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Comments on the evolution of the relationship
between linguistics and language didactics.

Linguistics, by virtue of the fact that it investigates language, has always had a tremendous influence upon the ideas about the teaching of languages. At present, however, there are some signs of a crisis in the long-lasting relationship of the two fields. There is an evident decrease of interest on the part of language teaching specialists who are now concerned primarily with other areas of investigation, such as second language acquisition and language psychology, in general. There is also an evident lack of progress in establishing a pattern of the relationship that could be compatible with the current developments in language didactics.

Two recently published articles conveniently illustrate this latter idea /Harsh 1982, Rivers 1982/. Apart from mentioning such current topics of interest as communicative competence and speech-act theory, both Rivers and Harsh have failed to add in any substantial way to the existing understanding of the nature of the relationship. Rivers /page 9/ states in her conclusion: "The many new directions opened up by research in linguistics and psychology have provided teachers with many ideas for program development and teaching approaches. By their very diversity, they have liberated teachers to plan and adapt their programs with due attention to the objectives of their students and the needs of the area where they are teaching. Teachers now feel free to develop the style of teaching with which they themselves feel most at ease, for it is only by feeling at ease that they can set their students at ease in the potentially anxiety-creating environment of the active second-language class. They will continue to learn more about language from the linguists and about the language learning process from the psychologists, but it is only the classroom teacher who is experiencing daily the interaction of these two who can finally decide the most appropriate approach to

teaching and course content in the local situation. Foreign language teachers of the future must make their own decisions as informed professionals /.../."

Suggestions that the teacher is free to choose what he feels at ease with and that only the teacher can make decisions concerning the best approach to teaching point to the fact that the relationship as outlined at present is far from being conclusive. The initial motivation for viewing linguistics as a relevant source discipline was exactly the opposite, that is to avoid the kind of freedom and subjectivity that Rivers is now talking about and to provide scientific basis for teachers' decisions.

When Fries outlined the relationship in 1945, he said /page 5/: ".../the modern scientific study of language has within the last twenty years developed special techniques of descriptive analysis by which a trained linguist can efficiently and accurately arrive at the fundamentally significant matters of structure and sound system amid the bewildering mass of details which constitute the actual rumble of speech. If an adult is to gain a satisfactory proficiency in a foreign language most quickly and easily he must have satisfactory materials upon which to work - i.e. he must have the really important items of the language selected and arranged in a properly related sequence with special emphasis upon the chief trouble spots. /.../ The techniques of scientific description, on the other hand, can provide a thorough and constant check of the language material and thus furnish the basis for the selection of the most efficient materials to guide the efforts of the learner. /.../ It is enough here to insist that only with sound materials based upon an adequate analysis of both the language to be studied and the native language of the student /or with the continued guidance of a trained linguist/ can an adult make the maximum progress toward the satisfactory mastery of a foreign language." The idea of the relationship implied in this passage is in opposition to that in the first quotation. For one thing, there is an almost invisible transition here from linguistic statements to didactic considerations. Fries assumes that the way in which linguists view language and the aspects they choose to regard relevant are also automatically relevant to the teaching of language. This view, which is

prevalent at the time of publication, is now no longer tenable. /This will be discussed later./ Further, Fries states that the results of the learning process depend on the quality of the materials. The materials are satisfactory, according to him, when they are based on the right kind of linguistics. At the time of writing, the "right" kind of linguistics was structural linguistics as opposed to traditional grammar. These effective materials contain the "fundamentally significant matters of structure and system" arranged according to linguistic criteria. At present it is not at all clear whether these are really the fundamentally matters in learning. To the contrary, there are views which argue that the emphasis on structure actually interferes with the learning process /Newmark and Reibel 1970/. According to Fries, linguistic analysis also highlights the chief trouble spots, that is the potential areas of errors. These are the spots where the systems of the two languages differ. Yet, the modest results of contrastive analysis used in textbook writing suggest that linguistics has not kept all the promises. In the passage from Fries, features such as "satisfactory", "the most efficient", and "sound" are as yet taken to mean "in line with linguistics". It is important to notice at this stage that initially the didactic interest in language is identified with its linguistic conception. In contrast to these ideas it is now impossible to claim that such an identification can be made legitimately and that Fries' understanding of the qualities of the materials can still be valid.

