

2 The Project

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a factual account of the project, confining attention to what was thought and done at different points in its development and leaving a more detailed discussion of the issues involved to later chapters. It should therefore be seen as a historical description rather than an interpretation or justification. I will first indicate how the initial pedagogic perception took shape and then describe aspects of the teaching that was done.

Background

The Structural-Oral-Situational method

It is relevant to look briefly at the theory of English language teaching which has been prevalent in India in the past thirty years and which formed the background to the project's initial perception. A major innovation in teaching English was introduced into the state education system between 1955 and 1965, at the initiative of the state and central governments and with substantial assistance from abroad. The innovation consisted, essentially, of the use of structurally and lexically graded syllabuses, situational presentation of all new teaching items, balanced attention to the four language skills (but with listening and speaking preceding reading and writing), and a great deal of controlled practice using techniques such as the substitution table and choral repetition.¹ This was in contrast to earlier procedures such as the translation and explication of written texts, the reading aloud and memorization of texts, and a good deal of explicit grammar in the form of sentence analysis and parsing. Large programmes for the intensive re-training of teachers were conducted to implement the innovation, and ten state-level institutions were established in different parts of the country to provide more systematic and continual in-service teacher training and to create support services such as the provision of textbooks, teachers' guides, and radio broadcasts. In addition, a large national institution was set up to provide specialist-level

training to potential teacher trainers and to undertake research-level activity in support of the teaching reform.

The Regional Institute of English in Bangalore was one of the ten state-level institutions, set up in 1963, to serve southern India following a massive 'campaign' of intensive teacher re-training based in Madras between 1959 and 1963.² This institute has used the term 'S-O-S' (Structural-Oral-Situational) to refer to the pedagogic principles it has been helping to implement and I shall be using that term, for convenience, at various points in this book. The indication given above of what the principles consisted of is perhaps an over-simplification, but two of the appendices to this book will help to show how the innovation was viewed at the time of its implementation. Appendix Ia reproduces a report which appeared in 1960 in a popular Indian newspaper, and which indicates not only what a demonstration of the new method was like but how there was a general sense of excitement about its potential. Appendix Ib is a form of assessment, made in 1965, of observable effects in the classroom of the 1959-63 'campaign' in Madras.

By about 1975, S-O-S was being regarded as a well-established method of teaching English, though there was some doubt about how well it had been transmitted to teachers and how widely its procedures were actually being followed in the numerous classrooms. S-O-S principles were, at the same time, increasingly being questioned, mainly on the grounds that learners' ability to make correct sentences in a classroom-practice situation did not ensure that they could make sentences correctly in other contexts, and that, although learners seemed to learn each structure well at the time it was taught, their command of language structure at the end of a structurally graded course lasting several years was still very unsatisfactory, requiring a good deal of remedial re-teaching which, in turn, led to similarly unsatisfactory results. It was also being suggested that concentration in the classroom on one structural pattern at a time might be inducing an overgeneralization of particular structural patterns leading to an increase in errors, and that the attempt to achieve comparable progress in all four language skills might be resulting in a holding back of attainable progress in the important receptive skill of reading. In addition, it was felt that the requirement of varied oral situational presentation of each new teaching item made too high a demand on teachers' inventiveness, while structural and lexical grading led to an

artificial and dull repetitiousness both in textbook materials and in classroom activity. There was, however, no clear evidence that learners' attainment levels were higher or lower than they had been under an earlier method of teaching, and it is therefore possible that the discontent being expressed largely represented a wearing out of the intellectual momentum of S-O-S pedagogy and a loss of plausibility to some of the perceptions behind it. This discontent was reinforced by an awareness of new pedagogic approaches being explored abroad – such as notional/functional syllabuses, communicative perspectives on language, and the designing of specific-purpose courses. As a result, a series of professional seminars were held in different parts of the country for the purpose of discussing one or another of the new approaches.

Preparatory discussion

Two such seminars were held at the Regional Institute of English in Bangalore. Participants included the specialist staff of both the Regional Institute itself and several of its sister institutions, English language specialists from some universities and state education departments, specialist staff of the British Council in India, and a visiting specialist at each seminar from a British University. At the first seminar held in January 1978, the discussion focused on notional/functional syllabuses (as proposed in Wilkins 1976 and presented at that seminar by Keith Johnson), while the second seminar focused on a discourse view of language and its pedagogic implications (as put forward in Widdowson 1978 and presented at the seminar by Henry Widdowson himself).³

It is natural for discussion at such seminars to be interpreted and responded to differently by different participants: what follows is my own view of how that discussion related to the project. Although the two seminars examined two different approaches to second language pedagogy, they threw up very similar problems for local participants in relating those approaches to their own situation and perceptions. The difficulty can perhaps be stated in the form of three conceptual mismatches.

First, an important principle of the prevailing S-O-S pedagogy was that grammar in the classroom was to be only implicit, not explicit – that is to say, grammar was to be used only for systematizing language data and for organizing practice materials,

not for providing learners with an explicit knowledge of the rules. Explicit grammar in the classroom would only lead to a knowledge *about* the language, not an ability to make correct sentences automatically – a point forcefully argued by Palmer (1921), whose insight lay behind the structural syllabus and the associated procedures of situational presentation and practice. His point was that learners would internalize structural patterns subconsciously and, as a result, be able to employ them automatically if they encountered sets of sentences exemplifying particular structural patterns under conditions which ensured that they understood the meaning of the sentences concerned.⁴ Influenced by Palmer's thinking, S-O-S pedagogy had aimed to promote in learners an internal grammatical competence which would manifest itself in the natural use of grammatically correct language. Although there was now a good deal of discontent being felt about that pedagogy, an internal grammatical competence was still seen by many participants in the seminars to be the main objective of language teaching. However, the new approaches based themselves on the argument that natural language use involved much more than a grammatical competence (which was persuasive enough), and that language pedagogy should therefore address itself to those additional forms of competence (which was much less persuasive). If one granted that there were dimensions to language use distinct from grammatical competence, it did not necessarily follow that these additional dimensions were more important for pedagogy than grammatical competence and should be paid attention to at its expense. The issue of how grammatical competence itself is best developed in learners did not seem to be addressed by the new proposals being examined. Examples of how grammatically correct sentences could still be socially inappropriate were not very helpful while available forms of pedagogy were found to be inadequate for enabling learners to achieve grammatical correctness itself, and social appropriacy did not seem a particularly pressing objective for second language learners in a formal educational setting.

Secondly, proposals for communicative teaching seemed to aim at an activation or extension of the grammatical competence already acquired by learners, for real-life use in particular areas of activity such as social discourse or academic study. It followed that courses constructed for such teaching were limited-purpose ones meant for learners already at an intermediate or advanced

level of grammatical competence and were not significantly concerned with developing that competence itself.⁵ The search in southern India, however, was for procedures of teaching suitable for schoolchildren and capable of developing grammatical competence from early stages.

Thirdly, it was true that notional syllabuses had been proposed (in the context of the Council of Europe's work) for the early stages of language learning and that one of the arguments for using such semantic syllabuses was, attractively, that they would increase attention to meaning in the classroom and make the learning of the grammatical system less conscious.⁷ However, such syllabuses did envisage a matching of each notional category with one or more linguistic forms, which meant that in the classroom the linguistic forms concerned were to be presented and practised in situations suggested by the notional category. It was not clear that this was significantly different, in terms of what happens in the classroom, from the situational presentation of language items from a linguistically organized syllabus. There was an inevitable loss of grammatical systematicity, while such semantic systematicity as was attainable seemed to have more value for a European context (in bringing about some comparability between courses in different languages) than for places like India. More importantly, the replacement of one mode of syllabus organization by another did not entail any major difference, in terms of classroom activity, from S-O-S pedagogy: specific items of language would still be preselected for any teaching unit and practised in contexts which suited them.

