

Reviews

**ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING. H. G. Widdowson.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pp. 213. ¥3,400**

Widdowson is quite specific about the target audience for this book: "those who take the profession of language teaching seriously." It is obvious from the text that he is addressing teachers themselves, rather than researchers, for it is teachers who must ultimately mediate between theory and practice, and it is the nature of this mediation which is the principal theme of the book. His purpose, also, is explicitly given as the provocation of critical thinking with regard to the various aspects of language teaching. However, there is also a hidden agenda, which aims to shape rather than to provoke opinion.

Before considering whether the target audience and purported aims of the text have been truly met, let us look at the structure of the book, which evolved from disparate papers written over the past five years or so. This background has left its traces, yet it is not irksomely repetitive. Some of its freshness has been lost as other writers are now covering similar ground (see Nunan, 1989; Richards, 1990). Much of what is said here serves to draw together and comment upon Widdowson's previous published works, which are frequently cited. Those familiar with his ideas will be interested to see the standpoint he has reached in this recent work.

The book is in three parts, entitled "The Theory and Practice of Language Teaching," "Aspects of Language," and "Aspects of Teaching." Each consists of three or four chapters developing the topic. In the first part of the book Widdowson argues for a continuing teacher education which promotes a view of teaching as "a research activity whereby experimental techniques of instruction are designed to correspond with hypothetical principles of pedagogy, with provision made for mutual adjustment so as to bring validity of principle into as close an alignment as possible with the utility of classrooms and technique" (p. 3). In other words, teachers should research their own classrooms and techniques. Admitting that this is a tall order for busy teachers, Widdowson has argued his point with examples of many cases where the work of SLA researchers and other applied linguists has been inappropriately or unquestioningly adopted as a basis for classroom practice, because teachers have not been used to evaluating new theories. (Krashen once again comes under heavy attack, perhaps unnecessarily after ten years of almost universal censure). He proposes that teachers should use the work of researchers not to inform their practical teaching directly so much as to

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inform their own research in order to appraise and apply new theories as and when suitable for their unique situation. A theoretical model for this systematic appraisal and application is suggested and the implications for pre- and in-service teacher education are discussed. His thinking here is similar to other current writers, such as Richards (1990).

The second part reviews different approaches to describing the nature of language and puts forward views on the relative importance of grammar and lexis, schematic and systematic knowledge. What is covered here relates directly to the third part of the book, which looks at the pedagogical implications of the need to teach students both the semantic medium and the pragmatic mediation of language. Widdowson argues that in the past these have been viewed as conflicting, in the form of the structural and communicative approaches respectively, whereas they need to be seen as complementary. He suggests that a task-based pedagogy would synthesize the approaches and gives some examples of how this could be realized. In the final chapter he examines the roles of teachers and learners and asserts the need for a teacher to remain in authoritative control of the learning process.

So, does this book reach its intended audience and fulfill its aims? To answer the latter question first, yes, it does raise questions and provoke critical thought. The book is primarily a theoretical rather than a practical one. The examples of practical realizations of Widdowson's ideas in the final section are not wholly convincing, but he claims that he does not wish or expect to provide answers which would not be subject to the critical appraisal he outlined in the first part of the book. Really it is in the arguments and the questions raised, rather than the answers, that the true strength and importance of the book lies. The book is very broad in scope and, in addition to the major ideas, there are nuggets of wisdom on various aspects of language teaching for the reader to come across with delight or exasperation. In particular there are some essential distinctions drawn which clarify certain matters wonderfully. For example, authoritarian vs. authoritative (p. 5, p. 58), eclectic vs. haphazard (p. 50), *enseignant* vs. *professeur* (p. 184). Certainly, I feel there is enough food for thought provided here to keep me puzzling over and inquiring into aspects of language teaching for some time to come. Presumably this was Widdowson's intention, and thus my reaction implies a fair degree of success.

