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The communicative approach to language-teaching in the framework of a programme of English for academic purposes

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Introduction

1.1 The materials described in this paper have been prepared or are under preparation for the teaching of English for Academic Purposes at the University of Birmingham since 1971, many of them jointly with C. M. Johns at the University of Aston. They represent only part – though an important part – of those materials; the full programme is described in a previous paper *The Current Programme of Materials Development in English for Academic Purposes at the Universities of Birmingham and Aston*[1], on section B of which the present paper is largely based. They illustrate to a greater or lesser degree and in different ways what has come to be called the *communicative* or *functional* approach to language-teaching; that is, that the teaching should take as its point of departure the *use* to which the language is to be put rather than the analysis of its formal patterning – morphological, syntactic, and phonological – as, for example, in the traditional 'graded structural' course, or in the formally-defined remedial grammar and pronunciation courses for overseas students at the University of Birmingham, which are not described in the present paper.

1.2 The success of the communicative approach to language-teaching is largely dependent to the extent to which it is possible to specify for a particular group of learners the uses to which target language is to be put. For the overseas postgraduates studying in the U.K. for whom the materials have been designed, such a specification is possible in some areas to a considerable degree of delicacy, but also presents certain problems. The major advantage that the teacher and materials-writer has is that the students are immediately engaged in a situation where the communications needs are real and pressing: the student himself is largely able to recognise them, and to evaluate the usefulness of the help he is offered in dealing with them. To a large extent the communicative needs of postgraduate students, whether on diploma or Masters courses, or doing research, can be characterised in terms of social skills (in particular spoken communication with teaching staff and supervisors, with colleagues, and with shopkeepers, landladies and so forth) and in

1 T. F. & C. M. Johns (1974): *The Current Programme of Materials Development in English for Academic Purposes at the Universities of Birmingham and Aston,* mimeo.

terms of study skills (the need to read both extensively and intensively within their own discipline: to understand and take notes on lectures; to take part in group-teaching in seminars and tutorials; and to write reports, essays, examination questions and theses). With over 180 students needing help from more than twenty different departments covering the whole spectrum of academic subjects and the limited teaching resources available it is not feasible to take *subject-area* as the starting-point for all teaching materials: we do not provide separate courses at postgraduate level on the basis of 'English for Accountants', 'English for Electrical Engineers' and so forth. The materials, therefore, represent a departure from what might be called the 'classic' ESP/EAP strategy (e.g. the *English Studies Series*[2], *Focus*[3] and *Special English*[4] among published materials) of selecting authentic or constructed texts from a particular discipline, and using these as a springboard for comprehension and development work. The basic materials described in this paper, then, deal as far as possible with the 'common-core' of skills, while leaving room for the provision at a later stage in the programme of specialist sub-units relating the principles of the common-core to texts, tasks and problems peculiar to a particular discipline. The exception to this general principle is the reading skills of scanning, extraction of information, exploitation of redundancy and decision-making which can, it appears at present, only be effectively dealt with by exploiting the texts with which students are engaged in the course of their studies. Work has been done on these lines over the past couple of years with two 'pilot-groups' from the Institute of Local Government Studies: the general line of approach that has evolved, with the help of the students, out of this work has now reached the stage where it is applicable to work on texts from other Social Science departments and most Arts departments, and possibly to texts in the Pure and Applied Sciences.

1.3 The following features of the courses described flow from the basic approach: the number of parameters on which students vary (discipline, mother-tongue, motivation, standard, needs): and the features which they have in common (preoccupation with the demands of their course or research: maturity and experience).

1.3.1 Apart from materials prepared specifically for a two-week presessional course for arriving postgraduate students in September (see, in particular, section 2 below) the courses are designed to be taught on a weekly

2 R. Mackin (gen.ed.): *English Studies Series* (various titles), Oxford University Press.
3 J. P. B. Allen & H. G. Widdowson (gen.eds.): *Focus Series* (various titles), Oxford University Press.
4 P. Strevens (gen.ed.): *Special English* (various titles), Collier-Macmillan.

basis of one-hour sessions through two or three terms. With assistance based on the result of the Birmingham Assessment and Diagnostic Test and interview, the student selects that combination of courses which best meets his needs and fits in with his departmental timetable or programme of research.

