

theory to various aspects of verbal communication, including stylistics, implicatures, irony, metaphor and speech acts. In several instances they propose analyses that differ considerably from current analyses.

Throughout their book, Sperber and Wilson explicitly contrast their relevance theory of communication with the well-known views of Grice. The issues on which Sperber and Wilson explicitly compare their own theory with that of Grice include the following: the precise nature of a model of inferential communication (chapter 1); the distinction between the explicit and implicit content of utterances (p.182); the question of the determinacy of implicatures (p.195); the notion of violating maxims of conversation (p.200); the question of the calculability of implicatures (p.200); the analysis of irony (p.240) and the need for a theory of speech acts (p.244). This explicit contrast between their own theory and the more well-known views of Grice ensures the book's interest value for the linguist.

While Sperber and Wilson's *Relevance* contains several interesting ideas, the main shortcoming of their theory of verbal communication is undoubtedly the speculative nature of the cognitive theory in which these ideas are embedded. The fact is that they do not take over a well-justified theory of cognition and integrate it with a theory of communication. To a very large extent, they have had to set up their own cognitive theory. The inevitable result, as they admit, is that much of what they claim is highly speculative. At most, Sperber and Wilson can claim that they have drawn the outlines of what appears to be an interesting view of human cognition and of how it works in the domain of linguistic communication.

M. Sinclair

Peter Gannon

Assessing Writing: Principles and Practice of Marking Written English. London: Edward Arnold, 1985. (88pp.)

This volume is the latest in the series: *Explorations in Language Study* and complements a previous volume, *Teaching Writing* by Geoffrey Thornton (1980). Whereas the latter mainly addresses

the issues of how to achieve higher standards in writing performance, this volume is concerned with the process of responding to and making judgements about pupils' written work. As such, it is a welcome addition to the series as it analyses the problems involved in this type of assessment, without pretending to supply definitive solutions.

There has always been dissatisfaction among language teachers with the quality of pupils' written work as well as with the efficacy of marking procedures. In the six chapters of this book, Gannon offers constructive criticism of current procedures and practical guidance for alternative methods. Chapter 1 poses the question: "Why do we mark writing?" and makes a brief distinction between marking, correcting and assessing. It also touches on the need to determine and record *development* in the pupil's written skills.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the nature of language and carefully distinguishes between the written and the spoken word. In discussing the concept of Standard English, Gannon notes:

There is nothing sacrosanct about any of the conventions of standard grammar, vocabulary or orthography, and they will certainly change over the years. But these conventions do exist, and they will not change so quickly as to relieve teachers from the duty of teaching children how to use them. (p.28)

On the other hand, teachers are not urged to eradicate nonstandard usages.

The emphasis should all the time be on extending a repertoire of language styles and usages, not on insisting on one kind of conformity or another. (p.29)

Chapter 3 explains the need for some sort of categorization of writing *functions*. A high priority is the pupils' need "to achieve a flexibility of written style that will enable them to write appropriately for a variety of purposes". Regarding assessment, Gannon acknowledges the subjective nature of judgements and therefore sees no point in trying to devise a framework of assessment which is wholly objective. He favours the use of a teacher's *informed* intuitions in the assessment process. In developing a mode of assessment, he is concerned with four principles: (i) curricular needs (ii) adult

expectations in respect of children's writing (iii) the need to contextualise writing activities and (iv) a consideration of linguistic form in relation to these activities.

Chapter 4, which considers some linguistic features of writing, has little of value to offer except for the author's views on shaping a text and achieving stylistic effectiveness.

Chapter 5 contains his suggestion for a practical means of assessment. After discussing the shortcomings of impression marking, he concludes that

. . . assessment can legitimately be seen as a continuous and continuing process of diagnosis, encouraging of strengths, remediation of error, and, in an ever widening range of writing functions, further diagnosis. (p.63)

For this reason he advocates a profiling system of recording pupils' strengths and weaknesses in relation to different writing purposes. He then demonstrates the use of this system — the Task Assessment Sheet — and in an appendix to this chapter, supplies criteria to serve as guidelines for the six categories that appear on it. Though some of these categories (vocabulary, punctuation) are all too familiar, some of the criteria indicate a fresh emphasis, for example, the category on grammatical features includes a description of

various levels of sentence structure and cohesion. Detailed guidelines are also given for assessing the shaping of a text. Overall, the emphasis is as much on appropriateness as on correctness.

The book concludes with a brief consideration of implications for classroom organization, in which Gannon stresses the importance of pupils' reading habits and the use of exemplars in developing their written skills. He touches on the importance of teacher preparation, selective marking and the pupils' need for individual attention.

This book offers a range of common sense ideas which are crystallized into a practical approach to the assessment of written work. The author insists that assessment is not merely the marking of essays, but is rooted in the process of teaching. He convincingly argues that the "raising of levels of performance in writing is best brought about by extending the range of tasks set to involve as wide as possible a variety of purposes for writing". I was impressed with the conciseness and lucidity of his views and with the perspectives they provide. As long as writing is the chief skill by which school children attempt to achieve success in our education system, assessment of written work will continue to be a crucial issue. For those teachers who, over the years, have become inflexible in their approach to assessment, or for those who have yet to develop an approach, this book will be of value.

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