

The Contribution of Linguistics to Second-Language Teaching

Roy Andrew Miller

The title of the present paper might better serve for a book or a series of studies than for a few introductory notes to the subject; my only excuse for using such an all-inclusive heading here is that it has already appeared as the introduction to an important if extremely short section in John B. Carroll's *The Study of Language: A Survey of Linguistics and Related Disciplines in America* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1953), and that much of what is to be said here is probably best viewed as an attempt at refinement if not as an attempt to refute some of the statements in this portion of Carroll's work. Certain of these statements seem to me very likely, perhaps through no fault of their author and indeed, perhaps even contrary to his otherwise more clearly expressed views, to mislead the novice concerning the possible role of what is now generally called linguistics in the training of teachers of second-languages.

Is any such concern necessary? Would it not be just as well, and infinitely easier, to fall in with what seems to be more and more the accepted doctrine on all parts of the international educational scene, to the effect that American language teaching methodology and techniques are available today in such an exquisite state of refinement that they can well afford to be exported to the rest of the world ready-made, pre-wrapped and waiting to be plugged in? It is probably unnecessary here to elaborate upon my personal difficulties in subscribing to such a thesis, but if asked to enumerate I would place in first order the

implications of an overpowering ethnocentricity which it embodies. These alone should be sufficient to give us pause to think.

Equally striking but perhaps less respectable because it is purely empiric is the veritable mountain of experimental data piled up over the past half century sufficient to demonstrate to anyone's satisfaction that these methods when exported as they come simply have not and do not work. Purely empirical, perhaps, but discouragingly conclusive. The long tradition, for example, in the mission-oriented secondary schools of Japan that the native informant of a language is the best teacher, regardless of absence of training of any kind, much less of linguistic training, has piled up impressive collections of negative results and is now, in the present generation, just beginning to be challenged by the best of these institutions. Meanwhile, most of the non-mission oriented secondary schools here have been, and in too many cases still are, busy proving the same dismal point with methods taken directly over from the Continent, though here personal informant contacts have been limited by force of economic circumstances and hence the whole has been even more of a hit-and-miss process.

But above all these in importance I would rather place the highly pessimistic evaluations currently and for some little time made of American language teaching methodology itself, and especially of second-language teaching in America. Whether these evaluations concern English or second-languages is not of great moment for us here in Japan, since in Japan the second-language with which we are in most cases concerned will always be English. This is important to remember, for it means that if American education is not particularly good in teaching English to its own students, and if on top of this it is not particularly adept or even at times interested in teaching second-languages, then the representatives of this American education tradition will come to the

Japanese situation, for example, or to any other country where the important second-language is English, with two serious strikes on them.

A survey of the complete literature would be in order at this point, but out of place in the present introductory paper. As a substitute for, and as the next best thing to such a survey I will simply refer to Carroll again. First he assembles (141 ff.) what evidence he can to show how if at all "contemporary education has been influenced by new doctrines on the nature of language" (142); then, having had space in less than a page to present this evidence, he concludes:

Unfortunately, the trends of which we have been speaking are not everywhere noticeable in American education. The number of schools which have been induced to make marked improvements in language-arts instruction is undoubtedly still relatively small. The indictments made by Bloomfield, Fries, and others are therefore in some degree still applicable to the American educational scene at large (143).

This is the conclusion of an educator, probably the first educator who has ever taken the trouble to assess, on the basis of the evidence now in hand, the effectiveness of America's language instruction in terms of the status of linguistic science today. His study, which I frequently quote here, was undertaken expressly for this purpose of comparative evaluation. If he feels that, for example, Bloomfield's indictments of American language education are still even "in some degree applicable to the American educational scene at large," then this is probably the most serious charge that could possibly be brought, and should by itself be sufficient to remove our discussion here from any level of personal impression or prejudice. For those not familiar with the man or his work, Bloomfield's indictments are probably among the

strongest ever levied against educational methods anywhere or any time ; the following is a fair sample :

Our schools are conducted by persons who, from professors of education down to teachers in the classrooms, know nothing of the results of linguistic science, not even the relation of writing to speech or of standard language to dialect. In short, they do not know what language is, and yet must teach it, and in consequence waste years of every child's life and reach a poor result.¹

This was written thirty-three years ago ; but only five years ago Carroll found it "still applicable." Surely this alone should make it imperative for those of us concerned with the improvement of language instruction in second-languages anywhere, but all the more in especially difficult situations such as those found in Japan, to ask whether anything is now being done to meet such objections. If not, then we must ask why not, and also consider how best and most efficiently the difficulty can be obviated. So long as criticisms of the kind raised by Bloomfield are not met, the American educator is, by the admission of *his own evaluation of himself and of his own work*, hardly in any position to offer to others the devices and techniques he finds manifestly unsatisfactory for himself.