1.3.2 It is a consequence of this flexible and largely elective approach that the goals, organisation, and methods of study of each course, and of each unit within each course should be made as explicit as possible. For most courses, a handout is provided at the beginning of each term setting out what the course is intended to achieve, and what topics will be covered on a week-to-week basis. If a student misses a certain session, he does so in the knowledge of what teaching he will thereby be missing, and – it is hoped – having decided that that particular session is of less relevance to him than some of the others.

1.3.3 Because of the problems of timetabling and the competing claims of work in the subject, handouts for any session and (where appropriate) associated taped materials are on access for students who wish to follow a course, but are unable to attend a particular session or sessions: they have been designed, therefore, to be suitable where necessary for self-study.

Description of materials

2. *Note taking and Note Reconstitution* (Presessional Course. Classroom: 10 Units)

2.1 This course is the central, and 'integrating' component of the presessional course for arriving overseas postgraduate students (see p. 2):

2.1.1 It is a language skill which is needed, for different purposes, by all postgraduate students, and one which many – even those with a reasonably good grasp of English – lack.

2.1.2 It involves both written and spoken English, and both reception and production (decoding and encoding). It therefore lends itself to that rapid variation of different types of activity that is necessary if concentration and enthusiasm are not to flag in the course of an intensive programme.

2.1.3 It focuses the attention of the student on the written or spoken text as a message: on its meaning, and the meaning-relations that obtain within it.

2.2 The course materials teach the skills involved in note-taking in the following order:

2.2.1 Elimination of redundant material (e.g. articles and copular verbs: repetitions and re-statements). Reconstitution concentrates on restoring grammatically redundant elements.

2.2.2 Rephrasing and reordering information (e.g. single lexical item for complex idea).

2.2.3 Conventional abbreviations (including subject-specific abbreviations).

2.2.4 Symbolic representation of logical relationships within text, the work being based in part on the ideas of Julian Dakin[5]. Each relationship is presented in isolation, and then contrastively practised together with all the relationships previously presented. The relationships covered, and the 'base' symbols include the following:

RELATIONSHIP	SYMBOL	EXPONENTS
Causation	→ ↗	'causes', 'leads to', 'brings about', etc. 'raises', 'leads to an increase in', etc.
Consequence	∴	'therefore', 'as a result', etc.
Contrast	b	'but', 'however', 'on the other hand', etc.
Equivalence	= ≃	'is the same as', 'equals', etc. 'is approximately the same as', etc.
Correlation	⇝	'correlates with', 'the more . . . the the more . . . ', etc.
Class inclusion	∋	'includes', etc.

The following conventions, when applied to the base symbols, extend the number of relationships that can be shown:

a) Left-right reversal of the symbol implies reversal of the relationship: Thus, ← 'is caused by', 'results from'; ∈ 'is a member of the class', d 'although', 'in spite of the fact that'. (An exception to the convention is the traditional up-down reversal ∵ 'because')
b) An oblique stroke through the symbol implies negation (e.g. ↛ 'does not cause', ≠ 'is different from', ⇝̸ 'is not found in association with').
c) A point after the symbol implies an equivalent intransitive predicate (e.g. ↗ 'rises', 'becomes greater', =˙ 'remains constant').

5 J. Dakin (1973): *The Language Laboratory and Language Learning,* Longman.

2.3 Each unit includes practice in both note-taking and note reconstitution in both the written and spoken mode as follows:

	NOTE TAKING	NOTE RECONSTITUTION
Written	Taking notes from sentences (at first only inserting symbol), progressing within each unit to taking notes from paragraph (target notes at first 'gapped': extent of gapping gradually increased).	Restoring notes already taken on sentences & paragraphs to 'full form': writing paragraphs from given notes (target paragraphs at first presented in gapped form).
Spoken	Taking notes from spoken sentences, progressing to 'mini-lectures'. Same gradual withdrawal of assistance as above.	Reading aloud from notes already taken. Telling jokes, giving short 'mini-lectures' from given notes.

2.4 It is hoped that the further development of the materials will take the following directions:

2.4.1 The provision of specialist sub-units applying the principles of the common-core units to written and spoken texts from specific subject-areas.

2.4.2 More fundamentally, an attempt to incorporate a systematic *non-linear* component within the existing framework. The present course is linear in that, allowing for omissions, reorderings etc., the sequential representation of the argument on the printed page or — in a lecture — in real time is represented by a similar linear arrangement in the students' notes.