In general, the development of grammatical competence in learners continued to be viewed as the primary objective (and problem) in teaching English in India, while communicative approaches were seen to be concerned generally with objectives other than grammatical competence.

Initial perception

At the two seminars, discussion arising from such differing perceptions helped to heighten an awareness of the issues involved and, in particular, led to a re-examination of the assumptions of S-O-S pedagogy. The reason why grammar was to be used only for organizing the samples of language to be presented to learners was that learners would thereby be led to abstract the rele-

vant structural patterns directly from the samples and at a subconscious level of the mind – ‘we learn without knowing what we are learning’ (Palmer 1921: 44). It was this subconscious abstraction of the grammatical system that enabled the system to operate subconsciously in learners’ later language use in a way that knowledge resulting from explicit grammar teaching would not operate – ‘We form our sentences in unconscious obedience to some rules unknown to us’ (Palmer 1921: 5). The issue was thus one of the nature of grammatical knowledge to be developed: if the desired form of knowledge was such that it could *operate* subconsciously, it was best for it to *develop* subconsciously as well. S-O-S pedagogy attempted to regulate and facilitate the process by which learners abstracted the grammatical system by (1) ordering the elements of the system in ways considered to be helpful for learning, (2) limiting, the samples of language presented to learners in such a way that only one new element had to be abstracted at a time, and (3) increasing the chances of the new element being abstracted by increasing the number of relevant samples encountered by learners – devices which may be called (1) planned progression, (2) pre-selection, and (3) form-focused activity. The use of these devices, it was hoped, would not alter the nature of the knowledge they were trying to promote. However, in re-examining that assumption, and in reviewing actual experience of such teaching, it seemed likely that those devices did in fact lead to a form of grammatical knowledge closer to an explicit knowledge than to the internal, self-regulating system being aimed at.⁸ It also seemed likely that the most important condition for learners’ abstraction of grammatical structure from relevant language samples was not so much an encounter with many samples of the same kind in quick succession but rather an intense preoccupation with the meaning of language samples – i.e. an effort to make sense of the language encountered, or to get meaning across in language adequately for given, and immediate, purposes. If this was so, the S-O-S procedure of situationalizing new language was of value not just in ensuring that the meaning of the new language was internalized along with its form but, more importantly, in bringing about in learners a preoccupation with meaning and an effort to understand. The nature of some imaginative classroom procedures being developed for communicative language teaching – such as the communicative exercise types discussed in Johnson (1982: 163–75) – also indicated an intuition about the

value of a preoccupation with meaning for language learning; and Widdowson's observation that 'we do not simply measure discourse up against our knowledge of pre-existing rules; we create discourse and *commonly bring new rules into existence by so doing*' (Widdowson 1978: 69; my italics) suggested a similar perception.

Communication in the classroom – in the sense of meaning-focused activity (i.e. a process of coping with a need to make sense or get meaning across) could therefore be a good means of developing grammatical competence in learners, quite independently of the issue of developing functional or social appropriacy in language use. Further, discussion often pointed to what was clearly a fundamental question about grammatical competence, namely, its 'deployability'. True grammatical competence was seen to be deployable – in the sense that it came into play in direct response to a need to communicate – without any linguistic elicitation and with equal levels of accuracy within and outside the classroom. The observation that learners' ability to make sentences in the classroom did not carry over to other contexts indicated a lack of deployability in the form of knowledge promoted by S-O-S procedures. It seemed plausible, in contrast, that deployability would be ensured if effort to communicate was in fact the context in which knowledge of the language developed. The aim of using communication as a pedagogic procedure would thus be to develop in learners an internal system which was deployable and, when deployed, capable of achieving grammatical accuracy.

In more general terms, possible grounds for dissatisfaction with S-O-S pedagogy could be summarized as follows: those who had been taught English, for several years at school were still unable:

- to use (i.e. deploy) the language when necessary outside the classroom (they found themselves deliberating unnaturally).
- to achieve an acceptable level of grammatical accuracy in their language use outside the classroom (though they might achieve such accuracy in a classroom context).
- to achieve an acceptable level of situational appropriacy in their language use outside the classroom (though they might achieve grammatical accuracy).

Although experience indicated that there was some truth to all three, the first two were seen to be much more serious and cen-

tral to pedagogy than the third, and communication in the classroom (in the sense of meaning-focused activity, as indicated above) was seen to be a form of pedagogy likely to avoid those two problems. It was to indicate the difference between this particular interpretation of the nature and role of communication in pedagogy on the one hand, and forms of pedagogy which addressed themselves primarily to the third problem above on the other, that the project used the term 'communicational' teaching, instead of the more current 'communicative' teaching.

S-O-S pedagogy, too, could be said to have addressed itself to the first two problems in rejecting the teaching of explicit grammar and in seeking instead to regulate learners' internalization of the grammatical system through planned progression, pre-selection, and form-focused activity. If, however, it was meaning-focused activity which facilitated learners' subconscious abstraction of grammatical structure from the samples of language encountered in that context, then form-focused activity was a mistaken pedagogic procedure. Further, the attempt to regulate and organize samples of language in grammatical terms through planned progression and pre-selection could have been a mistake as well. The assumption behind such regulation was that the teacher, or syllabus designer, already had a description of the grammatical system which learners were to internalize and was transferring that system, part by part, to learners' subconscious minds through appropriate samples of language. But developments in grammatical theory and description, in particular transformational-generative grammar, had shown clearly that the internal grammatical system operated subconsciously by fluent speakers was vastly more complex than was reflected by, or could be incorporated into, any grammatical syllabus – so complex and inaccessible to consciousness in fact, that no grammar yet constructed by linguists was able to account for it fully.⁹ Perhaps the most important implication of generative grammar for second language pedagogy was that the grammatical descriptions used for constructing syllabuses or practice materials were hopelessly inadequate as descriptions of the internal system which learners had to develop in order to achieve grammatical accuracy in their language use. It was therefore unlikely that any planned progression in a grammatical syllabus could actually reflect or regulate the development of the internal grammatical system being aimed at.

Perceptions such as these led, at the end of the second seminar, to the setting up of a teaching project with the aim of developing pedagogic procedures which would (1) bring about in the classroom a preoccupation with meaning and an effort to cope with communication and (2) avoid planned progression and pre-selection in terms of language structure as well as form-focused activity (or planned language practice) in the classroom. The main issues involved in such teaching will be examined in some detail in later chapters, which will indicate how the perceptions themselves were influenced by the experience of the project. Meanwhile, some indication of how the initial perception was actually stated at the time of setting up the project can be found in Appendix II.

Classes taught

Table 1 lists some facts about the eight classes of children taught on the project. The classes were at different schools (with the exception of numbers 7 and 8) in different towns or districts and at different stages of both schooling and instruction in English. They received project teaching for varying lengths of time (for reasons to be indicated shortly). Thus, class 1 in the table was at a secondary school in Malleswaram, initially consisted of fifty girls (see, however, below), was Standard VIII (i.e. the eighth year of a ten-year school course), was in its fourth year of instruction in English, and was taught on the project for three academic years. (An academic year is from June to the following March or April; so class 1 was taught on the project from June 1979 to March 1982.) The schools were in two different states. Classes 1, 4, and 6 were in the state of Karnataka where instruction in English begins in Standard V (age 10) and continues for six years up to the end of Standard X. Classes 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 were in the state of Tamil Nadu where instruction in English begins in Standard III (age 8) and continues for eight years up to the end of Standard X. (For a list of all the schools see Appendix III.)

