

Let every nation be at its home
Let every bird in its own nest dwell,
Let the African be free in his home
And let the searching parties that roam
Stop their search for a lost Africa.

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TO THE HOUSE-WIFE.

Sheila Saravanan

The harmony of the world begins at home,
The harmony of the world begins with YOU.
Wake up each common day
And call your home to life.
In the dawn's diffusing light,
Embrace your home with out-stretched arms,
In a mansion or a hut,
You are the magnetising energy holding together,
The energising source enlivening everyone.
You are the nucleus of the love circle,
The link of concern in that chain of unity.
You are the joy that comes with sharing,
The cure that comes with caring,
The unity that comes with bearing.
You are the torch of love for the world,
The world which is nothing but a larger family,
Of any human home.
The home which is spelt with the «H»
Of the heart and hope, not of hate.
You are hope -
You are home -
You are heaven.

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UNLIKE ANY OTHER SUBJECT

Dr. G. Despatie

Language is unlike any other subject, therefore it should not be taught like any other subject.
UNCERTAINTY AND CONFUSION. I.L.S. is once again in the process of reappraising its whole curriculum. This is not surprising. Everywhere, there seems to be a recurring atmosphere of disappointment, uncertainty and confusion regarding language teaching. Halliday admits that even in the best of conditions, «the results of years of hard work spent in teach-

ing foreign language... are often depressingly disappointing». (1964:156) Marckwardt states that «just about once every 20 to 25 years» we find language teachers «engaging in an agonizing reappraisal of their goals and practices». (1971:2)

REASONS. The reasons given for this widespread confusion are many. Some blame the teachers, some blame the students. Others find fault with the approach to language and the description of languages on which the teaching is founded. Francis C. Johnson blames it all on Linguistics, whose influence «has led to the failure to develop an adequate discipline of language teaching and learning». (1971:3)

I think that one of the main reasons for all this dissatisfaction is the complexity of language itself, and therefore of language teaching. In many ways, language is unlike any other subject.

FIRST OF ALL, it is unlike any other subject in that its content is not well defined. In other disciplines, the content is clear, and each has clear-cut divisions of «subjects» for example, in Physics: mechanics, optics, electricity, etc. - and each subject deals with a limited area. The content of language itself, on the other hand, is unlimited: it is everything one can talk about, the whole of reality.

From the teacher's viewpoint, there is another aspect to consider: the content of a second language is the same as that of the first language, therefore, it is nothing new to the student. There is no discovery of the unknown, no additional information to spark the interest or awaken curiosity.

SECONDLY, language is unlike any other subject in that it is essential for the learning of all other subjects. It is evident if all the instruction is given in a second language. But even if the instruction is in the native language, most universities require that the student have at least a «reading knowledge» of one or two languages other than his own. So much serious research is being done in so many different countries and at such a fast rate that one cannot hope to find all the material he needs published or translated in his own language. To acquire a reading knowledge of a language may seem easier than learning it as a second language, but most scholarly books and articles are far from easy to read, and even for that purpose modern methods favor oral practice.

THIRDLY, language is unlike any other subject in that the personality of the teacher may have more to do with the success of his students than in the teaching of any other subject. Dr. Cherrier points out that «a creative skill like language cannot be taught in the same sense that a technical skill like electrical repair is taught... a good language teacher does not so much teach as help the student to learn». (1973:24)

FINALLY, it is unlike any other subject in that society does not

care much how one teaches Chemistry or Geography, but it has a definite attitude toward the learning and teaching of language. All are interested - parents, professionals, teachers of other subjects - because all make use of it and all consider it not only important but essential to a good education. On the other hand, some consider it a waste of time to teach language, because they fail to distinguish between how a language can be learned and how a language can (or should) be taught.