Work by Buzan[6] and suggestions made by Jones and Roe concerning the teaching of English for science and technology[7] have argued, convincingly, that the best representation of information and ideas both for assessment and comprehension of the text as a whole, and for mnemonic purposes is often graphic (two-, and possibly three-dimensional). The problem is that in work

6 Tony Buzan (1974): *Use Your Head,* BBC Publications.
7 K. Jones & P. Roes (1975): "Designed English for Science and Technology (EST) Programmes", in: *English for Academic Study with special-reference to Science and Technology,* British Council, ETIC Occasional Papers.

done so far the principles on which such multi-dimensional graphic representations are to be constructed are left largely inexplicit (Buzan), or where explicit are restricted to certain types of information and argument (e.g. the use of dependency diagrams, flow-charts, etc. in the *Focus* series). The outlines of a more general explicit system which could be integrated within the present framework have, however, recently been emerging from work on scanning strategies for the reading of academic texts with students from the Institute of Local Government Studies. The basic principle is that the *sequential* progression of the main argument is represented *vertically* on the left side of the page, while *dependency* relationships (exemplifications, qualifications, etc.) are shown *horizontally* with the left-right spatial arrangement representing a scale of delicacy. One of the advantages of such a system is that it assists students to develop their powers of *decision-making* in relation of reading (for example, deciding what attention to pay to rightward information) and of *prediction.*

3. *Socialisation* (Presessional Course and term-time programme. Classroom: 30 sessions, 50 units)

3.1 These materials have been designed to assist overseas students with problems of spoken communication, both on and off the campus. They take the form of a series of stuctured substitution dialogues, taking as their starting point the ways in which a situation can be handled in English (not only a question of the language, but also of general cultural awareness) rather than on the syntactic structures that may be involved.

3.2 As a first approximation, the situations covered — most of which have been identified on the basis of student feedback — have been classified according to the definition of 'situation' implicit in the title as Speech Act, Setting, or Topic: the weekly term-time programme deals with a situation drawn from each area in turn. Some examples are:

SPEECH-ACT	SETTING	TOPIC
Enquiries	At the doctor's	Accomodation
Requests	At the bank	Assessment of Progress
Invitations	In a pub	Study Difficulties
Reproaches & Complaints	Shopping	Responsibility
Communications Repairs	On the telephone	The weather

3.3 While this first approximation has proved useful as a general guide-line, it is clear that most situations involve more than one of these elements: for example 'Asking and Showing the Way' involves Speech-Act (Enquiry: Giving and Checking Information), Setting (in the street), Topic (town geography) as well as the parameter of Participants (strangers) which is not included in the present scheme of classification.

3.4 The work of preparing and teaching the materials has thrown into relief some other problems in communicational language teaching, particularly in the use of the Speech-Act as a classificatory prime for pedagogic purposes:

3.4.1 There is a need for a clear *taxonomy* of speech-acts. The problem involves both the question of lower-level *distinctness* (thus, at what level and how should e.g. *requests, demands,* and *orders* be distinguished) and that of higher-level *ambiguity* (thus, *suggestions* have been utilised as a prime by some writers of 'functional' or 'notional' syllabuses: yet these are ambiguous in relation to the primary taxonomy set up for initiating moves in classroom interaction by Sinclair and Coulthard[8] of *directives, elicitations,* and *informs*).

3.4.2 The need for a *discursive* dimension in the definition of speech-acts for language teaching purposes. For example, given the situation of *invitation,* is this to be defined at the level of the isolated *act:* 'Would you like to come round for drinks this evening? ' or of a *move* consisting of one or more acts: 'By the way, we're having some people in for drinks this evening. Would you like to drop in? ' or of an *exchange* of one or more moves between two participants:

A 'By the way, we're having some people in for drinks this evening. Would you like to come round? '
B 'Thanks very much.'

or of a complex (but still structured) *transaction* of one or more exchanges:

A. 'Oh by the way, are you doing anything this evening? '
B 'No, I don't think so. Why? '
A 'Well, we're having some people in for drinks. I wondered if you'd like to come round.'

8 J. McH. Sinclair & R. M. Coulthard (1975): *Towards and Analysis of Discourse,* Oxford University Press.

B 'That's very kind of you. What time shall we come? '
A 'About 6.30? '
B 'That's fine. I'm looking forward to it.'

It is only by considering discourse, for example, that it is possible to deal with such Speech-Acts as *agreement* and *disagreement,* which typically occur in response or follow-up position in exchange structure (in simple terms: what are we teaching the students to agree with, or to, or about?): similarly, it discloses a further ambiguity in the use of *suggestion* as classificatory prime, since suggestions may occur (and be linguistically distinguishable) in response position as well as initiating position.