There is a public examination at the end of Standard X in each state, marking the end of secondary education. Although the syllabus in English for the successive standards is primarily a graded list of structures and vocabulary, the syllabus for the final year (Standard X) includes, in addition, a set of literary, descriptive, or discursive texts, selected without regard to the linguistic

Table 1 *Classes taught on the project*

Serial number and location of class	Students	Starting stage for project teaching		Project teaching done						
		On the school course	On the English course	Age	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
1 Malleswaram	50 girls	Standard VIII	4th year	13						
2 Nungambakkam	40 girls	Standard VI	4th year	11						
3 T. Nagar	30 girls + boys	Standard III	1st year	8						
4 Tasker Town	60 boys	Standard VIII	4th year	13						
5 Cuddalore	45 girls + boys	Standard III	1st year	8						
6 Jayanagar	50 girls + boys	Standard V	1st year	10						
7 Tiruvottiyur	60 boys	Standard VI	4th year	11						
8 Tiruvottiyur	55 boys	Standard VI	4th year	11						

syllabus, though with some consideration of their difficulty-level in terms of both content and language. But, more importantly in relation to the project, the public examination requires students to manipulate given sentences and words (for example to rewrite sentences as directed, fill in gaps, match items in different lists, and spot or correct grammatical or lexical errors) and to reproduce the gist of the texts in the form of summaries or short essays which are often memorized in advance.¹⁰ As a result, project teaching had either to devote some of the time in a Standard X class to summarizing texts and doing exercises on grammar and vocabulary (thus deviating from the project's principles) or to avoid teaching any class in Standard X. For this reason, only class 1 received project teaching in its Standard X year.

There is also a public examination half-way through the school course – at the end of Standard VII in Karnataka and at the end of Standard VIII in Tamil Nadu – which created greater problems for project teaching. The examination is generally modelled on that at the end of Standard X, which meant that the project had, once again, either to avoid teaching a Standard VII class (or a Standard VIII class, depending on the state) or include specific examination preparation in its teaching of such classes. More seriously, the classes in a school are almost always reorganized after a public examination, to take account of failures and students changing schools or discontinuing study, which meant that the project could not have the same group of students to teach before and after Standard VII in Karnataka and Standard VIII in Tamil Nadu. There is, in addition, a movement of students from primary to secondary (or middle) schools at the end of Standard IV in Karnataka and Standard V in Tamil Nadu, which also meant that the project could not have the same group before and after that stage. The consequence of all these institutional constraints was that no class was available for continuous teaching for more than three school years and some classes could be taught only for two years in order to avoid the year of a public examination. In two cases (classes 4 and 7), other institutional factors led to a discontinuation of teaching after only a year.

All the eight classes were in schools within the state system, where the language of instruction was the language of the state and the mother tongue of most students. They were, furthermore, schools which generally drew children from homes and social groups in which no English was spoken (and, in many

instances, the mother tongue was not read or written, though the students themselves had acquired some literacy in the mother tongue at school by the time they started receiving instruction in English). There were also homes which frequently had to hold children back from attending school and sometimes to withdraw them from school altogether; so the number of children shown in the table for each class is only the initial number, which was reduced by a few students each year. There was also a high level of absenteeism (about 15 per cent of the class, on average) all the time.

The time given to English in the schools is one teaching period of forty minutes a day, five days a week in some schools and six in others. A year's teaching of English amounts to about 130 teaching periods, which works out at about ninety contact hours (not counting the absenteeism mentioned above which reduces this time for particular students). Project teaching of a given class meant that all teaching of English for that class was done according to the project's principles, thus ignoring the syllabus and course-books laid down by the state system. No change was made in other aspects of the teaching situation such as class composition, timetabling or physical facilities. Some of the classes involved in the project were at a post-initial stage (i.e. fourth year) of learning English while others were beginners. There was one post-initial class in the first year of the project and two in the second. In the third year, there were three post-initial classes and one class of beginners. In the fourth and fifth years, there were three beginners' classes and one post-initial class. In general, most of the work was done with post-initial classes in the earlier stages of the project, while in the later stages the emphasis shifted to beginners.¹¹

Teachers

Those who did the teaching on the project were either specialists (i.e. teacher trainers or teachers with specialist qualifications in teaching English) or regular teachers at schools. The first two project classes were taught entirely by specialists, while the teaching of the third class was shared between a specialist and a teacher at the school concerned. The fourth class was taught by specialists, while the fifth and sixth classes were taught partly by specialists and partly by regular teachers. The seventh and eighth classes were taught entirely by regular teachers. Teaching can

thus be seen to have passed, in a limited way, from specialists to regular teachers.

Eighteen people in all participated in the teaching, nine of them teacher trainers by profession, two university teachers, three members of the British Council's specialist staff in India, and four regular teachers in the schools concerned. They are referred to as the 'project team' (or 'project group') in this book but did not in fact function as a single team at any stage. The fourteen specialists were all in full-time employment in various institutions and were taking up project teaching as a voluntary part-time activity for the length of time (one, two, or three years) that was convenient for them. Those who functioned as a team in any one year were those who were doing the teaching in that year – four to eight teachers. There was also a geographical separation of up to 200 miles between different project classes and schools, which meant that only those who were teaching the same class (two or three teachers) were in daily contact with each other.

Principles and procedures

Teaching in the first year

Project teaching in much of the first year was marked by uncertainty about procedures, repeated disappointments, conflicting perceptions or interpretations of particular lessons, and a good deal of negative response from learners. The project group (consisting of four teachers at that time) had a general concept of what it wished to bring about in the classroom, namely a pre-occupation in learners with meaning and a resultant effort to understand and say things; it also had a clear notion of the procedures it wished to avoid, namely pre-selection of language and form-focused activity. It had, however, few ideas about what procedures it could or wished to follow. Among those which seemed to be promising at the time were story completion – the teacher telling a story up to the point considered most interesting and then inviting students to suggest possible conclusions, simulation (involving role-play or dramatization), puzzles of various kinds, and 'real-life talk' – the teacher and learners talking to one another, as they would outside the classroom, about themselves, their views, or their experiences. Story completion was attempted repeatedly, but generally failed to evoke the response

expected. If the class did not find the story particularly interesting, there was little desire to try to complete it; and if the story did prove to be interesting, there was a demand that the teacher go on to tell the rest of it, and a sense of resentment when this was not done. Simulation quickly showed itself to be unsuitable: it was difficult to find situations which were associated with the use of English in India and accessible to the students' experience; and the students, in any case, regarded such activity as non-serious and would only engage in it as deliberate language practice work (that is, with the sentences they were to say provided to them in advance). Puzzles turned out to be too demanding (for example difficult to state in simple language without destroying their cognitive challenge) and also too unrelatable to one another to support any sustained and structured activity. Real-life talk conflicted directly with notions about the classroom and was persistently viewed by learners as only a friendly preliminary to more serious work rather than as a serious activity in itself.

In more general terms, there was a lack of shared expectations between teachers and learners which could enable each to interpret and evaluate the actions of the other. There was also a lack of stable patterning to different lessons such that it would indicate criteria of relevance and make it possible to accommodate unpredicted responses. The learners were facing not only new forms of classroom activity but new concepts of what classroom activity should be about; and the teacher's own sense of uncertainty about classroom procedures was not reassuring to them. For their part, the teachers were facing not only dissatisfaction with particular lessons but also difficulty in identifying the sources of dissatisfaction. As a result, they had problems in adjusting teaching during the course of a lesson so as to avoid or reduce felt dissatisfaction, and generally in using the experience of each lesson to ensure greater satisfaction in the next.¹²

Task and pre-task

Gradually, however, the problems began to clarify themselves and criteria for assessing particular lessons began to emerge. It was noticed that whenever there was a piece of logical thinking involved in a teacher-class exchange it was possible for the teacher to meet wrong responses (or non-response) from the

class by breaking down the logical process into smaller steps, such that the class saw a general direction (and destination) to the sequence of steps and in the meantime found each step easy enough to take. The result was a sequence of exchanges with a perceived purpose and a clear outcome which was satisfying both to the teacher because it was a structured activity, and to learners because there was a clear criterion of success and a sense of achievement from success. Such a sequence gave the teacher ongoing and relatively unambiguous evidence of learners' involvement in the process and opportunities to adjust his or her own part in the interchange in the light of that evidence: the relevance and readiness of learners' responses indicated how far they were keeping pace with the logical steps being taken, and it was relatively easy for the teacher to make the next step smaller or larger accordingly. Teacher-class negotiation – in the sense of a sequence of exchanges connecting one point to another on a given line of thought and adjustable at any point as it occurs – was thus identified as a classroom procedure which was both feasible and desirable. Opportunity for such negotiation became an important consideration in selecting classroom activities, and it was recognized that negotiation was most likely to take place – and to prove satisfying – when the demand on thinking made by the activity was just above the level which learners could meet without help. An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process, was regarded as a 'task'.