At the same time, the book reads not only as a plea to language teachers and applied linguists to think more critically about the relation of research to

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practice but also as a plea against specific practices. Here is the “hidden agenda.” There are several main tenets under attack, most of which could be described as central to the idea of communicative language teaching, all of which are popular. Disapprobation falls on authentic materials, humanistic techniques, learning language through using language, student autonomy, and even some forms of “action research.” While many may not agree with him on these matters, his objections are well-argued and have validity in regard to his stated aim. They serve to fuel his main proposition: that serious teaching should be founded on classroom research, evaluation, and the development of sound, reasoned pedagogical principles upon which to base our methodology. If we are to employ our favorite techniques, it is only proper that we should subject them to professional scrutiny.

With regard to the first question, however, I have some doubts. Regrettably, the book is probably destined to be read by academics and those teachers already devoting some time to academic pursuits, such as studying for an M.A. (And I would recommend this book most strongly to anyone in such a position.) However, there are many excellent, enthusiastic, busy teachers “who take the profession of language teaching seriously” who will probably not have the time or the inclination to read it. Basically, the book does not make comfortable reading, either in the sense of being easy to read or of being familiar in concept. Widdowson’s precise, eloquent use of language is, even in its perfection, rather too scholarly in tone to appeal easily to tired teachers (see the quotation in paragraph 3). It demands total concentration; little could be gleaned by a casual reader. Moreover, the book itself looks forbiddingly dense and academic. Sub-headings do signpost the key points, but they are insufficient to really aid digestion of the text.

In conclusion, the broad scope and the quality of the reasoned arguments of this book make it an important work. It will not have the readership it should have among practicing teachers, which would give it the greatest impact. However, as with many works of this nature, it is likely that the ideas will be re-presented in a simpler form by another academic with a more popular style, thus making it influential by a circuitous route.

Reviewed by **Anne Hill**, British Council, Kyoto.

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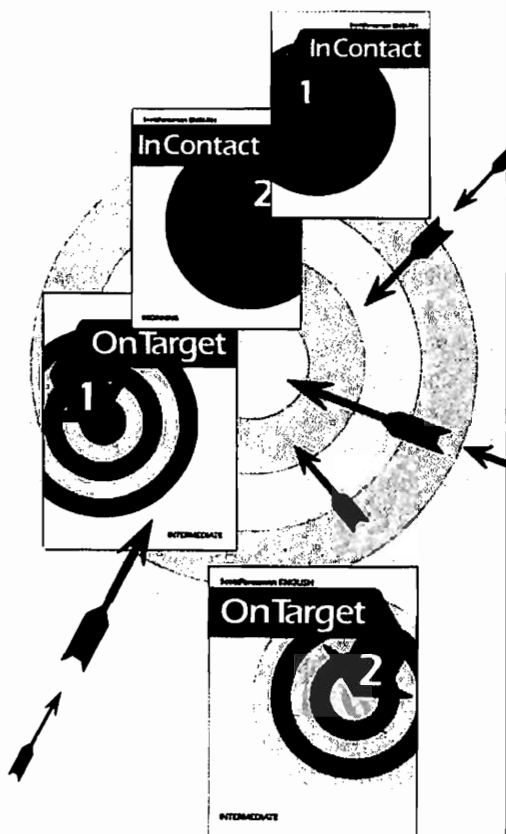
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FLUENCY AND ACCURACY. Hector Hammerly. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. Pp. 208 + viii.

Hammerly's discussion of fluency and accuracy in this book does not move much beyond describing "fluency" as speaking confidently, rapidly, and smoothly, but not necessarily grammatically (pp. 12, 15), and "accuracy" as controlling "the code" (p. 12). The book's name on the title page is more appropriate to his argument: *Fluency and Accuracy: Toward Balance in Language Teaching and Language Learning*. This confusion of titles may indicate that the book was put together hastily. Other parts of the book as well show need for critical editing.

This book is Hammerly's prescription for how languages should be taught and learned. He aims to appeal primarily to those North American foreign language teachers of French, German, and Spanish who distrust immersion programs and Krashen's second language theories. With this book, Hammerly offers them a new science of language teaching: "linguistics."