3.5 The gradual revision and development of the materials at present under way in the light of the experience gained in their use over the past four years includes the following features:

3.5.1 In the original dialogues substitutions were shown in the format devised by Jerrom and Szkutnik[9] (two example dialogues followed by a gapped skeleton dialogue with paradigms of substitutions for filling the gaps tabulated below). Students do not find this the easiest of formats to follow, and recently a number of dialogues have been re-written in the traditional substitution-table format.

3.5.2 An attempt has been made to present dialogues taking discourse structure into account:

a) Some dialogues have been re-written in two forms, the first and simpler form as a two- or three-part exchange, the second as a more elaborate transaction.
b) Beginning with the material on *Requests,* an attempt has been made to grade systematically through the progression *act* → *move* → *exchange* → *transaction.* Within such an extended format, it is possible to give more attention to the appropriacy of a particular choice within a particular context, and, through branching, to allow the student to take decisions about the direction the dialogue will take.

3.5.3 Supplementary materials for self-study and practice are being prepared, using 'progressive gapping' techniques for some units. As far as possible, these are based on printed and recorded 'realia' relating to the situation. As part of this development we are recording authentic samples of interaction, starting with enquiry counters (railway station, university library,

9 M. F. Jerrom & L. L. Szkutnik: *Conversational Exercises in Everday English* (vols 1 & 2), Longman.

etc.) which will, it is hoped, serve the dual purpose of providing material which can be incorporated into self-access units available in the library of the language laboratory, and also give us data against which to test the intuitive generalisations about interaction that are embodied in the materials.

4. *Academic Writing Course.* (Term-time Programme. Classroom: approx 25 units)

This course is based on an attempt to define the communication problems common to overseas postgraduate students across a wide range of subject-areas in writing essays, dissertations, and theses. The areas covered have been chosen on the basis of information from departments, study of 'target-type' texts in as wide a range of subjects as possible (e.g. research reports in *Nature*), and, above all, discussion with students and examination of their writing in individual consultation hours. The course may be seen as an extension of the Remedial Grammar course, in two senses:

a) It revises and practises in context the grammatical points on which remedial teaching has been given.
b) It presents, through context, certain syntactic/hypersyntactic features which are not at present covered in the Assessment and Diagnostic Test or in the associated teaching materials — for example, the intersentential features of cohesion and coherence (as distinguished by Widdowson[10]).

The areas covered are of four general types:

4.1 Strategies of Exposition

The topics are, as far as possible, presented in the same order that a student is likely to come across them in doing an extended piece of academic writing, and include:

1) Stating a Problem
2) Reference to and summary of the relevant literature
3) Generalisation, Particularisation, and Exemplification
4) Classification and Identification
5) Description of Process and Method
6) Causes and Results
7) Comparison and Contrast
8) Academic Mitigation
9) Arguing a Conclusion

10 H. G. Widdowson (1972): 'Directions in the teaching of discourse', in: S. P. Corder & E. Roulet (eds.): *Theoretical Linguistic Models in Applied Linguistics,* AIMAV, 65–76.

Within each unit, it is important to show how the strategy in question relates to the conceptual structure of the student's subject and what he wishes to say or might wish to say about the subject. While there are points in the course where the linguistic realisation of the strategy (the form/function relationship) can be taught in terms of 'set phrases' or 'set structures' (presented in substitution tables or algorithms), it may also involve discriminations in rhetorical patterning, in syntactic structure, in lexis, in semantics (for example in semantic relationships and in presuppositions) and in the specialised conventions of academic writing (of the sort that are covered in 'Style Manuals' for dissertations and theses). The goal of each unit (and the criterion by which its success or failure is judged) is that the student should be able, finally under time-pressure, to construct an original paragrpah or paragraphs in his own subject-area, using the material presented in the unit.

4.2.1 Numerical and Statistical Concepts

This may be regarded as a specialised extension of the material described under a). The units give practice in the ways in which information which can be shown in tabular or graphic form can be expressed verbally, and at the conventions in academic writing of cross-referring between text and diagram or table. The areas which have been found to be common to enough students within different departments to be worth covering on a 'common-core' basis are:

1) Measurement and Quantification
2) Change in time and state
3) Distribution
4) Correlation

4.3.1 Interpretation of Writing Instructionss

It has emerged, from contact with departments running postgraduate courses, and from contact with students themselves, that there is considerable difficulty in understanding the specialised conventions of essay questions in examinations and term-time assignments, and the type and organisation of the answer implicit in the question. We have, therefore, prepared a unit based on the analysis of some hundreds of examination questions drawn from a number of different departments in order to deal with this problem.

