:

(1) REQUEST (GIVE (x,y,z)) ↔ CONSENT
Could you lend me your book? *You may have it. I don't need it in these days.*
I am sorry, I need it myself.

Even small children very quickly understand that they have such basic claims and that they can express them with specific utterances in specific situations. The underlying formula of the speech act F(p) and details of theoretical precision can be made transparent years later. Other examples of basic communicative purposes could include the following:

(2) question and answer *When does our autumn excursion take place?*

(3) problem solving   *We should discuss what we are going to do.*
Where shall we go?
What shall we do?

(4) making proposals   *We could go to the zoo.*
Couldn't we go to the zoo?

(5) evaluating proposals *It would be very useful for our next test to visit the zoo.*
I would prefer to make a trip on bike.

(6) warning   *You'd better not be late, we have to take the first bus.*
We have to start very early; otherwise the zoo will be overcrowded.

5.2. Filling up the set of utterances

Whereas the first step focused on universal meaning concepts of action, the second step introduces the perspective of language comparison. It is the universal level of meaning where different languages meet, 'vergleichbar und unvergleichlich' as Mario Wandruszka (1969) called it. The perspective of language comparison focuses on comparing utterances of different languages and on the fact that there is always more than one utterance at our disposal to express our claims:

Table 6: The speech act as an open set of utterances

communicative purpose (state of affairs)   ↔   {set of utterances}

Even small children easily understand that they have different utterances at their disposal and they use them effectively in different situations and in different moves of the sequence. In learning a foreign language students will become aware of the fact that there are, on the one hand, specific types of utterances which, as types, seem to be universal: the *direct, indirect and idiomatic utterance* (Weigand 2003). On the other hand, they have to learn language specific features, i.e. differences between their mother language and the foreign language. I cannot go into details of morphological form or inflection but would like to emphasize a few lexical and grammatical particularities in comparing English as a foreign language with German. Let us consider the following sets of utterances in English and German:

(7) REQUEST (FETCH (x,y))   ↔
I am asking you to fetch Doris.   *Ich bitte dich*, Doris abzuholen. direct
Please fetch Doris.   Bitte hole Doris ab.   direct

Could you please fetch Doris? Könntest du Doris abholen?   indirect
Didn't you want to fetch Doris? Wolltest du nicht Doris abholen? indirect

Would you please fetch Doris?   Würdest du bitte Doris abholen? idiomatic
Today *you are going to fetch* Doris. Heute *holst du aber* Doris ab.   idiomatic
etc.   etc.

A German native speaker, for instance, has to learn that in English the progressive form is to be used, e.g., in *I am asking you* … or that the English verb *ask* corresponds to two different German verbs *fragen* and *bitten*. It will be important to emphasize the *integrational point,* namely that verbal means, such as sentence types, particles or modals, represent only a part of the communicative means used for carrying out speech acts. Thinking and perceiving are always included. Consequently there cannot be a code between verbal means and purposes. It is in principle the whole utterance as a complex of communicative means which carries the speech act. Often the utterance form has to be learned as a whole and cannot be constructed from components. In this way, step by step a *comparative utterance grammar* will emerge.

Particles are a difficult subject matter in this respect. For instance, the German utterance

(8)   ˘ Ist doch egal!

expressed with a certain intonation clearly means the opposite:

(9)   Es ist überhaupt nicht egal.

But how to express it in English? The only possibility would be to express it by *it doesn't matter* with a specific intonation pattern.

Filling up the set of utterances available in the foreign language will be an objective of the syllabus which is continually to be pursued in the process of the advance towards proficiency. The decision whether an utterance fits the set has to be made on the basis of the criterion of communicative equivalence. When introduced at the beginning of the syllabus, it suffices to have a rather rough notion of communicative equivalence which distinguishes utterances according to basic action functions. In this rough sense, all utterances of (7) would be communicatively equivalent. On a closer look, however, which would attempt to differentiate subtypes of requests and specific situations, the utterances listed in (7) are not really functional equivalents, not real paraphrases. These subtle differences have to be taken into account in the course of the syllabus at a time when the students are more proficient in their use of the foreign language.

5.3. *Principles of politeness*

In differentiating the utterances, especially direct and indirect ones, principles of politeness have to be addressed. The sociological concept of face addresses only one aspect of a multifaceted phenomenon which basically influences the choice of utterances. The theory of dialogic action games accounts for politeness as part of a regulative principle that mediates between pushing one's own goal and respecting the other human being. This regulative principle is highly dependent on culturally different systems of values and conventions (Weigand 2001: 96f.). Whereas, for instance, in German in a baker's shop we may simply use the direct utterance:

(10)   Geben Sie mir ein Vollkornbrot.

without any explicit device of politeness, in English we have to stick to polite utterance forms of the indirect or idiomatic type such as

(11)   Could I have a wholemeal loaf, please?

Especially with a negative reply, politeness in English can be expressed in a very subtle way which may seem amazing for German speakers as, for instance, in the following authentic example:

(12) A We'll have dinner together?
     B It seems that probably I will not be able to be in time.
        So please go ahead without me.