Yet, the quotation from Rivers emphasizing the teacher's freedom to make independent decisions seems to suggest that the relationship has returned to the starting point since language teachers had had the same kind of freedom before the advent of the scientific methods of teaching developed in the 50's and 60's. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that little progress has been made with reference to the role of linguistics in the field of teaching, but at the same time it is possible to make an observation that the clarity that has been achieved is mostly connected with notions of how not to use linguistics in this field. The aim of this paper is, however, to investigate possible reasons for the inconclusiveness of

the current state of the relationship. An element of progress can be seen in the fact that the identification of the didactic and the linguistic views of language is no longer made. A healthy attitude towards linguistics seems to reside in attempts at defining, in purely didactic terms, a specific demand for linguistic information as opposed to the dominant attitude which aims at finding, or creating, applications for recent linguistic findings following the conviction that they must be relevant to the field of teaching in one way or another.

This prevalent orientation was put to the test already with the emergence of transformational generative linguistics. Before that there was one linguistic school which had scientific aspirations since the traditional approaches to the analysis of language were rejected as unscientific. Yet, transformational generative grammar had even greater scientific claims and in this way it is a challenge to structural linguistics in the field of teaching and consequently to the ideas on teaching accepted from this school. Krohn /1971, 2/ comments that: "MFL" methodology has had its theoretical rug pulled out from under it - at least the linguistic portion of that rug and the learning theory portion." But unlike structural linguistics, TGG was too intricate to lend itself to an easy kind of application; its potential and actual use posed more problems than it solved. In this sense, it was above all a challenge to the established paradigm of the relationship.

Roulet /1975, 42/ offers the following reflection: "As long as one was happy with labelling directly observable facts, as was the case with traditional and structural grammars, it was easy to pass on this information, just as it was, in a language teaching course. Now when linguists utilize as base elements of their rules and their base structures, symbols which correspond to abstract facts and are not amenable to direct observation, this can no longer be the case. This no doubt explains why the problem of applications of models of grammatical analysis to teaching has appeared particularly acute with the development of transformational generative linguistics." It is not surprising therefore that views concerning the impact of TGG upon the field of teaching ranged from enthusiastic attempts at direct application to those completely rejecting its relevance. What seems of consequence to the development

of the relationship is the recognition that linguistics and its preoccupations need not necessarily be always transferable to the didactic discipline. Misunderstandings connected with the simplistic and nontechnical interpretation of the central concepts of TGG, such as generation, transformation, competence, brought home to the representatives of the teaching profession that some linguistic terms can be of no direct use from the point of view of language teaching. The abstract character of TGG insights helped them to realize that some linguistic insights may be designed for purposes other than aiding teaching. Also the scepticism of linguists themselves /Chomsky 1970/ as to the relevance of TGG to the field of teaching made it awkward for teachers to retain their indeterminate enthusiasm for anything that comes from linguistics. Moreover, the fact that structural linguistics had a very dangerous rival in TGG necessitated a choice on the part of language teaching between the two schools. Such a choice inevitably implies that the field of teaching must formulate its own criteria; such criteria were not necessary earlier. The need of criteria is, to a high degree, imposed not so much by a growing self awareness of the didactic discipline but by the progress in linguistics, but nevertheless contributes to a more independent attitude of language didactics toward linguistics. One of the possibilities that occurred to teachers was to accept TGG on the basis of its linguistic validity or on the basis of its recency, but this attitude was later discredited.