4.4 Intersentential Cohesion and Coherence

4.4.1 Features of Cohesion

To date 6 units have been prepared within the following areas:

a) Thematisation
Units on Fronting, Passivisation, Converse Terms, and Clefting, drawing attention to the relationships within text of given/new and equivalence/contrast.

b) Cross-reference
Most of the pedagogic work on the anaphoric features of text has, to date, concentrated on identifying the referents of pronouns, with a view to improving reading comprehension.
The materials prepared under this head extend this approach in two ways:
1) particular attention is paid to the ways in which academic texts appear to *avoid* simple pronominal cross-reference with a view to reducing ambiguity (e.g. the use of the structure deictic + classifier).
2) in addition to the relationship of *equivalence,* the materials (following the work of Bohumil Palek[11]) draw attention to the other possible *class relationships* realised by cross-reference (e.g. 'Such (a) –', 'another/the other –').

The practice materials are similar to those described under 4.1 and 4.2: a good deal of attention is paid to the identification and interpretation of features of cohesion in 'general academic' texts.

4.4.2 Features of Coherence
These materials concentrate on the explicit marking of logical/rhetorical relationships in text by means of intersentential and interclausal connectors. It is clear that, despite the attention paid to connectors in recent years, a good deal of work remains to be done on the underlying theory: eventually it is hoped that it will be possible to be far more explicit than at present seems feasible about paradigmatic forms of academic argumentation.

4.5 As will be apparent from the description above, these materials – as with most of those described in this paper – are still in a state of flux. There remains a good deal of work in polishing and expanding the units already written, and of supportive research in error-analysis and on the theory and analysis of texts: in this connexion the ongoing work in the computer storage and analysis of scientific texts at Birmingham University under Sue Proops will provide valuable evidence concerning many of the problems raised. In the 1976/7 session we may also be able to make a start on adding supplementary subject-oriented materials (c.f. work at Leeds by Heaton and Cowie) to the common-core units.

11 B. Palek (1968): 'Cross-reference: a contribution to Hypersyntax', in: *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague* 3.

5. *Listening Comprehension: Discussion Texts* (Term-time programme. Language Laboratory 30 units.)

5.1 In 1971–3 listening comprehension work in the language laboratory was based on read extracts from popular scientific journals (e.g. *New Scientist, Scientific American*), with comprehension and development exercises of various types. This type of text was unsatisfactory for three main reasons:

5.1.1 They were too specialised for students outside the subject-area, and usually too general for students within it.

5.1.2 They were, particularly those from 'New Scientist' in the register of journalism.

5.1.3 Most important, they represented 'spoken prose' (Abercrombie[12]) rather than spontaneous utterance.

5.2 Accordingly, the decision was made in 1973 to try to use only spontaneous spoken texts. The choice lay between *unidirectional* texts (e.g. recordings of lectures and talks) and *interactive* texts (e.g. semi-formal discussions of the type that many students have to handle in seminars and tutorials in their departments). For the former we already had some useful work done by Clive Holes at the University of Birmingham in 1971/2 on the factors affecting the comprehension of lectures by overseas postgraduate students[13]: it was, however, decided to choose the latter, on the grounds that such texts would:

5.2.1 present 'chunked' examples of exposition similar to that found in unidirectional texts

5.2.2 show features of interaction absent from unidirectional texts (e.g. turn-taking questions and answers, agreement and disagreement, etc.)

5.2.3 be more varied and interesting, and provide a context within which it would be natural to stimulate production as well as reception.

5.3 There remained the problem of where to look for texts. The material we have used up to the present has mainly been from the BBC Radio 4

12 D. Abercrombie (1965): 'Conversation and Spoken Prose', in: *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics,* Oxford University Press.

13 C. D. Holes (1972): *An investigation into some aspects of the language problems of two groups of overseas postgraduate students at Brimingham University,* unpublished MA thesis, University of Birmingham.

discussion programme 'A Work In Edgways'. This meets the requirement of generality better than most 'real life' seminars, while it has the following important features for our purpose:

5.3.1 It is topic-centred. Each programme 'talks round' a subject or idea put forward by the chairman in a way which is of interest and can be grasped by the specialist and the non-specialist.