A related observation was that the learners' perception of the piece of thinking they had to do in any given instance was based largely on what parallel they saw between that instance and another, and that such analogic thought was a useful resource for the teacher both in getting learners to understand the task being set and in guiding their effort to carry it out. This meant that the piece of logical thinking demanded by a given task could be made clear not only by attempting to explain the logic involved but, much more easily and usefully, by setting a parallel task which was either simpler or more accessible to learners in some way, or which was worked out by the teacher himself or by some specially able students in the class, thus providing the necessary help. Such parallelism also meant that some students could learn to do what was demanded of them by observing others meeting a similar demand, and the class as such could

attempt to do a task without the teacher's guidance after the experience of doing a similar task with the teacher's help.

Observations such as these led in due course to a clear preference for classroom activities which involved learners in some form of reasoning, or inferring, or inter-relating information in a logical way. They also led to a recurrent pattern to each lesson. There were now at least two parallel tasks in each lesson. The first, called perhaps misleadingly 'pre-task', was to be attempted as a whole-class activity, under the teacher's guidance and control.¹³ The second, called 'task' in contrast to the pre-task, was to be attempted by each learner individually (or sometimes in voluntary collaboration with a fellow-learner) with assistance sought from the teacher when necessary on specific points. There was also a third component to each lesson, consisting of a quick marking of students' individual work (i.e. the outcome of the 'task' stated by each student on paper). This marking was done, usually overnight, on the basis of content, not language, and was meant both to give students some feedback on their level of success and, equally, to give the teacher some idea of the level of challenge the task had presented.¹⁴ The teacher's assessment of the level of difficulty acted as an input to the planning of subsequent lessons.

The basic format of the whole-class activity was teacher-class interaction in the form of question and answer (or instruction and compliance) which served three functions: (1) it led the class, step by step, to the expected outcome of the pre-task, thus involving exchanges each of which called for a greater effort of reasoning than the last; (2) it broke down a given step further into smaller steps when a need for doing so was indicated by learners' responses, and (3) it provided one or more parallels to one or more of the steps in reasoning, ensuring that as many students as possible in a mixed-ability class grasped the nature of the activity. The proportion between these three functions varied from one lesson and one class to another depending on the ease or difficulty with which the class was, in the teacher's judgement, able to make the effort called for. The teacher's plan for the pre-task normally consisted, in addition to whatever factual information the pre-task was based on, of a set of graded questions or instructions serving the first function, and one or more parallel questions/instructions to be used when necessary, serving the third. Questions/instructions to serve any further negotiation (i.e. the second function above, of breaking down a step

into still smaller steps) were thought up in the classroom when the teacher felt they were needed. The parallel questions were used or omitted, or added to in the light of perceived need, and the teacher sometimes omitted some of the graded questions as well – either the last ones, if the class found the pre-task more difficult than anticipated (and therefore needed many more questions of the other two kinds), or the earlier, easier ones if the planned grading was found to be needlessly detailed. The teacher's plan also, of course, included a task similar to the pre-task, though never identical and not of a kind which could be performed without fresh, though similar, thinking, along with a set of similarly graded questions.

These principles for structuring a single lesson were then used to structure a sequence of lessons: tasks of the same type – that is, based on the same body of information or the same format – were set on successive days such that each day's work was similar to but more complex than the previous day's. Further, when the teacher felt that all, or most, of the class needed to attempt more work at the same level before they could attempt anything more complex, a whole lesson was made parallel to the previous day's, in the same way that pre-task and task were parallel to each other or certain questions within the pre-task were parallel to others. Parallel lessons were especially useful in alternating between oral and written media: parallel pre-tasks and tasks (i.e. the factual information involved and/or a set of questions/instructions) were regularly presented to learners in writing after similar pre-tasks or tasks had been attempted by them from an oral presentation. The project team found that, judging from learners' performance, the change to the written medium in itself constituted an increase in complexity. This ordering of oral and written tasks is the only piece of deliberate *linguistic* grading which was used in project teaching. The other traditional form of grading – reception followed by production – was viewed quite differently and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Language control

As project teaching became more and more structured along these lines, it was also realized that this structuring brought about a form of simplification and control of the teacher's language in the classroom which was different in quality from

planned language control, but entirely adequate to sustain classroom interaction. In the early stages of project teaching, teachers had found themselves uncertain about the extent to which they had to simplify their language, and dissatisfied with having to check at regular intervals on learners' comprehension with questions such as 'Do you understand?' or 'What did I say?'¹⁵ With the emergence of task-based interaction, in which each step was a teacher-class exchange that influenced the next, there was now a clear criterion of adequacy for simplification, namely that the class should be able to grasp the current step in the task, as well as constant feedback from learners. When there was an indication of incomprehension, the teacher adopted such strategies as repeating or rephrasing the statement, breaking it down into smaller propositions, employing a non-verbal form of communication, or providing a gloss in the learners' mother-tongue, for the purpose of getting the meaning across adequately for the class to make a relevant response. It was also observed that task-based interaction was itself a context which facilitated comprehension since there were only limited possibilities, in any given exchange, of what something could mean. Comprehension and inferencing were further facilitated by the parallel patterns of discourse resulting from similar or contrasting pieces of reasoning at different points in the task. Indeed, it was a pleasant surprise for the project group to realize how far task-based interaction ensured adequate simplification and comprehension without any prior linguistic planning. It was not of course assumed that all the language used in the classroom was being fully comprehended by learners, but, as will be argued in Chapter 3, 'full comprehension' is not a usable concept in any case.

Meaning-focused activity

Experience of task-based teaching also helped to clarify the project group's notions about learners' preoccupation with language and meaning. This can perhaps be stated in terms of four categories of classroom activity:

1 *Rule-focused activity* in which learners are occupied with a conscious perception or application (or memorization or recall) of the rules of language structure. This kind of activity involves understanding how the language concerned 'works' and was rejected by S-O-S pedagogy, as noted earlier, on the grounds

that such explicit knowledge of the rules did not lead to an ability to use the language automatically.

2 *Form-focused activity* in which learners are occupied with repeating or manipulating given language forms, or constructing new forms on the model of those given. Such ‘practice’ activity is valued by S-O-S pedagogy on the grounds that it facilitates subconscious assimilation of the structural regularities inherent in the forms involved and promotes automaticity in language use. It also relates to the notion of language ‘skills’, both in the sense of automaticity in use and in the sense of providing experience in the different modes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

3 *Meaningful activity* in which learners repeat, manipulate, or construct language forms with attention not only to the forms themselves but to the meanings or contexts which are associated with them. Such ‘meaningful practice’ is also valued by S-O-S pedagogy on the grounds that it ensures the assimilation both of structural regularities and of their associated meanings or contexts.