The book has four major parts: "Language Learning in the Classroom" (Chapters 1-5), "New Views on Familiar Topics" (Chapters 6-10, "Proposals and Suggestions" (Chapters 11-15), and "Broader Implications" (Chapter 16). Hammerly makes several points, two of which are basic: (a) using a theory of "natural" first language learning to develop methods of second or foreign classroom language teaching is difficult, particularly when students are immersed in a form of the language that is not a native-speaker or standard form; (b) second (or "local") language and foreign (or "remote") language situations are fundamentally different, and may require different theories of learning and different methods of teaching. Hammerly's central thesis is a tenable one: "balanced results in SL teaching are possible only when a beginning and intermediate emphasis on linguistic accuracy gradually shifts to an advanced emphasis on communicative fluency with accuracy built in" (p. 55).

Hammerly refers primarily to Indo-European languages, and to North American and northern European settings of language instruction in which students share a common native language and study a common foreign ("remote") language. He argues for a more language-based approach that is heavily based on insight from the student's native language, and that involves a tightly controlled and systematically structured, bottom-up type of instruction that gradually shifts attention from form to meaning. One of Hammerly's

major assumptions is that “if accurate output is a goal, then managed input is essential” (p. 73). Laudable as these aims may be, there are many reasons why the book cannot be recommended.

Early in the book, Hammerly joins together “communicative,” “acquisitionist,” and “naturalist” theories into one “CAN megatheory” (p. 2). Later, in a typically convoluted sentence, he accuses those who follow the megatheory’s leaders of “faddism,” “trendism,” and “bandwagonism,” and explains that such behavior is “especially damaging to academically immature fields like SL teaching, learning, and use—which I prefer to call by a more convenient one-word name, ‘linguistics’” (p. 15).

Having thus introduced the new “science” (p. 16) of linguistics, and its “principled eclecticism” (p. 18), Hammerly describes, in decidedly unscientific terms, negative aspects of CAN megatheory. ESP is one example:

SLs for Specific Purposes: People who just need to understand and use second language in a few contexts, who don’t mind “butchering” it and the consequences this may entail, and who accept the idea that they are probably ruining forever their chances of speaking the language well may wish to take a quick course in that language “for specific purposes.” (p. 22)

While Hammerly coins many new terms to help “linguists” pursue the science of linguistics, he ignores established linguistics and applied linguistics terminology. He disparages the language spoken in the second language classroom as “deviant”—a “classroom pidgin” which becomes “ingrained.” Established usage restricts “pidgin” to a grammatically limited language used by speakers with no common language—not the “remote” language situation that Hammerly claims to address (p. 40). He uses the applied linguistics term “interlanguage” in such contexts as “error-laden interlanguage,” “faulty interlanguage rules,” and “inaccurate terminal interlanguage.” For two decades, applied linguists have accepted and used Selinker’s (1972) definition of interlanguage as a systematically evolving and rule-governed system (without necessarily agreeing with Selinker that this is how second languages are acquired). Hammerly redefines it as “a faulty mixture of SL rules and overgeneralizations, and interlingual intrusions and inhibitions” (p. 72).

Linguistics opposes CAN megatheory and supports grammatical correctness. But beyond that, it is difficult to pinpoint the principles that unify this

new science. Hammerly repeatedly explains that “what is ‘in’ and what is ‘out’ in linguistics should be based on the soundness of the idea rather than its newness or source (e.g., p. 17). But where are the sound ideas of linguistics, and what is the essence of Hammerly’s theory? He writes:

Neither the approach nor its elements need to conform to any given theory, whether from particular linguists or from any of the feeder disciplines outside linguistics—linguistics, psychology, education, or whatever. *This is what I mean by balanced principled SL teaching.* (p. 57)

As if he senses that the above explanation may not be adequate, Hammerly turns to the teaching and learning of pronunciation to provide an example of how “principled balanced teaching obliges us to aim at quality learning in all aspects of SL competence” (p. 59). He writes that “developing excellent pronunciation is a matter of forming habits. Good habits are not difficult to develop if care is taken to behave correctly and consistently from the start” (p. 60). This sounds rather familiar, although Skinner is not in the bibliography, and behaviorism is not in the index.