5.3.2 Including the chairman, there are 4 participants: enough to provide a range of different points of view, and give rise to interesting features of interaction, but not so many that it becomes difficult to distinguish the different speakers. Of the 4 participants, on average two are academics with specialist knowledge of the subject.

5.3.3 The chairman guides the discussion to much the same extent and in much the same way as would the university seminar-leader, given an 'ideal' seminar situation. As guided, the discussion develops in a similar fashion, from formal introductory statements of position, towards a freer – and sometimes heated – interchange, into which the chairman may from time to time intervene to redirect the discussion.

5.4 The topics of programme which we have used for teaching purposes range widely, including:

The Language of Science
The Role of Capitalism in the Western World
The Use of Mathematical Models in Economics
The Effect of Changes in Transport on Society
Problems of Giving Aid to Underdeveloped Countries
Archaeology and History
Violence and The Law
Science and the Supernatural
Medicine and Ethics
Political Power

Each unit is based on a 3 to 5 minute extract from the discussion.

5.5 There is little experience in using 'raw' unscripted discussion of this type as a basis for teaching materials. There are, however, two principles that we have tried to keep to:

5.5.1 In using authentic materials, the principle of grading is not abandoned: it is, rather, transferred from control over the text itself to the degree of help that is given the student in handling the text.

5.5.2 Since the aim of the materials is to allow the student to take part fully in a similar discussion, the teaching should pass from comprehension to production within the context of the vocabulary, structures, ideas, and patterns of interaction occurring in the text.

5.6 The format of each unit on which we have settled is as follows:

5.6.1 Background Preparation

For many of the units (and in particular for those used at the beginning of the course) a reading passage is provided for self-study before the lesson, setting out the intellectual background of the ideas discussed in the text, and (where necessary) the development of the discussion up to the start of the text. The passage incorporates and explains (either through context, or explicitly) the 'key' words and structures in the text.

5.6.2 Presentation

The text is recorded on the students' tape-recorders before the beginning of the lesson: from the start of the lesson the student therefore has control over the text. A transcription is provided with glosses of difficult words and phrases and cultural and technical references in the right-hand margin. The extent to which such a transcription should be 'cleaned up' for teaching purposes (i.e. whether it should be a 'competence' or a 'performance' transcription) is a thorny one. Our practice has been to punctuate the transcription (keeping the conventions of transcription as consistent as possible), and to indicate false starts and major hesitations, but not minor hesitations, stumbles or overlappings. In some of the transcriptions have also included among our conventions the underlining of the main sequence of ideas (omitting repetitions, rephrasings, examples, asides, etc.): students find this particularly useful in the early stages of the course. The use of the transcription varies widely, from allowing the student to make use of it throughout the lesson (especially in the early stages of the course, where there is reliance on transfer from the student's knowledge of written English to increase the ability to handle, and his confidence with, spoken English), to finally only giving it to him at the conclusion of the lesson.

5.6.3 Comprehension Exercises

No set sequence of exercises has been established for all units: a variety of different types have been tried out which may be classified as follows:

a) *Construction of Equivalent Text*

The equivalent text may be a summary (e.g. in reported speech, or in note form: see B1 above) or, occasionally an expansion or reordering (e.g. where a speaker has spoken elliptically, omitting or confusing stages in a

logical argument) of the text, or of part of the text. The methods by which the student is led to construct an equivalent text include:

i) Multiple choice (correct answers combining to form equivalent text)

ii) Sentence-completion (completed sentences combining or combinable to form equivalent text)

iii) Blank-filling (c.f. Cloze procedure) of equivalent text

b) *Reconstruction of Text and Text Features*

Without view of the transcription, reconstructing part of the original text (e.g. blank-filling – 'guided dictation') and recovering features of the text (e.g. lexical items, phrases) from equivalences.

c) *Predictive Comprehension*

One way in which this has been taught and tested in the past is to interrupt a (spoken or written) text at a point at which structural and contextual clues allow the native speaker to predict accurately what will follow. The fragmentation of the text that this would require would, in the framework of the present units, be undesirable, but it is possible to exploit an interesting feature of this type of text to the same ends: that is, the high proportion of uncompleted utterances (whether as a result of interruption or self-interruption) where the probable completion can be recovered from context. Predictive comprehension is tested in the multiple-choice or open-ended format: 'What was speaker X going to say?' A closely related type of exercise which we have, on occasion used, may be called *inferential comprehension:* for example, which further statements would be likely to be accepted by which speakers on the basis of the arguments in the text?