4 *Meaning-focused activity* in which learners are occupied with understanding, extending (e.g. through reasoning), or conveying meaning, and cope with language forms as demanded by that process. Attention to language forms is thus not intentional but incidental to perceiving, expressing, and organizing meaning.

There are, no doubt, forms of activity which fall between any two of these categories, but this categorization indicates how the project group saw the difference in classroom activity-types between S-O-S pedagogy and project teaching. Project teaching aimed at meaning-focused activity to the exclusion of the other three types. Task-based interaction in the classroom constituted meaning-focused activity in that not only was the interaction directed, at each point and as a whole, to outcomes in terms of meaning-content but the meaning-content involved at any point was determined by ongoing exchanges and had to be responsive to unpredicted contributions. Language use in such a process could only be contingent upon meaning-exchange and any attention to language forms as such was necessarily incidental to communication.

The format of task-based teaching conformed reasonably

well to both learners' and teachers' notions of classroom activity. The pre-task stage of the lesson, normally occupying between a half and two-thirds of the time, was given to teacher-directed, whole-class activity while the rest was used by learners for working on their own on an 'assignment' related to what had gone before. What was being dealt with in both parts was meaning-content requiring mental effort. The whole-class activity consisted of a pedagogic dialogue in which the teacher's questions were, as in other classrooms, invitations to learners to demonstrate their ability, not pretended requests for enlightenment, and learner's responses arose from their role as learners, not from assumed roles in simulated situations or from their individual lives outside the classroom.

Teaching in subsequent years

The ideas outlined above took shape towards the end of the first year of project teaching. They were implemented in the second year's teaching of the same class (Class 1 in Table 1) and, more consistently, in the teaching of a new class (Class 2 in Table 1) which was added to the project at that point. This new class was taught for two years (275 lessons in all) and the tasks devised in the course of that teaching formed a repertoire for use with later post-initial classes. Meanwhile, two further classes were added to the project at the beginning of the third year, one of which (Class 3 in Table 1) was of beginners. The project group felt that it had by then gained sufficient understanding of task-based teaching (and sufficient classroom confirmation of its perceptions) for an attempt to be made to extend teaching to beginner level.

Contrary to the group's fears, task-based teaching of beginners did not throw up any major problems requiring a re-thinking of the principles. One small advantage was the existence of several English loan-words in everyday use in Indian languages, and in the school 'dialects', some of which were therefore available even in the first lesson for beginners. Examples are 'blackboard', 'chalk', 'notebook', 'first', 'last', 'map', 'drawing', 'timetable', and 'bell'. Basic literacy in English was a specific aim at beginner level, and was achieved by using letters of the alphabet regularly as 'coins of the game' in various tasks – for naming parts of given drawings, for instance, or labelling locations or placement in given configurations. (An example will be

given later in this chapter.) Early tasks also drew a good deal on learners' numeracy, using forms of information normally expressed in numbers such as times of day, dates on calendars, age and year of birth, prices, and numbers of objects bought, lost, or saved. The cognitive challenge of such tasks generally consisted of counting and calculating. The verbal negotiation which took place in these contexts (and which required surprisingly little mother-tongue glossing – only about two words in a lesson) increased learners' familiarity with English, which made it possible to base subsequent tasks on verbally-expressed information.

In general, teaching beginners made two things forcefully clear. First, tasks in the classroom create a need to communicate which brings into play not just target-language resources, but all the other resources learners have at their disposal, for example conjecture, gestures, knowledge of conventions, numeracy, and the mother tongue. When target-language resources are unavailable the others are used to extra effect to compensate for that lack. It is therefore not the case that beginners in a given language are unable to engage in any communication in that language: when focused on communication, they are able to deploy non-linguistic resources and, as a result, not only achieve some degree of communication but, in the process, some new resources, however small, in the target language. These, in turn, are deployed in the next attempt at communication, yielding further target-language resources. Such acquisition of target-language resources and their deployment to maximal effect reveals itself dramatically in early lessons with beginners. Secondly, tasks in the classroom, and the interaction which they produce, are a powerful support to the learner's effort to infer meaning, and consequently to the acquisition of target-language resources, since they set up explicit frames of reference, rules of relevance, recurrent procedures and reasoning patterns, parallel situations, and problem-and-solution sequences, all of which facilitate comprehension, as noted earlier, and reduce the insecurity of action based on random conjecture.

The tasks devised in the course of a year's teaching of beginners (Class 3 in Table 1) formed a repertoire to draw on in teaching two other classes of beginners (Classes 5 and 6), which started at the beginning of the fourth year of the project. All three classes of beginners were able, after a year's project teaching, to cope with tasks which had been devised earlier for post-initial (fourth-year English) classes, so that there was now a collection of tasks

for about 400 lessons from the beginning stage. While a part of this collection (tasks devised for Class 3 in its first year) was, as just noted, re-used later by other teachers with two other classes, the rest (tasks devised for Class 2 in the two years that class was taught) was re-used by other teachers with three subsequent project classes (Classes 4, 7, and 8). This indicates the amount of actual replication which the project was able to achieve.

Review seminars

A review seminar, of one to two weeks, was organized at the end of each year's project teaching with roughly the same types of audience as at the two seminars which led to the project.¹⁶ Not only were lesson reports on the year's teaching (as illustrated in the next section) made available at these seminars, but some actual samples of teaching – in the form of audio-recordings, transcripts, live lessons with one of the project classes and, to a very limited extent, video-recordings – were provided for examination and comment. The project team's interpretation of the teaching was also presented and discussed from different points of view, as were the views of those outside the project team who had taken the trouble during the year to observe some part of project teaching.

Reactions to the project were varied and often in conflict with one another, but the seminar discussions caused at least a re-examination of past pedagogic assumptions and often a sharing, corroboration, or modification of different perceptions.

Evaluation

One result of the discussion at review seminars was a decision by the project team to arrange for an external evaluation of learners' progress. Four different project classes (Classes 3, 5, 6, and 8 in Table 1) were given a series of tests, along with their non-project peers in the schools concerned, at the end of the fifth year. A brief report on this evaluation can be found in Beretta and Davies (1984) which is reprinted as Appendix VI.

Illustrative tasks

Some examples of the types of task used in project teaching are given below. They are taken from the brief lesson-reports which

were made available for comment and criticism in the first three years of the project to all who were interested, including those who attended annual review seminars. It must be remembered in reading these examples that such task specification does not constitute language-teaching material in the usual sense: it represents only an indication of content, leaving the actual language to be negotiated in each classroom; and even the content is subject to modification for particular classes and in particular lessons. A comparison between the 'Railway timetables' lesson report given immediately below and the transcript of the same lesson which appears in Appendix IVa will illustrate this negotiability of tasks.¹⁷

1 Railway timetables

This was the first task, in a sequence of five, based on railway timetables. The teacher knew that students in the class were not familiar with railway timetables, though all of them had seen trains and more than half of them had been in a train at some time. The teacher also knew that the class was quite unfamiliar with the twenty-four hour clock and therefore did a preliminary pre-task (relying on parallels to give students the concept) and task, before going on to work based on a timetable as such.

Preliminary pre-task The teacher writes '0600 hours = 6 am' on the blackboard and gets students to suggest similar twelve-hour clock equivalents of such times as 0630, 0915, 1000, 1145, 1200, 1300, 2300, 0000, 0115, and 0430. Pupils do this with reasonable success, although counting sometimes proves difficult (for example 2015 minus 1200) and the meaning of 0000 hours proves quite beyond them.

Preliminary task The teacher writes up eight twenty-four hour clock timings on the blackboard and students individually work out and write in their notebooks the twelve-hour equivalent of each. The teacher then writes up the answers and students mark each other's work. The result, from a show of hands, indicates that almost exactly half the students got five or more answers right and the rest four or less.