If the syllabus claims to deal with such perfect ways of native language use, authentic examples are needed. They can however not be formally retrieved from a corpus but need evaluation either by an insider of the action game or by the linguist as observer.

5.4. Predicating

In any syllabus, vocabulary will play a crucial role. In an action theoretic approach vocabulary contains the means for *predicating*. These means are not single words to be inserted into abstract syntactic structures nor do they have defined meanings. On the contrary, these means are phrases or multi-word units which are used by speakers in order to predicate how they perceive the world (Weigand 1998).

Such a view of the lexicon naturally has important consequences for the description of lexical structures and for teaching a foreign language. Many problems overemphasized in orthodox theories vanish, e.g. polysemy, others have to be reconsidered, e.g., synonymy. Polysemy becomes evident as a problem of theory not of use. In learning a foreign language it is words-in-use which have to be learned because the use of words is neither totally based on free choice nor on rules as can be clearly seen by a few examples such as the following taken from a comparative analysis of *to fall* and German *fallen* (Weigand 2006a):

(13) big drops of rain fell   dicke Tropfen fielen
     his hair *falls to* his shoulders   sein Haar *fällt auf* seine Schultern
     to *fall on* a specific day   *auf* einen bestimmten Tag *fallen*
     to *fall back on* easier solutions   auf einfachere Lösungen *zurückgreifen*
     my work *falls into* three parts   meine Arbeit *gliedert sich* in drei Teile

to *fall into* a trap	in die Falle *gehen*
etc.	etc.

Words have meaning in phrases. The phrase is the unit which, in most cases, is unequivocal. Moreover, it is the phrase which determines synonymy as can be demonstrated by another example which starts from a comparative analysis of *thick* versus *dick* and leads to the inclusion of other 'synonymous adjectives' (see Weigand 1998: 35):

(14) *thick* wall   *dick*e Wand
      thick forest   *dicht*er Wald
      thick crowd   dichte Menge
      heavy drops   dicke Tropfen
      heavy traffic   dicker/dichter Verkehr
      swollen ankle   dicker Knöchel
      swollen cheek   dicke Backe
      etc.   etc.

For a theory of natural language and a corresponding syllabus which aims at competence-in-performance, it does not make sense to generate syntactic structures of the type NP →Det Adj N and insert lexical signs the connection of which is determined by rules, nor does a theory of mediation solve the problem. The lexical unit is not the single adjective but the collocation of adjective + noun or in syntactic terms the NP. Learning is facilitated if it is based on structures and networks, in the case of vocabulary on networks of phrases.

Sometimes differences between languages are not so clear-cut as in our examples (13) and (14) but refer to multifaceted language-specific details which are highly arbitrary and therefore pose problems for memorizing, for instance, in the case of speech act verbal phrases (Weigand 2002b):

(15) to *make* an assertion   eine Behauptung *aufstellen*
      to *ask* a question   eine Frage *stellen*
      to *give* information   eine Mitteilung *machen*
      to *make* a recommendation   eine Empfehlung *geben*
      etc.   etc.

Knowing how words are used in phrases makes up a crucial part of learning a foreign language. Unfortunately, a comparative lexicography

which indicates corresponding phrases or collocations is still in its infancy.

5.5. Referring

Whereas predicating is expressed by means of lexical phrases, referring has to do with grammatical means such as articles, pronouns and the like. It is however too rash to equate types of reference with expression types as sometimes happens in traditional linguistic accounts and philosophical argumentation. Reference is not at all a rule-governed matter but a very complicated affair. Like predicating, it is done with phrases which are sometimes dependent on the whole utterance and the speech situation and, in the end, on what the speaker believes to be definite or indefinite. Again, as was the case with predicating, the differences between languages are varied and arbitrary, as can be seen by a few examples:

(16) Let's *go jogging* – Machen wir *einen* Lauf – Facciamo *la* corsa
      Le rouge et *le* noir (Stendhal) – Rot und schwarz – *The* Red and *the* Black
      Communism is losing significance – *Der* Kommunismus verliert an Bedeutung
                                                    – *Il* comunismo perde di significato.

The learner will have to know that referring is not a case of changing articles but again a case of phrases and utterances which are to some degree conventional but to some degree dependent on the speaker.

It is, for instance, not a reasonable procedure to analyse the sequence of pronouns and proper names in face-to-face communication in order to find out rules for their use (cf. Weigand 1996). The use of these referential means has to be integrated with other cognitive means, namely assumptions of the individual speakers about what can be presupposed as still being in the memory of their interlocutors.

5.6. Further components of the syllabus

A difficult topic in the syllabus will be the topic of *utterance syntax* or pragmatic syntax. If syntax is to be dealt with at all, it can no longer be treated as autonomous sentence syntax but has to be considered as a means for expressing pragmatic meaning. Utterance syntax has to do

with various types of grammatical expression, among them sentence types, particles, modals, intonation, etc. To a certain degree, these means can be considered to be speech act indicating devices. It is striking that for every basic speech act type there is a sentence type: for explorative speech acts the interrogative sentence, for representatives the declarative sentence, for directives the imperative sentence and for declarative speech acts the grammatical structure of the explicit performative utterance. For teaching purposes, these correlations can be introduced as a preferred or economic correlation. They can serve as a starting point which however has to be continually differentiated for advanced students. It should be clear from the very outset that there is no code of correlation between sentence types and functions.

