New Publications ... Nuwe Publikasies

Reviews

John Pearce

The Heart of English: Nine to Fourteen. Oxford: OUP, 1985. (124pp.)

This book was written for "teachers who find themselves teaching English without claiming a specialist competence in the subject" and aims at providing practical guidance in planning, developing, and organizing classroom work. Consequently, although Pearce has British teachers in mind, many South African teachers who lack confidence will welcome this book.

It is divided into three parts. The first part considers the reading curriculum and looks at ways of developing comprehension skills. These three chapters draw on recent research findings to define firstly what reading is, firmly establishing the importance of a dynamic view of reading which takes account of reading as a process of growing sophistication. Standard comprehension exercises are sharply criticised because of their limitations if understanding is seen as important. A vivid picture of alternative activities is given. However, although Pearce makes his points most convincingly, the illustrations given are unlikely to be directly useful to the South African teacher, who will have to choose passages which speak to his own pupils.

The section on reading goes on to suggest sensible ways in which skilful reading can be taught, employing cloze, prediction, sequencing and questions. Practical advice is given so the inexperienced teacher would have no difficulty in drawing up his own exercises. Finally, the section on reading explores ways in which children become fluent readers "able to range as widely in reading as their studies or hobbies may take them and as deeply in literature as their interests may lead".

The second section of the book is concerned with developing writing skills and ways of helping children towards a clearer sense of audience, register and mode. Teachers in training will find the distinctions made between various stages in the child's development most illuminating. Established teachers may find they have been emphasising 'correctness' when the child needs to "adopt and engage with the style of written language". Chapter 5, which looks at ways of teaching writing, is particularly useful in offering suggestions which take the realities of the classroom into account. The chapters on spelling and punctuation are refreshingly bold suggesting the importance of establishing clear patterns rather than teaching long lists of spelling or studying analytic rules.

The third section deals with oral skills and the importance of integrating the various skills which constitute language study in an organized and balanced way. The present emphasis in South Africa on language across the curriculum makes this section particularly relevant. The final chapter in the book explores very briefly some related issues such as slow learners. While the discussion is necessarily rather superficial, it does provide a very useful orientation.

Pearce argues convincingly and readers will enjoy his clean style. Furthermore, his view of classroom activity is coldly realistic/refreshingly candid.

While the treatment of the teaching of English is not comprehensive, the book offers a rare combination of clear insight and practical guidance. It provides a rich store of ideas and forces the reader to re-examine established practices. Although those teaching English as a first language will gain most from the book, second language teachers will find much to interest them.

Those who find the book lacks depth of treatment will discover that the *Notes of references* direct them to works that offer more detailed examination of each of the topics discussed.

E. Ridge

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson

Relevance: Communication and Cognition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. (279pp.)

Sperber and Wilson attempt to ground the study of human communication, and verbal communication in particular, on a general view of human cognition. There is an obvious similarity between their aims and that of Jackendoff, in his recent

book, *Semantics and Cognition* (1983). The difference is that Jackendoff attempts to integrate a theory of *semantic* representation within a theory of conceptual structure, while Sperber and Wilson are concerned with *pragmatics,* the interaction of linguistic meaning and contextual factors in utterance interpretation.

Although their main concern is the use of language to communicate, Sperber and Wilson do not claim that the essential feature of language is its use in communication. Neither do they claim that linguistic communication–that is, communication by means of language–is a typical case of communication. The assumption of such an essential link between language and communication thus plays no role in their account of utterance interpretation.

In chapter 1 ("Communication"), Sperber and Wilson consider two major questions raised by the study of communication: (i) what is communicated? and (ii) how is communication achieved? As regards the second question, they reject the view that there can be a general theory of communication. They argue that communication cannot be reduced to either the code model of communication or the inferential model, since communication can be achieved in completely different ways. A unified theory of communication based on either of these two models is thus ruled out. The best-known inferential model–that of Grice–is critically analysed, and an attempt is made to develop an improved inferential model. This model is called the *ostensive-referential* model of communication. Ostensive-inferential communication is defined as follows (p.63):

> The communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions.

An assumption is manifest if it is perceptible or inferable. The ostensive-referential model is intended to be used in conjunction with the code model to explain verbal communication.

In chapter 2 ("Inference") a model of the inferential abilities involved in comprehension is outlined. Following Fodor in *The Modularity of Mind*

(1983) Sperber and Wilson view the mind as a variety of specialised systems, each with its own method of representation and computation. These systems are of two broad types. First, there are the input systems, which process visual, auditory, linguistic and other perceptual information. Second, there are the central systems, which integrate information derived from the various input systems and from memory, and perform inferential tasks. Sperber and Wilson's claim is that no specialised inferential processes are required to explain verbal inference in communication. Instead, inferential communication is seen to be an instance of ordinary, spontaneous inference. As regards this spontaneous inference, they argue that, while it is non-demonstrative, deductive rules play an important role in it.

Chapter 3 ("Relevance") is the central chapter of the book. The main aim of the preceding chapters was to set up the conceptual background required for the formulation of the principle of relevance, and the next chapter illustrates how this principle can be used to explain various features of verbal communication. The notion 'relevance' Sperber and Wilson are attempting to clarify is not that expressed by the ordinary English word "relevance". Nor is it merely an explication of the notion 'relevance' which features in Grice's well-known conversational maxims. What Sperber and Wilson attempt to do, is to define 'relevance' as a "useful theoretical concept". The principle of relevance is formulated as follows (p.158):

> Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.

The presumption of optimal relevance is formulated as follows (p.158):

> (a) The set of assumptions which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's while to process the ostensive stimulus.
>
> (b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one the communicator could have used to communicate.

In the last chapter ("Aspects of verbal communication"), Sperber and Wilson apply relevance

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 communicaton 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