I

What if anything can be done to set this house in order ? Carroll seems pessimistic. To him the fact that the "linguist has a special and unique contribution to make to the problem of teaching a second language" is simply an "impression" that "seems to have been gained in some quarters" (190), and while he comes out (192) for a "strong influence" of linguistic science on second-language teaching against what he terms a "hypercritical" trend of opinion, to him it is still "only a half-truth to say that the new programs

are fundamentally based on the teachings of linguistic science” (190). All this seems as discouraging as it could possibly be. Carroll presents a picture of linguistic science as something which must struggle so that it may simply “influence” second-language teaching; second-language teaching itself remains something sacrosanct, far up from and above the reach of the linguist, carried on by a group (who? we wish to ask several times, reading his relevant passages) by whose hypercritical opinions the linguist can be defeated; to prolong the paraphrase further would simply be rude. To sum it up, he appears to me at least to offer but little hope for a path out of the dilemma which he himself has so graphically set forth.

This air of pessimism deepens if we inspect closely the roles he would grant to linguistic science in the teaching of second-languages (191-2). To sum up, Carroll would see value in the linguist as 1) a consultant; 2) an informant-handler; 3) a guide (it could perhaps be styled “reverse-informant”) to learner’s own language; 4) a guide to the history of the second-language, “when that happens to be involved in the teaching.”

With the first role it would be plainly cavalier to quibble at this point. This role is now partly accepted even in Japanese educational circles, though with certain arbitrary provisions best thought of as characteristic products of the local scene and its cultural heritage, which in many cases may well sap the implied collaboration of its only possible vitality. The linguist consultant here today is more and more being limited by consent of academic society to persons who both by training and by consent agree to put themselves in a position where they cannot possibly perform role 3); the consultant linguist here must generally be the exclusive property socially and culturally of a particular school or sect, and other even less understandable self-imposed limitations

could be pointed out, at the risk of tending even more toward the polemic. Suffice it to say that at present in second-language education in Japan role 1) above is being experimented with, though in such a limited and self-restricting fashion as to throw the whole validity of the function into danger.

The technique of using informants in language instruction, now almost classically accepted in most advanced second-language teaching situations in America, has not to my knowledge been employed on any important scale in Japan to date, or experimented with here to any extent, even in the teaching of exotic languages where one might reasonably expect to find it employed.²

There are probably quite understandable reasons for this. The informant technique in the second-language classroom conflicts with several of the most strongly held *mores* of traditional Japanese social thought concerning the role and importance of the teacher. It is probably this sharp conflict with a firmly established social pattern that has resulted in an otherwise surprising lack of interest in this promising technique. The informant system in second-language teaching has, on the surface at least, great promise for Japan; at the very least it would provide suitable and satisfying employment for the great numbers of would-be but untrained teachers, missionaries and many other persons of good will who each year come here for short periods and who wish to make some contribution to the local English teaching situation. The fruitful employment of their generous contributions of time and effort would be one of the most valid reasons for advocating at least an attempt at experimentation with the informant technique in this country. The possibility of employing it still remains, surely, since the conflict here is with the *mores* of Japanese society and not with the behavior patterns of those who come from abroad. Be this as it may, the fact remains that nothing has yet been

done here with informant techniques, so that linguistic science's possible contribution as a producer of trained informant-handlers is not in the foreseeable future likely to be of any great importance to Japan.

With function 3) we must again probably deal with a future so remote as to be removed from practical consideration. Conflicts with local academic and social *mores* on this score would also be sharp enough to make those suggested immediately above pale in comparison. Again, if the contribution of linguistics to second-language teaching were to be limited to or even concentrated upon work of this variety, then it would probably have nothing to offer the Japanese situation until that remote improbable day when patterns of social behavior have radically reversed themselves. And if and when that might happen, the result would in most usually accepted senses no longer be Japan.