Furthermore there is the topic of dialogue structures to be addressed in the classroom. Again there are no independent patterns of how to structure dialogic sequences but rather principles and strategies pursued by the speakers in negotiating meaning and understanding such as, for instance, principles of insisting or clarifying. There is already some good teaching material based on short dialogues (e.g. Lorenzen & Taborn 1983). In this respect the issue has to be raised whether teaching has to be exclusively based on authentic material. In any case, authentic material is a highly valuable source for understanding language and, if checked in a corpus, for verifying presumed conventions. Language use however goes beyond the possibilities of a corpus (Weigand 2004a), as, for instance, Widdowson (2003: 102ff.) also points out. As long as we remain observers, i.e. outsiders of the action game, we will only in part understand what is going on. Authenticity therefore must not be a fetish, neither in linguistics nor in language teaching.

6. Learning guidelines

According to Elman and his group (1996: 22), learning is to be conceived of as a process of changes that arise as a result of interactions between the organism and aspects of the external environment. How this process can be intentionally influenced is an open question. I assume the following guidelines which are still to some degree programmatic in nature and need to be verified by further empirical research:

• Learning is improved if teaching is based on structures and networks.

The importance of structures and networks, for instance, becomes very clear with vocabulary. Words should be learned in phrasal structures or, as Sinclair (1998: 86) calls it, 'in larger bits'.

- Learning is improved if the teacher uses the foreign language in large measure as the language of the classroom.
- Learning is improved if the teacher starts from the cognitive level of the learners.

Teaching should proceed from simple cases to more complex ones, from few examples to many variants in a process that distinguishes different stages, starting from competence for survival via basic English and English for intermediate or advanced students to near native competence-in-performance. Matching horizons includes motivation: we learn more easily if we want to learn, and it includes testing in order to inform the teacher about the success of his/her efforts.

- Learning is improved if different teaching strategies account for different parts of the object to be learned.

In my view, it is important to distinguish between active and receptive competence-in-performance. Competence in understanding or receptive competence should be be oriented towards understanding native language use. For active competence however it is sufficient if the learners have a suitable, even if restricted, set of expression variants at their disposal from which they can select verbal means for every move in the action game even if it is far more restricted than the set of expressions native speakers have at their disposal.

- Learning is improved by guidelines that can be derived from first language acquisition.

In my view, we can learn a lot from the process by means of which children learn their mother language. Basically, it is a process of dialogic interaction between mother and child which demonstrates a few striking points. For instance, children *repeat* words they have just learned, and they repeat them in use. They are always confronted with the language they are going to learn. Mothers demonstrate the use and meaning of words by *paraphrases* and *reformulations*. They use *positive reinforcements*

insofar as they are happy about the learning progress made by their children. The children themselves *play an active part*: they are motivated to learn, they intervene and pose questions. They proceed by trial and error but also by trying to understand and build up their world rationally, for instance, by first using the word *egg* for a ball. They have an extraordinary feeling for how specific utterances fit the situation and use whole utterances appropriately without knowing what the individual words mean. Even if first language acquisition cannot be equated with learning a foreign language, the teacher can learn a lot from how nature has provided for it. Similarities in first and second language learning have, for instance, been empirically confirmed by Ervin-Tripp (1974) (cf. Fletcher & MacWhinney 1995, especially the contributions by Snow and Ochs & Schieffelin, on different positions on child language acquisition).

7. Concluding remarks

To conclude: Instead of establishing discipline boundaries between linguistics, applied linguistics, and the area of professional practice we should reflect on what we want to achieve by theories and in practice. There might be a real difference between theory and practice in physics, the difference between fundamentals and technical knowledge. To some extent, we can find this type of difference in linguistics, too, namely the difference between natural language use and language use under specific technical conditions, for instance, of the new electronic media. Teaching a foreign language however is another issue. We do not need theories of mediation for it which presuppose linguistic theories of language as a sign system. From the very beginning, we need theories of language-in-interaction that are applicable to practice in various areas. In this endeavour we must be ready to cross traditional academic boundaries and to focus on the same complex object from different perspectives. It will be the task of applied linguistics to develop syllabuses based on a theory of competence-in-performance and on the new insights of neuroscience.

Much has still to be done to make teaching and learning easier. For linguistics I would just like to mention the desiderata of good multilingual dictionaries of words-in-use which are based on corpora and of extensive comparative utterance grammars. For applied linguistics the desideratum remains to develop good teaching materials on the basis of a syllabus of competence-in-performance. Nevertheless, in the end, it will

be the learner's challenge to bridge the gap between the protected space of the classroom and real life outside.

Acknowledgement

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16

DDA WEIGAND

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