d) *Identification of Function of Utterance within Context*

This represents a type of 'applied discourse analysis'. The exercises which we have developed for this purpose include:

i) Identification of cross-references

ii) Identification of parenthetical insertions:

a) Function (drawing attention to effect of key-shift: raised for contrastive or new in relation to matrix utterance, lowered for shared e.g. rephrasing)

b) Identification of matrix (e.g. underlining)

iii) Identification of utterance as rhetorical signalling device – e.g.

a) 'Yes' as an answer to question/evaluation/matching device/entry attempt/hesitation marker/internal response.

b) Entry strategies and Prefaces.

c) Metacomments (retrospective and prospective: implications of ellipsis marked tonicity, and pseudo-clefting).

d) Function of statement as amplification/restriction/denial/consequence, etc. of previous utterance.

e) Challenge implicit in question.

5.6.4 Production Exercises

Modelling (usually in meaningful drill format) some feature or features of the interchange in the text, leading to discrimination on the basis of appropriacy in context, or of speaker role. The drills also serve to reinforce the vocabulary and the expression of ideas in the text.

5.6.5 Follow up

The final ten minutes of the lesson are given to a short 'open' discussion of the ideas in the text, either between the tutor and the whole class, or in groups. For those who wish to follow up the work in class, the text (untranscribed) of the whole discussion from which the extract is taken is placed on access in the library of the language laboratory. It may be that in the future development of the materials it will be helpful to give students who wish it additional written follow-up work to each unit.

6. *Seminar Discussion Strategies* (Presessional Course. Classroom/Language Laboratory: 10 Units)

6.1 This was conceived in the first place as a necessary complement to the language laboratory course described above:

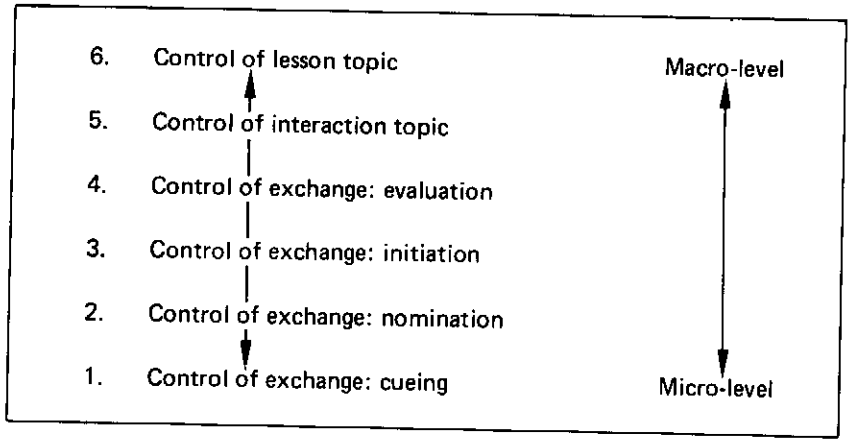
6.1.1 It could cover some types of seminar interaction not fully exemplified by the 'Word in Edgways' texts. While it appears that these are parallel to the type of discussion found in a high proportion of social Science and Arts seminars, in departments of Science and Engineering group-Teaching often has a rather different structure based on the presentation of a paper or guided problem solving, and characterised by a high proportion of question and answer exchanges on matters of fact and theory. We are at present analysing the preliminary results of a questionnaire on the 'seminar-difficulties of overseas postgraduate students' and research is ongoing into undergraduate group-teaching in the Faculty of Science and Engineering (R. Mead) and into communication breakdowns between British tutors and overseas students in undergraduate and postgraduate seminars (S. Balachandran): pending the results of the research the work of materials preparation and teaching has, to some extent, been in abeyance.

6.1.2 It could present the material in a more structured format than that adopted in the materials described under 5, with their (self-imposed)

restriction that all practice should derive directly from the text. For example, the importance revealed by the texts of *metacomment* suggests that it is important in this type of discussion that the student should be able to command and discriminate between the the common colloquial expressions used to talk *about* interaction: to comment on the way the argument has progressed, and is progressing: there is clearly advantage in grouping these systematically in a teaching unit rather than just drawing attention to them as they arise in text.