Carroll's function 4) is his most tantalizing, and probably the one that would strike most persons now engaged in second-language teaching in Japan as both most familiar and most likely to succeed. To me, and I think to most persons trained in the tradition of American linguistics, it is the most unlikely of all the four, and the one in whose validity we generally tend to have the least confidence. I know of no experimental evidence which has ever indicated that occasions when statements concerning the history of the second-language "happen to be involved in the teaching," do indeed arise. Even granted that they could and do arise, they are statistically probably of the order of one to a hundred, and hardly worth setting up a special course of instruction by which to prepare teachers to cope with them. Halley's Comet is a well-established celestial phenomenon, but its rarity probably means that few astronomers are trained by being prepared exclusively for the problems presented solely by its obser-

vation. In the same way, if the linguist's role in second-language teaching is to lie in wait for these cases where history "happens to be involved," he will be unoccupied most of the time. This is not to deny the linguist his pre-eminence in presenting courses in the history of the second-language, or in the history of other languages. For these he is uniquely qualified, but that is not what Carroll is taking about here.

If these, then, are the sole roles in which the linguist can make himself useful in second-language teaching, he cannot be said to have much to offer the second-language situation in a country like Japan, where some of the roles as I have tried to show are themselves of questionable validity, and where, more importantly, others are in such sharp conflict with local *mores* as to probably be unfeasible in our lifetimes. Is it worth-while, then, continuing the discussion?

It is only if we are willing to inquire a bit more closely into a point that might well have been the place of departure for the entire consideration. This is the problem of what we mean by a linguist, what we mean by linguistics, or linguistic science, and what we mean by training in linguistics, or training in linguistic science. That all these have nothing to do with being a polyglot the reader must surely have understood by this time. By linguistics, or linguistic science, I mean the scientific study of language as classically set forth in Leonard Bloomfield's *Language* (New York, Henry Holt, 1933, several subsequent reprints; London, 1935, at least three subsequent reprints). By scientific I (and Bloomfield) mean the pursuit of this study as a way of increasing knowledge, that is, as a science rather than as an art or a skill. A linguist is someone acquainted with this scientific study of language, and among the things he studies are the nature of language, its structure, and its history.

As in anything else, there are and should probably be considerable differences both in level and degree in the thoroughness and ambition, if not in the seriousness, with which such study is performed. One of the difficulties with the functions under which linguistics might contribute to second-language teaching as Carroll sketches them is that they are generally conceived of in terms of what I shall from here on call the "linguist," someone who has studied language sufficiently to be in a position to do original work in linguistics himself and to direct attempts at such work on the part of others. The contributions of such persons to second-language teaching are mostly along the order of the functions above discussed after Carroll, and are typically plagued by the various difficulties above suggested. Such a linguist trains others, his students, some of whom may one day become as skilled as he is, and some of whom should become even more proficient, if he is a good teacher; then from this point on they too may operate in second-language work under the same limitations and disabilities as he does.

But what I would especially like to bring into consideration here is that in addition to these there is another distinct species which it is possible to produce, and that it is this other species through which linguistics can make its greatest contribution to second-language teaching. For want of a more fitting term, let me designate these as "Linguistically Informed Students," and immediately try to explain what I mean by this phrase.

Today the necessity of training the college student in those many aspects of knowledge which will fit him to take his proper place in his society is recognized; it might well be accepted simply as a paraphrase of what we mean by college education. Especially as the concept of general education has gained ground, more and more attention is being devoted to the problem of

turning out college graduates whose training will be more and more appropriate to their needs as educated citizens and members of society. Such learn the calculus, not necessarily because they are to become physicists or engineers (though gratifyingly large numbers may well do just that) but because the calculus, like all the other branches of mathematics, has something to teach them about the nature of science, the nature of knowledge, the scientific method, its limitations and applications, and hence eventually about their functions and duties in society. They may study opera, literature, mathematics, economics, and a wide variety of other things, because all these are educational, and in college we are trying to give them an education.