The language teacher can hardly ignore the fact that all children learn their native language without an instructor, and that thousands of people, many of them adults who have never had any (or much) formal education, succeed in learning one or more foreign languages without being taught. But when one is forced to learn a foreign language in school, or chooses to undertake formal instruction, then, as Halliday says, «one of the useful functions of the teacher... can be to provide the physical conditions that will render more bearable and expeditious a process that could nevertheless take place without him». (1974:181)

TEACHING LANGUAGE AND TEACHING ABOUT LANGUAGE

How then should language be taught? First, we must distinguish between teaching language and teaching about language. If you teach grammar or linguistics or literature or rhetoric or stylistics or communication or translation, you are teaching some aspect of language, but not language itself. All those subjects are part of the curriculum of a language institute, but they presuppose a certain level of proficiency in the language itself, otherwise they will neither be understood nor appreciated. They will simply be a waste of time.

Teaching language means teaching students how to understand, speak, read and write in a particular language, in relation to the culture of the native speakers. It means teaching the skills necessary to communicate in that language. At university level, it means raising students' skills to the level of proficiency needed to understand the teachers and the related subjects mentioned above, to read and understand without too much effort scholarly books and articles, to write term papers, dissertations and theses, to speak fluently and correctly about any of the subjects studied. If such a level of proficiency has not been reached by the time the student enters the university, then teaching should concentrate on raising him to that level as quickly as possible.

WAYS AND MEANS. I do not think that this goal can be achieved by offering 'academic' courses or 'remedial' credit courses. Published statistics on Freshman language progress support this view. The reason is simply that such courses represent, for the students, just more of the same: they are 'university' courses in name only, since they are exactly

like the preceding High School courses. If there is nothing new there is no interest, and where there is no interest there can hardly be progress.

What is needed, I suggest, is not more grammar and comprehension exercises, but more oral practice. Errors that will probably not be corrected by a series of artificial exercises (it's too late) may well be eliminated by hearing and practising the correct forms repeated over and over again in concrete, living situations.

One way of making this practice possible is by organizing a Language Center, where the students will find an environment as close as possible to a real life situation: total immersion, conversation, tapes, films, etc. This idea is not new: it has been thoroughly studied and discussed in the past few years. But it has not yet been implemented.

Another way of improving oral proficiency is by enrolling the help of teachers of other subjects. All teachers are in fact language teachers, first of all because teaching in a language means providing the student with «interesting further practice material for the exercise of the skills being acquired», reinforcing learning «by enabling the pupils to experience the language in new contexts and combinations», and introducing «new grammatical patterns and new vocabulary items» (Halliday, 1964: 253).

Besides serving as models for their students, those teachers could encourage them to do their best by demanding that all assignments, tests and exams be written in correct English, even allotting marks for language. Also by encouraging dialogue and discussion in class. If no attention at all to spoken or written language, the students will make no effort to improve. Movement could also come from more contact between teacher and student. Every language teacher should be willing to «help the student» outside the classroom as well as inside - by being available for consultation, discussion and readings of papers, etc.

Finally, some activities - such as readings, debates, publications related to language learning, and are even considered as an integral part of a language course. These activities may be easy or difficult to organize, depending on the interest of the students or on mere circumstances. But perhaps much will depend on «the personality of the language teacher».

CONCLUSION. The preceding suggestions, even if they were all implemented, would still not solve all the problems, but they might solve some of them. The main point is that there will continue to be confusion, dissatisfaction and disappointment as long as we insist on teaching language as if it were like any other subject. Language is not, properly speaking, a 'subject' at all, but a skill. And the only way to acquire a skill is by intensive practice.

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WINE TURNED INTO WATER

J. Chopra.

(To a friend who lost his wife and son in a car crash.)

Wine turned into water
For you, my stricken friend,
As Dark Death dealt
A grievous blow
To your life-mate
And the blossom of both your loves.

Death must descend
But not when life
Is most sweet to live.

Life, a gossamer
Could not withstand
The sudden crash
of Death that fell
With a thud.

What hopes of future
Can man nurture
Inhabiting this cocoon
Of fragility?

What pleasure, what delight,
Is born stable?

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