There were also quite influential views /Lamendella 1969, Oller 1973/ which claimed the irrelevance of TGG to language teaching and were instrumental in defining an attitude toward linguistics in terms of opposition rather than identification of the two fields. Oller and Lamendella do not reject TGG as a scientific model; to the contrary, they are convinced that both the structural and the generative models are scientific, but they consider this to be an insufficient prerequisite for using them in language pedagogy. Their inadequacy for the purposes of teaching stems from their failure to capture the didactically relevant aspect of language. Lamendella thinks that a psycholinguistic model of language is more appropriate in this respect, while Oller insists that

it should be a pragmatic model which stresses how information is coded in language. Models of descriptive linguistics are rejected on the grounds that they focus on language as a self-contained system. In this way both views contribute to the formulation of a more independent attitude of the field of language teaching toward linguistics.

Apart from the necessity of coping, in one way or another, with the emerging plurality of language models, the field of teaching had to keep pace with the ever broadening scope of linguistic research, embracing such areas as the sociological, psychological and physiological dimensions of language. Attempts at incorporating these new developments include the ideas that the whole relationship should be based on implications rather than applications or that it should only be indirect rather than direct; there is a preoccupation with the notion of applied linguistics understood as a level mediating between the theoretical interests of pure linguistics and the practical concerns of teaching; there is also a claim that the field of teaching should be free to combine different schools in linguistics in order to construct an eclectic linguistic basis, and finally, there is an orientation that a macro-linguistic basis, including all the developments in the hyphenated linguistic fields, is much more appropriate than the micro-linguistic one, utilized so far. Yet, the above conceptions only modify rather than alter the established paradigm of the relationship because they accept the relevance of linguistics as a matter of principle. They differ in this respect from the ideas of Oller and Lemendella. At the same time, they are essentially an outgrowth of linguistic rather than didactic developments. The ideas concerning the indirect use of linguistics try to overcome the difficulty involved in using abstract linguistic insights in the field of teaching, but they fail to offer a principled basis for implementing them. The same reservation can be expressed about the eclectic conception of the linguistic basis; it is not clear how this basis should be constructed and which elements can be used. The notion of the macro-linguistic foundation is in line with the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research, but it fails to tackle the problem of the relative merits of these developments to the different aspects of language teaching.

The implications paradigm can be blamed for leaving too much freedom to subjective judgements and is not, for this reason, a fully acceptable solution.

A fairly accurate account of this inconclusive state of the relationship is to be found in Wardhaugh 1975 /page 12/ who states that "the linguistic insights cannot be ignored; they must be incorporated somehow /my emphasis/. The evident evasiveness as to how exactly linguistics could be used and for what purposes leads to a conclusion that although some of the disadvantages of the too simplistic applications have been overcome and some of the initial identifications avoided, it is far from being clear where the interests of the two fields coincide and how to justify the need of the relationship in terms other than axiomatic.

An interesting trend seems to be that in which attempts are made at coping with the plurality of language models by way of establishing criteria of their didactic relevance. It is recognized that language and linguistic description of language are different objects. A model is less inclusive than language because it is an abstraction made from the point of view of some preconception /Rezvin 1966/, Leontjev says: "An exhaustive description of a language is no real model, but an aggregate of all possible models, i.e. a purely theoretical assumption." As a result, it becomes clear that some models may be better suited to didactic needs than others. Logically, this should lead to a definition of the aspect of language, relevant to the task of language learning and teaching, that should be modelled for the purposes of language didactics. But so far, this has not been done. Instead, several authors have tried to establish criteria of relevance which could be matched against the available linguistic models. Results are not overwhelming. In his discussion of this problem, Corder /1973/ decides that didactic validity of the given model must result from its utility. The test of utility is, according to him, empirical. Corder's criterion is not very helpful because it does not offer any principled basis for choosing a model prior to its application. In order to establish their degree of utility, all the available models would have to be checked for this feature. The search of criteria, however, is aimed at avoiding this kind of procedure.