Hammerly sometimes incorrectly attributes positions to others and then cleverly refutes them. When it serves his purpose, he characterizes “Chomskyan linguistics” as being opposed to contrastive analysis (p. 62); later, in order “to be fair” to Chomsky, he tells us that Chomsky never claimed that his theories could be usefully applied to language teaching (p. 182). Hammerly does not cite the classic contrastive analyses of Moulton (1965) and Stockwell and Bowen (1962), even though they describe the same European languages he does, and deal with some of the same issues Hammerly discusses, in the version of contrastive analysis that he proposes in “New Views on Familiar Topics.”

After referring to “SLA theory as developed by Krashen and many others” (p. 6), Hammerly informs us that “SLA proponents consider the native language of the second language learner unimportant” (p. 7). Yet native language has usually had an explicit position in SLA theory (e.g., Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, pp. 6, 96-118).

Hammerly introduces—without identifying the source—a “Minimal Interference Hypothesis” (MIH) so that he may then criticize “evidence supporting the MIH” (pp. 64-65). After “carefully checking the data published in

several of these studies,” Hammerly finds that the evidence is “tainted”—without citing the studies. In order to disprove the “MIH,” he cites and describes only two studies, one of which is a “pilot study” by a master’s degree student at his university that is unpublished and unavailable.

Hammerly may ignore published and available ESL research because he distrusts it:

ESL research is basically unreliable even for the ESL classroom, and the conclusions based on it shouldn’t be extrapolated to the remote SL classroom. SL acquisition research cannot justifiably [sic] be extrapolated to *any* classroom SL *teaching and learning*. Yet much of the “new paradigm” in SL teaching is based on such unjustified extrapolations. And if we value at all the concept of grammaticality, we must conclude that this paradigm doesn’t work. (p. 40)

Perhaps Hammerly deserves credit for questioning a dominant paradigm and the research it is based on, but he has not expressed his criticisms professionally. Neither has he introduced his new science of linguistics, or the research he bases it on, thoughtfully and convincingly. CAN megatheoreticians and second language researchers are unlikely to feel a need to respond to these accusations.

Reviewed by **Tim Riney**, International Christian University.

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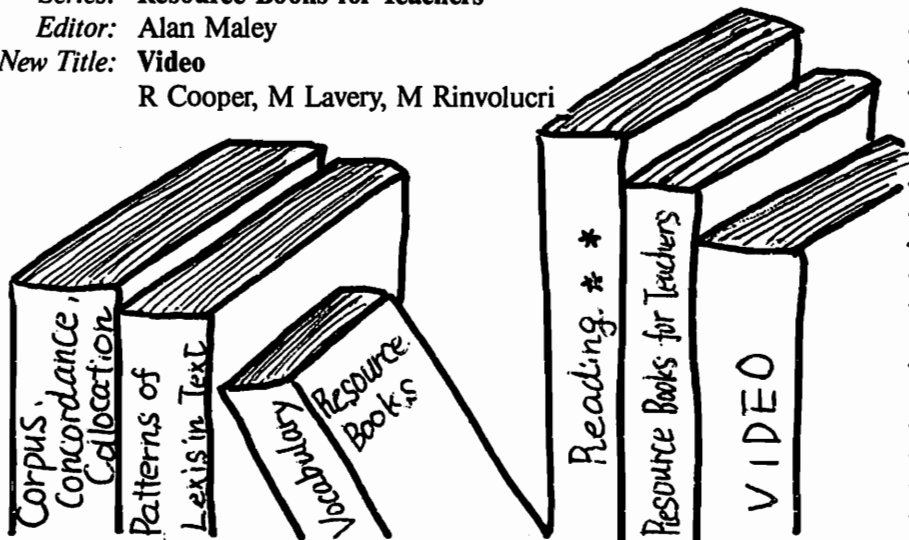
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SCRIPTS, PLANS, GOALS, AND UNDERSTANDING. Roger C. Schank and Robert P. Abelson. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977. 248 pages.