Pre-task The following is written up on the blackboard:

	Madras	Katpadi	Jolarpet	Bangalore
Brindavan	Dep. 0725	Arr. 0915	Arr. 1028	Arr. 1300
Express		Dep. 0920	Dep. 1030	

Questions such as the following are asked, answered, and discussed:

- 1 When does the Brindavan Express leave Madras/arrive in Bangalore? (Answers are expected in terms of the twelve-hour clock.)
- 2 When does it arrive at Katpadi/leave Jolarpet?
- 3 For how long does it stop at Jolarpet?
- 4 How long does it take to go from Madras to Katpadi/Jolarpet to Bangalore?
- 5 How many stations does it stop at on the way?

Task Sheets of paper containing the following timetable and the questions below it are handed out. The teacher asks a few questions orally, based on an anticipation of learners' difficulties (for example, 'Is this a day train or a night train?' in view of the difference from the pre-task timetable, and 'For how long does the train stop at Jolarpet?' in view of students' observed difficulty in calculating time across the hour mark) and then leaves the class to do the task.

	Madras	Arkonam	Katpadi	Jolarpet	Kolar	Bangalore
Bangalore	Dep. 2140	Arr. 2250	Arr. 0005	Arr. 0155	Arr. 0340	Arr. 0550
Mail		Dep. 2305	Dep. 0015	Dep. 0210		Dep. 0350

- 1 When does the Bangalore Mail leave Madras?
- 2 When does it arrive in Bangalore?
- 3 For how long does it stop at Arkonam?
- 4 At what time does it reach Katpadi?
- 5 At what time does it leave Jolarpet?
- 6 How long does it take to go from Madras to Arkonam?
- 7 How long does it take to go from Kolar to Bangalore?

Students' performance:

7 or 6 answers correct	14 students
5 or 4 answers, correct	8 students
3 or 2 answers correct	6 students
1 or 0 answers correct	3 students

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The next lesson based on railway timetables presented students with the following task (following a similar pre-task) as representing an appropriate increase in complexity:

	Madras	Arkonam	Katpadi	Jolarpet	Kolar	Bangalore
Bangalore	Dep. 2140	Arr. 2255	Arr. 0005	Arr. 0155	Arr. 0340	Arr. 0550
Mail		Dep. 2305	Dep. 0015	Dep. 0210	Dep. 0350	
Bangalore	Dep. 1300	Arr. 1420	Arr. 1515	Arr. 1647	Arr. 1825	Arr. 2020
Express		Dep. 1440	Dep. 1520	Dep. 1650	Dep. 1830	
Brindavan	Dep. 0725	—	Arr. 0915	Arr. 1028	—	Arr. 1300
Express			Dep. 0920	Dep. 1030		

Questions:

- 1 When does the Bangalore Express arrive at Katpadi?
- 2 At what time does the Bangalore Mail leave Arkonam?
- 3 For how long does the Bangalore Express stop at Jolarpet?
- 4 Which trains stop at Arkonam?
- 5 Where is the Brindavan Express at twelve noon?
- 6 Where is the Bangalore Express at three p.m.?
- 7 Mr Ganeshan wants to travel from Madras to Kolar. He has some work in Kolar in the morning. By which train should he travel?
- 8 Mrs Mani has to work in Madras on the morning of Monday. She wants to get to Bangalore on Monday night. Which train can she take?

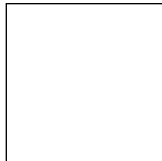
A later task in the sequence involved filling in request forms (used in India) for railway reservations. The form requires such details as the number of the train, date of travel, the traveller's age, class of travel, and form of accommodation (seat/berths), which were made available to the class in the form of personal letters received from friends or relatives – living elsewhere – asking for reservations to be made for their intended travel.

2 Instructions to draw

A sequence of lessons based on instructions to draw contained the following task (following a similar pre-task) representing an appropriate challenge at one stage of project teaching:

- a Draw a line, from left to right.
- b Write B at the right end of the line, and A at the left end.
- c Draw another line below AB.
- d Write D at its left end and C at its right end.
- e Join BD.

When the sequence was resumed two weeks later, with twelve lessons on other task-types intervening, the following task proved to be appropriately challenging for the class. (The pre-task which preceded it introduced conventions such as that 'continue AB' meant continuing the line concerned in the direction of B to about twice its original length.)



- a Name the top corners of the square: B on the left and C on the right.
- b Name the corners at the bottom: D on the right and A on the left.
- c Continue AB and call the end of the line E.
- d Continue CD and write F at the end of the line.
- e Join EC.
- f What should be joined next?

Returning to the drawing sequence a long time later (when about 200 lessons had intervened, though only three of them had been on drawing instructions) the teacher found the class able to do the following task with about the same measure of success:

- a Draw two parallel, horizontal lines. Let them be about four inches long.
- b Join the ends of the two lines on the left, with a short vertical line.
- c Use two parallel, vertical lines to join the right ends of the horizontal lines.
- d Mark the mid-points of the parallel, vertical lines.
- e Draw a dotted line, horizontally, passing through the mid-points of the parallel vertical lines and extending to the right for about half an inch.
- f Use straight lines to join the right end of the dotted line with the right ends of the two horizontal parallel lines.

3 Interpreting rules

In a sequence of tasks based on rules of various kinds, the following was a lesson based on local rules for concessional bus fares for students. The rules (which students were given copies of) are stated first, followed by the questions which constituted the pre-task and task.

Pallavan Transport Corporation
(Madras City)

- a Students can buy and use bus tokens for a month, instead of buying a ticket for each bus journey.
- b The cost of tokens is as follows:

30 tokens	Rs 7.50
60 tokens	Rs 15.00
90 tokens	Rs 22.50
120 tokens	Rs 30.00
- c A student has to buy at least 30 tokens a month. He/she cannot buy more than 120 tokens a month.

- d** One token is equal to one bus ticket: the student has to give a token to the conductor of the bus, instead of buying a ticket from him.
 - e** Tokens should be used only for the purpose of travelling between one's home and the school or college where one is studying.
 - f** Tokens should be bought each month between the 1st and the 15th. They can be used only between the 16th of that month and the 15th of the next month.
 - g** No money will be refunded on unused tokens.
 - h** Only full-time students of a school, college, or university can buy and use bus tokens. They have to produce a certificate from the head of the institution to show that they are full-time students.
 - i** Tokens cannot be transferred from one person to another.
 - j** If a student misuses his/her tokens, he/she will not be allowed to buy any more tokens during that year.
-

Pre-task After a glossing, at the students' request, of some words (for example 'refunded', 'misused') and a preliminary discussion, involving questions, about the nature of some rules (for example on the point that tokens can be bought only in multiples of thirty and that a direct bus from home to school involves the use of a single token while a change of buses involves using one token on each bus), the following case is discussed as the pre-task:

Raman is a student of the Government Arts College in Nandanam. He lives in T. Nagar. He has classes from Monday to Friday each week and eats his lunch at the college canteen. There are direct buses from T. Nagar to Nandanam.

- 1 How many bus tokens does Raman need each week?
- 2 How many tokens does he need for a month (i.e. 4 weeks, by convention)?
- 3 A bus ticket from T. Nagar to Nandanam costs Rs 0.50. How much does Raman save by buying tokens?
- 4 How many tokens should he buy each month? Why? How many will he actually use?
- 5 Raman's brother goes to a High School in Saidapet. Can he use Raman's extra tokens? How do you know?
- 6 Raman goes to see his uncle in K. K. Nagar every Sunday. Can he use his tokens to go to K. K. Nagar? How do you know?

Task Balan studies at the Higher Secondary School in Nungambakkam. His home is in Adyar. He has classes only in the afternoons, from Monday to Saturday. There are direct buses from Nungambakkam to Adyar and a ticket costs one rupee.