A linguistically informed student is a student who has been given the opportunity to add to his education, in the above sense, the necessary minimum information about the nature, structure, and history of language, that is, about linguistic science, that will suit him and his needs as an educated citizen. Bloomfield complained a generation ago that such was not then being done, and he could properly make the same complaint today. It is still not being done. We train linguists, in small numbers, to be sure, but then small numbers are probably all that we shall ever need of this highly specialized skill. But we still are little if any advanced along the path of providing the essential information about language and its nature as a part of education, especially as a part of what we like to call general education. By so doing (or better, by *not* so doing) we turn out students in every specialty and in none who still manage to have one thing in common: they are totally naive about language, because their sources of information have never been lifted from the level of folk-lore and old-wives' tales and put into the place of dignity they deserve: the classroom, under the direction and instruction of a qualified

linguist as teacher.

Hence it is that our college students, linguistically as naive as they were in Bloomfield's time, carry their naiveté over into their own study of their own language, into their study of a second- or third-language, and eventually into their teaching of either their own or a second-language. This is where, as I estimate the situation, the crux of the problem lies. Our second-language teachers must come from somewhere; for better or worse, in Japan as elsewhere they come largely from the ranks of our college graduates. Our college graduates in almost every case know more about counterpoint, Gresham's law and the nature of atomic structure than they know about language in any scientific sense, not because they have been either poor or inattentive students for four years, but because in most cases no one has ever taught them. Our instruction in linguistics is limited to those who elect it, or who hope to become linguists themselves. These are in any case few in number, and to the degree that they succeed their talents are in general lost to second-language teaching, as their teachers' talents have been. Technical and natural science education can only succeed when large numbers of students, preferably all who are allowed to continue into college, are given the opportunity to become familiar with the fundamentals of these disciplines; I suggest that the same is also true of second-language teaching.

II

If the situation were ever to be obtained in which we could be sure that second-language teachers would be linguistically informed instead of linguistically naive as generally at present, what benefits might reasonably be expected to accrue? Here I do not feel it is possible to call experimental evidence into account, and such evidence is actually the only kind that is of any importance;

but until the experiment is run the evidence can hardly be in hand. So what follows is, in this sense and for this reason, necessarily limited to speculation, but the fact that it is speculation as far as possible grounded in fact and experience may to some extent redeem it.

Carroll gives an impressive list (144) of the “directions [in which] linguistics and related studies [can] make a contribution to the formulation of ends and means in language-arts instruction.” His “language-arts instruction” is the customary educationalists’ euphemism for first-language teaching, and its employment here should not put us off from going through his list, for it is an impressive one. Briefly summarized it includes the following :

(a) “the recognition of the primacy of speech as contrasted with written language” ;

(b) “an acquaintance with the phonemic structure of the [sic] language and its relation (or lack of relation) to orthography” ;

(c) “an awareness of the dynamic character of a [sic] language system and its changes through time and space—as a background for the teaching of grammar and usage” ;

(d) “a knowledge of the nature of meaning and its genesis...” ;

(e) “an analysis of individual differences in pupils with respect to their needs and abilities in the language arts...” ;

(f) “a concern with the role of language in mediating virtually every kind of learning...” ;

(g) “an understanding of the psychological processes involved in encoding and decoding information...”

An impressive list, and a difficult and controversial one—as much so for the linguist as for the educationalist. As one of the former I would have to begin by seriously questioning the validity of (c), which I do not completely understand, and which to me seems at the present state of knowledge an impossible goal, even

in so far as I understand it. But perhaps it is something that means more to education than it does to linguistics. With (d) the difficulties are even more enormous; linguistics of the kind I (and Carroll!) am talking about is largely silent on the nature of meaning, and completely agnostic as to its genesis, both attitudes being probably quite properly so taken.

Items (e) (f) and (g) could also be questioned; the first one is the educator's problem, though it will of course be splendid if the linguist can help him any (but I doubt it); (f) seems to me more of a pious maxim than any scientific criterion or "direction"; and (g) is probably all the farther removed from linguistics for being of the essential nature of educational psychology. There remain, then, only these two, (a) and (b); are they worth worrying about?