Why is it that our students have so much trouble comprehending the meaning of an English text or learning new vocabulary? Many of our colleagues have been working on this problem and a variety of partial answers have appeared. Most of them, however, seem flawed in one way or another, and many are contradicted by the available evidence or common sense. Not all the serious work on this problem, however, is being done by applied linguists. Scientists working in the field of cognitive science, the intersection of psychology, artificial intelligence, and linguistics, are actively developing practical theories to explain the processes of understanding and learning.

Cognitive scientists are now attempting to make computers understand natural language. Much of their work is based on the concept of scripts, schema (schemata in the plural form) in the TESOL jargon. Since beginning their work in 1971, they have developed an extensive literature, most of which is found in the computer section of a library, not the applied linguistics section.

The book under consideration here is a cognitive science classic that is still being listed in the bibliography of almost every new book in the field. Also, it has stood the test of time and is still being quoted. If we turn our attention from cognitive science to teaching, we find that scripts are now mentioned in almost every discussion on understanding, especially in relation to teaching reading. Teaching methods are being developed which explicitly address scripts.

The idea of scripts, or schemata, is easy to understand. In the following commonly used example, the information that is not explicitly stated is easily filled in by the reader after referring to our internal representation of what happens in a restaurant, our "restaurant" schema.

[1] Mary entered the restaurant. Later she paid and left.

Reference to our schema tells us that Mary sat at a table or counter,

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looked at a menu and ordered, then someone prepared and brought her food, and finally she received the bill, which she paid before leaving. There are also many other details that our schema tells us are probably true. For example, Mary probably ate the food and left a tip, and the menu and food were probably brought to Mary by a waiter or waitress.

Obviously this concept of schemata is very powerful and well deserves the attention that it has been getting. However, schemata are not sufficient to understand texts like the following:

[2] Mary wanted a drink. She called to John in the kitchen.

[3] Mike wanted to go to the movies. He couldn't, so he watched TV.

[4] Joe is Bill's boss. Bill is late for work. What will Joe do?

Text [2] requires the understanding of Mary's *plan*. Her plan or expectation is that John will respond to her request by bringing her some water. In text [3] we must understand that Mike's *goal* is to amuse himself to be able to accept TV as a substitute for the movies. In text [4] there is a *theme* which describes the relationship between bosses and employees that contains background information allowing us to predict the plans and goals, and thus the actions, of the participants.

Additionally, there is the problem of how memory is organized. It is obvious that the system of hierarchically stored vocabulary items envisioned by many linguists is incomplete. Most verbs and abstract nouns defy this sort of characterization.

A quick read of *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding* (SPGU) will introduce a new perspective to your thinking about these problems. The authors, Schank from social psychology and Abelson from artificial intelligence, present the interim results of their study of the nature of knowledge and how this knowledge is used—in other words, “cognitive science” or the theory of knowledge systems. They feel the book is about artificial intelligence, psychology, and linguistics, without conforming to the conventions of any of these fields. They also say that they are not sure exactly what audience they are writing for, but that they have often omitted or simplified the technical arguments. The book was

first published in 1977, but it is still in print and the contents have not become outdated. In fact, a more recent book of which Abelson is an editor (Galambos, Ableson, & Black, 1986) provides further theoretical and experimental justifications for the positions taken in SPGU.

The book is conceptually organized into three sections. The first section, which is the majority of the book, consists of seven chapters in which the authors develop their system of notation and define their terminology for describing scripts, plans, and goals. The second section is a single chapter describing the computer programs that were written to test the theory. The final section consists of a single chapter on how scripts are acquired.