6.1.3 It could present the basic strategies in a concentrated form, with an emphasis on production, as part of the presessional course in order to give the newly-arrived student more confidence in approaching his first seminar in his department.

6.2 In defining the 'basic strategies' the idea of *control* implicit in the research carried out at Birmingham into the language of the classroom, proved illuminating. This showed that much classroom interaction (and also, it appears from the results of the questionnaire, much of the interaction in tertiary education to which the overseas student is accustomed and which he expects) is heavily dependent at all levels on the structuring of the teacher. These levels may tentatively be shown hierarchically as follows:



While there are details that are as yet obscure, it appears that where there is a *withdrawal* of control, either during a lesson or seminar, or during a course of lessons or seminars, or when the style of teaching of one department or teacher is compared with another, that withdrawal is not

random with regard to the hierarchy: that is, elements of control towards the lower end tend to be withdrawn before those towards the upper end of the hierarchy.

6.3 The corollary of the concept of control-withdrawal is that control does not — or should not — disappear in the teaching situation: rather, it passes to the participants. From the questionnaire and from informal feedback, it is significant that many of the 'language difficulties' of overseas students were related directly to the extent to which in the seminar situation the seminar leader withdraws from lower-level control. They say, for example, that he should 'tell them the right answer' and not let them 'make mistakes': that they are nervous of joining in discussion unprompted, of interrupting and being interrupted: that they do not know how to make clear what they do not understand. It may even be that the complaint that they are unable to follow the 'way the discussion is going' could be a symptom of the withdrawal of the teacher's expected role in summarising, and checking the understanding of information and argument.

6.4 The pilot teaching materials concentrate, therefore, on those features of interaction that are dependent on participant-control and include practice in:

6.4.1 Turn-taking (both 'entering' and 'getting out')

6.4.2 Metacomment: both retrospective (recovering point at issue: commenting on the development of the argument: evaluating previous speaker's contribution) and prospective (showing how ones own contribution will relate to what will to before, both rhetorically — e.g. as *conveyance/amplification/restriction/counter/consequence,* etc. and informationally, in particular in setting up the relationships of equivalence and contrast, by use of fronting, pseudo-clefting, marked tonicity, key-shift, etc.)

6.4.3 Repair Strategies, in particular re cycling.

6.5 It is clear from our recordings of university group-teaching that even where there is little withdrawal of control by the teacher (for example, where control is retained above the second level of the tentative hierarchy) there still remain problems for our overseas students in the typical classroom elicitation — response — evaluation exchange.

6.5.1 The problems of *teacher elicitations* are seen most clearly if they are compared with the 'idealised' question-and-answer exchanges to which students may have come accustomed in language-teaching textbooks. Some of the additional complexities of authentic elicitations may be summarised as follows:

a) *Structural*

i) Elicitations are not always realised as interrogatives with syntactic inversion or rising intonation: syntactically, they are often declaratives

ii) They are frequently embedded within larger syntactic contexts ('indirect questions')

iii) They are frequently marked by ellipsis, both conventional ('Then what? ') and contextual.

b) *Functional*

An appropriate response requires recognition of the rhetorical function of the question within the wider context. For example:

i) Elicitation v. check question

ii) Open v. closed elicitation

iii) Question as 'academic challenge'

c) *Logical*

Our texts reveal that questions show considerable logical complexity (e.g. 'conditional questions') either in themselves, or more importantly within the wider context — for example the context of a question-and-answer sequence.

6.5.2 The study of *responses* in authentic interaction also casts some light on another aspect of traditional classroom and text book practice in the teaching of English. There is a longstanding pedagogic controversy among language teachers as to whether students should be required to give (non-elliptical) 'full answers' to teacher's questions (justified on the grounds that this forces the student to repeat the language material contained in the question) or (elliptical) 'short answers' (on the grounds that this is — in an undefined way — more 'natural'). In both cases 'long answer' or 'short answer' have to be established as conventions through the teaching procedure, with additional confusion for the student if there is 'convention switching'. From the study of authentic texts, it appears that not only do participants give both 'long' *and* 'short' answers, but that the degree of ellipsis may be to a large extent predictable on the basis of a handful of factors, of which one of the most important is the degree of *disjunction* between initiation and response (e.g. prefaced responses — responses separated from initiation by one or more exchanges). The pilot materials attempt to simulate this 'authentic' choice between elliptical and non-elliptical responses by requiring students to pay attention to the degree of disjunction in the context.