The answer must be a very big "yes," because if linguistics had nothing else to offer instruction in the "language arts" (and it may well not have), *it would still be of vital importance for its contributions in these two "directions" alone.* It is precisely in these two "directions" that the linguistically informed student will be best equipped as a second-language teacher. Whatever may be the merits of some of Carroll's "directions," the first two, and the most important of the list, are of the same importance in a second-language situation as they are in a first-language one.

The second-language teacher who is linguistically naive will fall down just exactly in these two "directions," and his failures here will seriously endanger the effectiveness of anything else he may be able to do. Exactly the same can be said of the first-language teacher. For both, nothing can be as important as insuring that their education, if not their professional training, does not leave them ignorant of what linguistic science can offer to the solution of the problems they will find in connection with Carroll's

(a) and (b).

Carroll reports (146) that "Bloomfield..., Hall..., and other linguistic scientists...point out that the reality of language is represented by its sounds and not by the letters which may be used to represent the sound of words." What they and other linguists insist upon is as a matter of fact something rather different; they insist upon the fact that the reality of a language *is* its sounds. This slip would not be worthwhile pointing out were it not typical of the tone of several of Carroll's statements in elucidation of his (a). Later (147) he suggests that "there is a well-established misconception in our culture as to the primacy of written language, but this misconception has a valid basis, namely, that written forms serve to refresh our memories where we mistrust the spoken word." A misconception may be and very often is well-established, but can it have valid basis? No more generally so, I suspect, than it has in this particular instance. The point here is that Carroll is his own best witness to the importance of a sound grounding in linguistic theory for attacking the problem of language and writing, and that of teaching reading. Without such a grounding the educator, whether a graduate-school professor or a second-language teacher in a high-school, finds it impossible to write more than a few lines on the subject without getting himself into insoluble theoretical difficulties.

Of course, Carroll is in this "direction" a world advanced over most of his contemporaries; the samples he quotes from the unfortunate attack by W. S. Gray of the University of Chicago's Department of Education on Bloomfield's proposals for reading pedagogy (148-9) are simply an extreme case in point. When Gray can write as late as 1948 that "in our language a printed word is actually a recording of the series of sounds that we use

in the spoken word," Carroll feels that the linguist can "justly plead for qualification" (149). The linguist actually need not ask for either qualification or explanation, since the issue here is one he has long since solved with a good measure of success. Far more profitable is it for him to suggest that educationalists might also prepare themselves and their students by informing themselves about these subjects, in a word, that they too become linguistically informed.

In a word, Carroll's (a) and (b) both concern the second-language teacher who must eventually face the problem of teaching reading, and can do it only if he understands what reading is, what language is, and how they differ. This is particularly true when English is the second language being taught, since English orthography is by all odds the world's worst. Our students in Japan, for example, cannot get by simply with speaking English; they must of course learn to read it.³ So problems of reading pedagogy are as central to second-language teaching here as they are, for example, to the "language arts" in the United States or England. The teacher who is linguistically naive is not able to do an effective job in these areas.

In his discussion specifically dealing with second-language teaching (186 ff.) Carroll has some very worth-while passages on what lack of agreement among second-language teachers "as to the proper objectives of their instruction" can mean in terms of difficulties of evaluation. Partly this points up one of the most often overlooked truisms of all language teaching, first- or second- : the futility of any evaluation which scores lack of success in achieving goals never attempted. Generally educationalists are acute, and growing more so, upon this point, and now we more often hear of realistic evaluation of language teaching largely in terms of the primary goals of the instruction. But sight is too often lost of

the fact that linguistic science has an important body of accumulated data and doctrine concerning the nature of the possible goals for such instruction, and that evaluation which does not take these too into account is as invalid as that which would not take the set goals of any particular situation into account.

In the implementation of these goals, the linguistically informed student has a great deal to offer as a second-language teacher. No matter how rigidly prescribed a curriculum or how well planned a course of instruction may be, the teacher actually on his feet in the classroom must assess anew and direct afresh the goals of his instruction many times each day—constantly, perhaps, somewhat in the manner of the old-fashioned artillery range-computers once in use which constantly corrected their calculated course on the basis of continually entering increments of fresh data.