The first section, except for the two introductory chapters, will probably be of only limited interest to most readers. There is a detailed discussion of the terminology which can be used for marking a text for analysis or use by a computer. However, these chapters do contain analyses of sample sentences and texts which will provide food for thought for even the most knowledgeable native speaker.

The second section describes four computer programs which were written to test the theory described in the first section. SAM (Script Applier Mechanism) understands stories by creating a longer version of the story in which all of the omitted items from the script are included. The authors state that they have written similar programs which have successfully translated English into Chinese, Russian, Dutch, and Spanish. After describing SAM in some detail, the authors present an annotated printout of a computer's output while SAM was analyzing a short story.

The second program is FRUMP (Fast Reading Understanding and Memory Program), a script based program for skimming newspaper articles. Depending upon the type of article, FRUMP searches for the facts that it expects the article to contain. Again, a description and computer printout are provided.

The third program is TALESPIN, which makes up stories by asking the operator to answer questions about the key elements from the scripts

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the program contains. A detailed description of the interaction between an operator and TALESPIN is included.

The final program is PAM (Plan Applier Mechanism), which is similar to SAM but uses plans instead of scripts.

The final section will be particularly stimulating for most teachers and applied linguists. The authors provide a short case study demonstrating the acquisition of scripts and plans by Hana, the child of one of the authors. A variety of transcripts are offered. The earliest, at age one year and nine months, shows Hana associating groups of vocabulary items with single episodes. Through questioning and having her tell stories, the development of Hana's understanding is followed past her fourth birthday. The authors summarize their findings as follows:

[T]he pattern of learning would seem to be that first, definitions of objects are learned as episodes. Then, scripts are learned to connect events. Finally, scripts are organized by goal structures that are used to make sense of the need for them. (p. 227)

They also say that episodes are made up of sequences of actions and that there are two principles at work: (a) "memory concepts are strongly identified with and related to the first time they were encountered," and "episodic memory for Hana is grouped contextually" (p. 226). My own research (Adamson, 1976) supports this. When asked to sort vocabulary items into groups, lower level second language students use an episodic grouping strategy, but more fluent students group grammatically. My study paralleled a study of native speaking children (Anglin, 1970) that had found that younger children used episodic strategies, but adults used grammatical strategies. A large body of experimental evidence further supports the authors' position, but this is not the place to review it. Anyone interested will find this book and Galambos et al. (1986) good starting points.

Once we accept this description of the development of scripts, we must rethink the whole process of language learning and teaching. Both the presentation to the students and their manipulative practice would seem to require changes.

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Most scripts are different across cultures. The restaurant script mentioned above will be quite different depending on the country in which the restaurant is located. For example, tipping is not required in a Japanese restaurant; however, you are brought a damp cloth with which to wipe your hands before eating, and you may have to remove your shoes before sitting at a table. The Japanese restaurant may or may not have chairs and silverware, and the cash register may be a wooden box with a *soroban* (Japanese abacus). Therefore, it could be misleading for Japanese students to use their own internal scripts for the understanding of English scripts. The same would apply to plans or goals. Memorizing lists of one-to-one translations should also be ineffective in the long run, since the translations will probably be associated with different episodes and scripts. However, students in many classrooms do precisely this. The result, as we all know, is a country full of students who believe that English is just a complicated way of writing Japanese.


Although the details of how to do it are by no means obvious, we apparently need to find ways to create English-like scripts in our students and then to attach English words, phrases, and finally sentences and full texts directly to these scripts. I hope that some of you readers have been sufficiently stimulated by this review to read the book and then to discover new ways to apply these ideas to your teaching.

Reviewed by **Charles E. Adamson**, Shizuoka Institute of Science and Technology.

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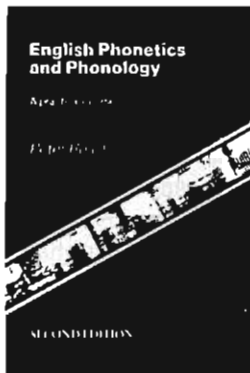
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