- 1 How many tokens does Balan need each month?
- 2 How many tokens should he buy each month? How much money does he save?
- 3 He bought 60 tokens in July. His school had some holidays in August, so he used only 30 tokens up to 15 August.
 - a Can he go on using the remaining 30 tokens? How do you know?
 - b Can he return the remaining 30 tokens and get back the money? How can you tell?

One of the students, who belonged to the top half of the class in terms of general performance, wrote the following answer:

- 1 Balan needs every month 52 tokens (4 days holidays).
- 2 Balan buys 52 tickets Rs 52.00
He buys 60 tokens Rs 15.00
He saves Rs 37.00
- 3 a He cannot use them, see Rule No. 6 of P.T.C.
b He cannot return tickets and cannot get money, see Rule 7.

Another student, representing the lower half of the ability range in the class, wrote:

- 1 Balan every month need 48 tokens.
- 2 Balan save if he buys 60 tokens 28.00.
- 3 a 1st and 15th. They can used 16th and 15th of next month.
b Only 30 tokens buy a month.

The class did four more lessons based on the same rules, two of them involving students who had to change buses between home and school (and could make an additional saving by using tokens only on the longer sector, for some days in a month); another involving irregular uses of tokens and the consequences, and yet another involving procedures for buying tokens (e.g. producing certificates, making applications). There were also sequences of tasks based on the rules for a bank account, a system of postal code numbers (and a quick mail service) used in India, and the rules of a library.

4 Beginners' tasks

Some of the tasks for beginners deliberately used the letters of the alphabet in order to lead towards literacy, as noted earlier (see page 29). The following are two examples of such tasks, with an indication of the pre-task discourse which resulted:

a On the blackboard:

1		5		
10		4		2
	9		12	
8		3		11
	6		7	

Teacher talk:

I want someone to write 'b' at the end of line number five. Who can write 'b' at the end of five? Can you? . . . Come and try. Is that line five? No, that's line number one. This is line five. All right, write 'b' at the end of it . . . at the end, not in the middle. . . . No, not at the beginning, at the end. . . . Yes, write 'b' there. Good, you can go back now. . . . Now, I want someone else to write 'e' at the top of line eight. Can you? . . . Can you? Who else can? All right, you try . . . top of eight, correct. What should you write there? Not 'c', that is 'c'. I want 'e'. Yes, that's 'e', fine. Well done. Next, you have to write 'a' at the beginning of twelve.

Those who can, put up your hands. Any more? All right, you can come and write. Where is the beginning of twelve? Where is twelve? Can you find twelve there? No? Who wants to show twelve to him? Come along. That is right, number twelve. That is line twelve. Now you have to write 'a' at the beginning of that line . . . 'a' at the beginning . . . Good. . . .

b On the blackboard:

p	e	n		
		u		
	m	a	n	
	b	o	y	
	e			
	r			

Teacher talk:

Listen to this and say whether it is true or false . . . 'a' is to the right of 'm' . . . 'a' to the right of 'm'. Is that true or false? Hands up those who say it is true. . . . What do you think? False? Let's see. Where is 'a'? And where is 'm'? . . . 'm' not 'n'. That's right, 'm'. Now, is 'a' to the right or left? To the right, correct. 'a' is to the right of 'm'. So it is true. . . . Can you see? All right. And now, listen again. Is this true or false? . . . 'u' is just above 'n' . . . just above 'n', not below. True or false? False? How can you tell? Which is 'n' and which is 'u'? Which is below? . . . 'n' is below 'u'? Above, yes. Is 'u' below or above 'n'? Below, yes. So 'u' is below 'n', not above. The statement is false. Good. . . .

It turned out that students in the beginners' class did not yet know how to read time from the clock and a sequence of lessons was accordingly based on that subject. Early tasks in the sequence involved telling time from clock faces (drawn on the blackboard) with the hands on the hour mark and half-hour mark, while later tasks involved moving one of the clock's hands according to the movement of the other, or re-positioning both hands according to specified lapses of time. This was followed by another sequence of graded tasks which involved the daily routines, for example office hours, of individuals and working out from them either the duration of particular activities, for example travel from hospital to home in the case of a doctor, or the locations of particular individuals at given times. A further sequence was based on a given monthly calendar: an early task involved relating specified dates to days of the week and vice versa, while later tasks involved relating weekly or fortnightly routines to the relevant dates, monthly routines to relevant days of the week in a given month, and working back or forward to a relevant date or day of the week in the preceding or following month.

School timetables themselves formed the basis of yet another sequence of tasks. An early task in the sequence involved filling up a blank timetable from the teacher's statements (see Appendix IVb for a transcript of the resulting pre-task discourse on one occasion) while later tasks involved relating the timetables of different classes, for example to find out when a student in one class could pass on a shared atlas or box of mathematical instruments to another in another class, or constructing from class timetables the individual timetable for a given teacher who teaches particular subjects to particular classes. A more advanced

task was to find out when the head teacher could see three different teachers together during school time without disturbing any of the classes, which involved working out a time when none of the three teachers was teaching any class.

Task sequencing

As will have been gathered from the above, tasks within a given sequence (i.e. tasks of the same type forming the basis of several lessons) were ordered by a commonsense judgement of increasing complexity, the later tasks being either inclusive of the earlier ones or involving a larger amount of information, or an extension of the kind of reasoning done earlier. The following is one example:

- a** Given the map of a town (with the roads and some places named) marking on it or naming some other places (e.g. a hospital) on the basis of given descriptions, or describing the locations of some places in relation to others. This involves, among other things, a directional orientation on the map (e.g. 'A' is just to the north of 'B', 'C' is at the eastern end of the road, etc.)
- b** On the same map, stating the best (e.g. shortest, easiest) way from one place to another.
- c** Given someone who has lost his/her way and is now at a certain place on the same map, deciding where he/she must have gone wrong and what is best done now.
- d** Given bus-routes and taxi-stands on the same map, deciding which among possible routes is likely to be the best (e.g. quickest, cheapest, or with the least distance to walk) for a particular person in a particular context.
- e** Given the same map, deciding on the most needed new bus-route or taxi-stand (from considerations such as the locations of the railway station, the temple, the school, etc.).

There was usually more than one lesson at each level of complexity, with some variation from one to the next and with a transition from orally-presented tasks to those presented on paper, as indicated earlier. Any sequence planned or taken over from earlier teaching of another class was subject to change in the light of learners' performance in each lesson. The order in which different task sequences followed each other was similarly a matter of common-sense judgement and past experience, subject to some alterations at each re-use. A classified, and highly generalized, list of the types of task used on the project is given in Appendix V.¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Some documentation of these changes can be found in the Nagpur Report (1958), Study Group Report (1967), and Study Group Report (1971).
- 2 See Smith (1962) and Smith (1968: 180–205) for a description of the programme, and Widdowson (1968: 115–17) for some comment.
- 3 The RIE Bulletins published in 1978 and 1979 provide summaries of the proceedings of these two seminars.
- 4 See Palmer (1921: 54–5): ‘Proficiency in the understanding of the structure of a language is attained by treating the subject as a science, by studying the *theory*; but proficiency in the *use* of a language can only come as a result of perfectly formed habit If we are unaware of the manner in which we have pieced [a sentence] together, we have produced it automatically If we build it up by conscious synthesis or by a rapid translation from an equivalent sentence of our native tongue, we do not produce it automatically; we have not formed the habit of using the sentence or the type of sentence to which it belongs.’
- 5 Some examples are Allen and Widdowson (1974), Morrow and Johnson (1979), Johnson and Morrow (1979).
- 6 See van Ek (1975, 1980).
- 7 See Wilkins (1976). Also Wilkins (1981: 99): ‘In the worldwide reality of language teaching, a notional syllabus may force the teacher’s attention on meaning where, even if contrary to intention, with a structural syllabus meaning is often neglected.’
- 8 The distinction being made here between explicit and implicit knowledge is close to that made by Bialystok (1978; 1983) except that Bialystok regards implicit knowledge as being ‘unanalysed’ (1983: 106) and the process of inferencing in language acquisition as leading only to explicit knowledge (1978: 79; 1983: 105). I regard implicit knowledge as being an analysed (hence generative) system and subconscious inferencing as a process which helps to develop it.
- 9 cf. Chomsky (1976: 4): ‘For the conscious mind, not specifically designed for the purpose, it remains a distant goal to