While it is properly to the linguist to whom we must turn for decisions affecting language instruction goals in curriculum development and other major areas of decision, since he alone (rather than the educator) is in a position, thanks to the findings of his science, to make statements on the goals that are possible, likely, and feasible, to the educator or to the social administrator can then be left the decisions involving choice among various linguistically realistic goals—which are socially desirable, which are economically possible, and the like. But the adjusting of even these “top-level” decisions to the realities of daily classroom teaching must and will probably always remain the task of the language teacher.

During all language teaching the necessity for decisions concerning goals constantly arises; no one who has ever worked in a living classroom situation will deny this. The linguistically naive teacher will largely lack the basis for making exactly those de-

cisions which he must always be prepared to make. The linguistically informed teacher will be able to bring adequate information and training to bear in each situation, enough at least to ensure that his working decisions are within the limits of linguistic feasibility. Nothing more discourages both teacher and students than inveterate working toward unattainable goals. The more linguistic science finds out concerning the nature of human language, the more it has to offer concerning the evaluation of our language goals *before* and *during*, and not just simply after the conclusion of, our language teaching.

The authors of the "Harvard Report" (The Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society) were able to conclude as late as 1946 that the "prime function" of foreign-language teaching in general education is "to illuminate English in these two respects in which English supremely needs illumination, namely, syntax and vocabulary" (124, cited Carroll 141). Carroll quite correctly, if perhaps a little too mildly, points out that "research results in general give little support for making such an assertion;" linguistic science surely, if it has found out anything at all about the nature of language and the learning processes associated with it, has sufficient research results now accumulated to be able to single out exactly this kind of thing as a linguistically unfeasible goal. The teacher who is devoting his time to it whether in a first- or second-language teaching situation is sure to be disappointed. (Though this "illuminating" attitude might seem to be a characteristic feature of English language education in America, a fairly exact parallel exists in Japan, where it masquerades under the outwardly innocuous title of "Cultural Values in English Education"; other deceptive aliases also are found.)

The linguistically naive language teacher, first- or second-,

will not recognize the invalidity of such goals, just as the authors of the "Harvard Report" obviously did not; disappointment with his own results and disillusionment with language teaching in general are among the dangers which follow. The linguistically informed teacher will be able, even if officially required to adhere to a curriculum with patently unfeasible goals, to do much to spare himself and his students the debilitating effects of such disappointment and disillusionment.

Just as every language teacher must do much of his own goal-assessment and directing, so every language teacher is also intimately concerned with tests and measurements. In the conclusions to his doctoral thesis on the construction of achievement tests in English for Latin-American students, R. Lado lists six conclusions, of which the first three in order follow: "(1) that a great lag exists in measurement in English as a foreign language, (2) that the lag is connected with unscientific views of language, (3) that the science of language should be used in defining what to test" (cited Carroll 195). It would be difficult to put it more concretely or more exactly. Every language teacher must measure achievement and performance; if he is linguistically naive, he can only fall back on his resources of the folk-lore about language and its nature. The results are often both tragic and unfair, and even undemocratic.

If this last seems like more of an emotion than a reasoned statement, perhaps it might be well to give part of the background on which it is based. In the course of observing the teaching of English as a foreign language in Japan in the hands of linguistically naive teachers, both Japanese and non-Japanese, I have often had my attention forcibly directed to the nature of the measurements customarily employed. Sometimes one goes out and seeks this kind of information in the course of professional duties,

but more often, since I am a resident native speaker of English, more than a sufficient quantity is brought to one, *both by teachers and students*—the latter wondering what the answers their teachers want (or wanted) are, the former wondering what answers they should require their students to produce. That I am most often simply unable to solve the difficulties of either group is only a final note of tragedy in a situation already so far removed from any kind of scientifically valid testing that it would be comic if so many young lives were not involved in studying for this sort of thing.

This is strong language, of course, and often to be sure both parties inflicted with such measurement attempts would gladly exchange them for others, but the *linguistically naive teacher cannot devise more valid ones*. That is the heart of the difficulty. Society demands that he measure and test, but his training has not given him the linguistic basis for performing this necessary educational service.