Halliday /1973/ makes the following observation in this connection /page 9-10/: "The criterion is that of relevance; we want to understand, and to highlight, those facets of language which bear on the investigation of the task in hand. In an educational context the problem for linguistics is to elaborate some account of language that is relevant to the work of the English Teacher. What constitutes a relevant notion of language from this point of view, and by what criteria can this be decided?" Halliday does not offer any answer to these questions, but from the point of view of the development of the relationship it is interesting that these problems have been posed at all. "iddowson /1979/, who also discusses the issue in his account of the partiality and relevance of linguistic description, reaches the conclusion that the model aiming at relevance should take into account the language user. Mackey /1975/ is of the opinion that each model of linguistic description produces different results in teaching and a question arises: Whose linguistics to apply? No answer this question, the field of teaching, which has been the child of fashion in linguistics for a considerable period, should establish its own priorities. As a result of these considerations, it is no longer possible in the field of teaching to accept the linguistic criteria of validity as didactic criteria. The notion of teaching priorities which are indispensable in evaluating the different models has not been, as yet, fully developed, but it seems to be one of the urgent tasks for future investigations.

An alternative to the search for criteria of relevance is the eclectic orientation. Light /1968, 222/ expresses an opinion which sounds like the creed of eclecticism: "It does teacher no good to make existential commitment to one or another school of linguistics, and the claims that whole programmes for teaching should be based upon one school of linguistic studies are a hindrance to good teaching. For an a priori choice of a wholistic method of analysis puts the teacher among linguists and robs him of the freedom he must have to select materials and teach them according to educational criteria." The eclectic orientation has its own disadvantages. It is not clear, for instance, whether the eclectic linguistic basis should be developed by an accumulation of all the existing models and addition of the newly developed

ones ad infinitum and thus lead to a possibly broad and inclusive model of language. There is a contradiction at this point, since, as Leontjev says, an exhaustive model of language is neither necessary nor possible. There is no such task that would require an exhaustive model. This inherent danger of the eclectic conception suggests that the search of criteria resulting from the analysis of the task offers better prospects of finding solutions than the essentially improvised summation of the linguistic models.

The state of the relationship as outlined above is fairly compound and further complications of the paradigm are still feasible though not necessarily helpful. It is evident that the main preoccupation of this paradigm is linguistics and its possible uses in the field of teaching. Such an emphasis can be compared to a cure looking for a disease, as rightly pointed out by Corder /1973/. The topic of the didactic priorities emerged relatively recently and has not been sufficiently stressed since then. Yet, some of the negative evidence resulting from the typical linguistically oriented treatment of the relationship may be helpful in redirecting the attention of specialists toward the didactic aspects of this matter.

Rivers' statement that "teachers are now free to develop the style of teaching with which they feel at ease" may be understood as implying that the ideas have come full circle. This is not the case, however. Current preoccupation with the psychological aspects of learning may, in the long run, enable the teaching specialists to define the didactic priorities, which determine the character of the relationship, in more specific categories.

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Streszczenie.

Artykuł "Comments on the Evolution of the Relationship between Linguistics and Language Didactics" omawia kwestię związków językoznawstwa i dydaktyki języków obcych, z uwzględnieniem przesłanek jakie naszały w związku z dynamicznym rozwojem obu dziedzin. Stadia rozwoju stosunku obu dziedzin wskazują że nastąpiło odejście od identyfikowania zagadnień interesujących językoznawstw z problemami dydaktycznymi. Obecny spadek zainteresowania problematyką powiązań obu dziedzin tłumaczyć można dość skąpymi wynikami uzyskanymi w wyniku stosowania dominującego dotąd podejścia poszukującego zastosowania językoznawstwa w dziedzinie nauczania języków obcych, nie zaś definiowania problemów dydaktycznych przy pomocy informacji lingwistycznych. Obecującym kierunkiem badań wydają się poszukiwania kryteriów przydatności modeli lingwistycznych dla celów dydaktycznych.