reconstruct and comprehend what the child has done intuitively and with minimal effort.’ Also Chomsky (1980: 133): ‘Ordinary grammar books, quite properly for their purposes, tacitly assume a principled grammar (generally without awareness) and deal with idiosyncrasies, with the kinds of things which could not be known without experience or instruction. . . . Explanatory principles with any merit bearing on the domain of facts of the sort I have been considering are in general inaccessible to consciousness, and there is no reason to expect otherwise.’ Palmer had pointed out, too, that the system that is learnt in learning a second language ‘is so complex and so vast that the learned world has not yet succeeded in unravelling it or in sounding its depths’ (1921: 2).

- 10 This shows the problem in acting on Brumfit’s suggestion that since the public examination is ‘a test designed to measure structural competence in English’ and since the project’s ‘hypothesis is that a problem-solving approach is effective in teaching the structure of the language, such a public examination should have some validity’ as an evaluation of the project (1984b: 238).
- 11 Hence Brumfit’s remark, based on the project’s situation in 1982, that ‘most of the students taught have not been beginners’ (1984a: 238). The project team stated its reasons for starting with a post-initial class as follows (RIE Newsletter 1/1, July 1979): ‘There are two major assumptions in a communicational approach to school-level teaching, viz. (a) that language “use” (in Widdowson’s sense) is not merely a matter of exploiting the language structure already learnt for communicative purposes, but constitutes a good pedagogic device for enlarging the learner’s command of language structure itself, and (b) that all language structure can, in principle, be taught and learnt through activities involving language use. We think that the second assumption is not only bolder than the first but is based on the validity of it. The first assumption can be true without the second being true but not vice versa. Testing the first assumption, therefore, seems to us both a simpler task (with independent potential for useful findings) and a necessary step towards testing the second.’

- 12 Reviewing the teaching done in the first three months, the project team said (RIE Newsletter 1/2, September 1979): 'In the process of ignoring the specific principles of structural teaching, we run the risk (and have already been guilty to some extent) of ignoring the more general principles of all teaching, such as (i) pitching (and adjusting in the light of experience) the level of activity or effort to the actual ability of learners, (ii) grading a sequence of activities from simple to more complex, so as to produce a cumulative effect, (iii) the need for teacher–learner rapport based, for example, on continuity between lessons and the building up of appropriate learner-expectations, and (iv) the need for (and modes of) reward/reinforcement, feedback and economy.'

Assessing the teaching done in the course of the first year, the project team regarded 56 of the 126 lessons taught as unsuccessful and the remaining 70 as successful, according to the following criteria: 'A lesson has been considered successful if (i) it had a task-centred pattern, and (ii) the task set seemed to engage most pupils' minds, i.e. the task was perceived clearly and attempted seriously, regardless of what measure of success was actually achieved. Unsuccessful lessons are those which (i) were not task-centred, i.e. were devoted entirely to preparation/practice or set the task too late for it to be attempted, or (ii) were too difficult, hence brought forth random responses, or (iii) were too easy as a result of over-guidance, thus reducing the task almost to mere reproduction, or (iv) proved, for some reason, uninteresting (or "silly") to pupils or (v) very occasionally, were frustrated by external factors, e.g. last day of term; a school event.' (RIE Newsletter 1/4, April 1980).

- 13 The term 'pre-task' has been mistakenly understood as involving direct teaching (i.e. presentation and practice) of the concepts as well as the items of language needed for the task: connections tend to be established in the minds of those who read reports on project teaching between 'pre-task', 'pre-teaching', 'preparation', and 'presentation'. Johnson's (1982: 141) interpretation of the pre-task in these terms may, in addition, have arisen from the fact that he visited the project at a time (the end of the first year) when the project team was still exploring the concepts involved and using terms such as 'rehearsal' and 'preparatory work' to refer to

the pre-task thus: 'The aim of the preparatory work is to ensure (i) that the task to be set will, when set, be clearly perceived by learners and (ii) that strategies for tackling the task, as well as the language that will be needed for the purpose, will, when needed, be available for recall and reapplication. In most cases, such preparation is best done through one or more small-scale rehearsals of the task to be presented. The relationship between rehearsal and task is an important means of regulating the challenge of a task; the closer the rehearsal is to the task (in form as well as in substance), the lower the challenge of the latter. In general, no task should be just a duplication of the rehearsal, thus reducing the challenge to a matter of mere recall and reproduction: the task should involve at least a reapplication of the strategies involved to a different situation/set of facts and, at most, an extension (amounting to guided discovery) of the strategies called for.' (RIE Newsletter 1/4, April 1980). Johnson was, of course, also making a prediction about such rehearsing eventually leading to a 'heavy pre-teaching' of language items while the project in reality went on to develop the concept of the pre-task as a parallel task. See also Greenwood (1985) for a misinterpretation of the pre-task, based partly on Johnson's statement and partly on the project's 1980 statement just cited. See also note 17 below.

- 14 Brumfit's (1984b: 237–8) comments on such marking indicate an assumption on his part that the marks were meant to be a form of evidence to the public on the success of the project. The project team included the marks in its lesson reports only as rough evidence on the success of the task concerned (within the assumptions of the project and as judged by the project teacher), which is not the same thing as evidence on the project's success. However, such marks can perhaps be a form of evidence on the learner's progress if the relative complexity of the tasks used at different points of time is assessed and, equally, if a subjective uniformity (as a substitute for explicit objectivity) to the teacher's marking is assumed. See Saraswathi (1984) for such a study.
- 15 The project team's thoughts at the time on language control were: 'The classroom activities we envisage will not be constrained by linguistic control of the kind associated with the structural approach. . . . This does not mean that there will

be a total absence of linguistic control in our experimental teaching. Some form of overall control will undoubtedly be necessary in conducting the classroom activities we are thinking of. . . . The actual general control that a teacher needs to maintain will, we think, be determined by the classroom evidence he sees and by trial and error' (RIE Newsletter 1/1, July 1979). And, at the end of the first year's teaching: 'The teacher is to control his language in the classroom in the same way that an adult controls his language in conversing with a child, namely, by avoiding what he considers to be beyond his audience, by glossing, rephrasing, explaining or ascertaining the understanding of such expressions and modifying his assumptions about what is within or beyond his audience's competence, continually in the light of ongoing (interactional) evidence' (RIE Newsletter 1/4, April 1980).

- 16 RIE (1980a), RIE (1980b), and RIE (1981) are reports on two of these seminars.
- 17 This particular lesson, on railway timetables, was one of four subjected to a study at the University of Lancaster, to see if there was any evidence in the classroom discourse of deliberate teaching of language items. Briefly, the tasks used in four of the project lessons in India were used by a British teacher with a class of British children (younger than the class in India) as lessons on the subject-content of the tasks concerned, and audio transcripts of the resulting lessons in Britain were compared with corresponding transcripts of the lessons in India. None of the differences between the two sets of transcripts indicated any overt or covert teaching of pre-selected language in project teaching. See Collingham (1981), Gilpin (1981), Kumaravadivelu (1981), and Mizon (1981).
- 18 As indicated by the list, the particular task which Brumfit (1984a, 1984b) uses to illustrate project teaching happens to be an untypical one.