A favorite form of unscientific testing from which the linguistically informed teacher will be able to liberate his pupils is roughly as follows. First a certain category of linguistic forms is “taught,” *i. e.* something of their description presented in class. If this is, for example, “nouns,” the teacher attempts to acquaint the students with the main sub-classes of this form class, which might well include mass nouns, countables, uncountables, proper nouns, and so forth, depending on the system used and how complete it is. The linguistically informed teacher will be able to stress in a hundred ways, some overt but mostly covert, the essentially *arbitrary* nature of the membership in these sub-classes. The linguistically naive teacher will be without anything in particular to say about his subject, and so to fill the vacuum will fashion up a fiction, which will become more and more complex

and detailed over his years of classroom experience. In this fiction membership in these sub-classes is determined by supposed congruence between the "meanings" of the words and the "meanings" of the sub-classes; for him *water* is a mass noun *because* H₂O must be served up in glassfuls, and the like. Then, after a suitable interval, comes the test.

The linguistically naive teacher has now, within his own lights, prepared the ground for the test which he alone is able to give; he gives his students lists of words they have not studied in class (*this* is what makes it a test, after all) or better yet, words they do not even know (this is, we should remember, a second-language teaching situation), and asks his pupils either to state their sub-class membership ("what kind of noun is *chocolate-bar*?") or to "use them in a sentence." He imagines that sub-class membership is a function of logic, and that the students can solve these problems by "using their heads;" he takes refuge from the fact that most of them never do succeed by the assumption, to which he is inevitably led, that "some students never *do* learn to use their heads, no matter how much help they get." Hence I do not think it either an exaggeration or name-calling to characterize this type of linguistically naive measurement as undemocratic, since in my understanding of the process it violates the essential respect for true individual ability and individual worth upon which the democratic ideology is predicated.

When faced with such a problem, there is little way out for the student of the linguistically naive teacher. He can simply guess, and take his chances on the law of averages; I suspect a consistently higher score results from this process than from any other. He may (and usually does) try to "reason things out," but since he is dealing with an essentially arbitrary set of data (his naive teacher does not realize this), he can only expect about the same

statistical chance of success as his less energetic neighbor who simply guesses. Even if he tries to "reason things out," the arbitrary nature of his data means that all he will get for his pains is eventual disillusionment with the efficiency of the reasoning process, a high price to pay for learning a second-language. He may well (and in most cases does) have recourse to translation into his first-language; again the arbitrary nature of the possible correspondences merely put him at the mercy of chance. If he is able to isolate his search for assistance in translation from his appeal to the reasoning process he will at least not be compounding the confusion, but most likely neither the student nor his linguistically naive teacher has any training in this isolating technique, either. And finally, if he happens to know the answer already, through previous or chance knowledge of the language, he will be sure to get the right answer. The result is that those who know the data sought from accidental situations outside of the classroom are consistently given the highest grades, while those who most faithfully apply the methods offered in the classroom are doomed to no higher a score than they could get by simply tossing a coin for each answer.

III

If the reader now finds it possible to concede even the possible advantage of taking steps to insure that our potential second-language teachers are linguistically informed rather than linguistically naive, he may well be expected, and even encouraged, to ask exactly what should be done about it, and when. This first is a problem to which considerable concern has already been directed among American linguists in particular, though surely much too remains to be done here. Much of the *Report on the Second Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Teaching* (John De Francis, ed., Monograph Series on Languages

and Linguistics, No. 1, Gerogetown University, 1951) is devoted to a very fruitful discussion of this problem of the content for an elementary, introductory course in linguistics (especially 28-51). Every linguist who has given such a course even once will be able to criticize and amplify the findings of this Round Table, but it nevertheless has enough substance to serve as a point of departure for the educationalist, for example, who might wish to know what such a course would deal with. Charles A. Ferguson has offered the following definition of such a course, worth quoting in full here :

A course in linguistics is a course which makes clear the nature of language, explains human linguistic behavior and discusses the structure found in any given language or in all languages, deals with the techniques for describing that structure, the changes that take place in language, the variation that exists in languages, and various other special points under these general headings (*Report*, 29).

To develop such a course is a challenge to each linguist, but not until such a course or the equivalent subject matter is an integral part of the basic training for our potential language teachers can we expect much change for the better. In the same Round Table *Report* Henry Lee Smith, Jr. suggests another important possibility, that of introducing the necessary information and attitudes without the student being aware that any particular linguistic instruction is being imparted (*Report*, 46). This might happen for example during an intensive language course, the kind of instructional background from which Smith especially speaks. This has intriguing possibilities—after all, this is now exactly the way that most of the folk-lore about language reaches our students, *via* classroom instructional attitudes, rather than as a part of any formal course of instruction—but it probably remains for the

fairly distant future to see their application in any great measure. Until the teachers as a whole are trained, quite the reverse will continue to take place.⁴

The problem of when is also a vital one, and again in the absence of experimental data, which is likely to be some time in becoming available, all we can do is guess. Carroll has suggested (*Report*, 47) that a program in undergraduate general education is the ideal place for such a course, and one is tempted to agree with him. If general education is the place for the calculus and the *Cratylus*, the *Lun-yü* and Das Wohltemperirte Klavier, then it is probably also the place for a course insuring that science and not folk-lore is part of the student's equipment for dealing with language. For the present, in addition to stressing the necessity for considering the general education possibilities of such a course, one cannot close without emphasizing that late is here, as often, better than never at all. If students do not have this necessary information by the time they reach our graduate schools of education, then they must get it there. This is far too late, and too long delayed even to be probably very effective, but it must be attempted as a last-ditch emergency measure. When earlier stages of the educational system do their proper job, then it will be unnecessary at the higher levels.

The charges (cited above) which Bloomfield in 1925 levelled at our educational practices are still largely unanswered: our classrooms and our schools are still conducted by persons who, from professors of education on down know virtually nothing of the findings of the science of language. Even such a vitally essential and essentially simple matter as the relation of writing to language is often not even mentioned all the way through a four-year college program in the liberal arts, even where such a program is both by preference and commitment devoted to imparting an

“education” which is “general.” A generation after Bloomfield wrote his scathing indictment, our teachers still in short do not know what language is, because no one tells them. Yet they must teach it, whether they are second-language teachers or teachers of audio-visual techniques or professors of educational principles or anything else under the educational sun, for without language and its uses, primary, second and what have you, all our instruction in any field whatever would soon come to a dismal halt. In consequence of their linguistic naiveté, they still today waste years of everyone’s life, and their results are still as poor as when Bloomfield celebrated the founding of the Linguistic Society of America with his situation estimate. Will his indictment still be as true another thirty-three years from today?

(Associate Professor of Linguistics, ICU)

- 1) Leonard Bloomfield, “Why a linguistic society?” *Language* 1. 1-5 (1925), cited in Carroll, *op. cit.*, 141.
- 2) Carroll’s reference (173) to the time “shortly after Pearl Harbor, [when] these results were turned to good account when the work of Mary Haas with the Thai language was applied to an intensive course in that language at the University of Michigan” invites misunderstanding. He goes on to state that “this course represented the first case in which a linguistic scientist, without necessarily having personal fluency in the language in question, directed the classroom teaching process and used native informants as models for drill purposes,” and cites Professor Haas’ well-known paper “The linguist as a teacher of languages,” *Language* 19. 203-8 (1943). One fears that the impression is meant to be given that the informant technique (surely the term ‘native’ is no longer useful or necessary) implies lack of proficiency in the language by the linguist directing the training. As a matter of fact, Haas’ own lack of “personal fluency” as he calls it lasted just about the length of the first term of the work, and thereafter her own skill in spoken Thai was and is the very model of the kind of results effective teaching (in this case, of course, her own) can produce. The linguist ignorant of the informant’s language undertakes such direction only in circumstances of great urgency, as was the case here, and never by choice; and his

first task, as it would be in field work, is *to learn the language*. I mention this at length here only because misunderstanding on the role of the linguist directing informant work has often threatened to give the whole technique a bad name in academic circles.

- 3) Seven years or so ago this might have been an unnecessary statement, and perhaps it still is. But the emphasis now quite properly given to spoken language in Japanese second-language education prompts it, for with this new emphasis has also come an unfortunate tendency to forget that if our graduates use English (or other second-language) at all, their written uses will in most situations be equally frequent and important.
- 4) It is always far easier to say what any course should not include than it is to be constructive. But surely such a course should not cater to the prescientific interest in polyglot museums of curiosities that so often masquerades as linguistics. Any approach stressing what Carroll himself seems approvingly to refer to as "the marvels of languages" (243, in footnote 13 to 157) would in my opinion be an approach in the wrong direction.