

REVIEWS

William Branford with M.V.Aldridge, R. Dace, P. Keating and I. Pinchuck. *Structure, Style and Communication*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980. 463 pp. Boards, R8,75.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the traditional approach to the study of grammar has been the subject of much criticism. As theories of language and language-acquisition have proliferated, so has the problem of what to teach become the nightmare faced by every teacher of English. The sub-title of this book, *An English Language Manual*, reveals that the authors have attempted to solve that issue.

In the Preface, the senior author expresses the hope that this book 'may prove interesting and helpful' to university students of English and communication theory, practising teachers of languages and to teacher trainees. For all of these people there are elements of this book that will prove valuable.

The Manual is divided up into four main sections. The first section, entitled *Language and Communication*, illustrates that 'the really basic rules of English are not an arbitrary code formulated by experts on grammar, endorsed by a legislative body and enforced by the teaching profession. The basic rules of English govern a complex system of behaviour and response ... (p. 89). The second section, *English Sentences*, continues to highlight the weaknesses inherent in the purely traditional view of grammar while constructively redefining what one's approach should be. For example, the traditionalist might state that 'a full sentence consists of subject and predicate'; but, as the authors point out, 'apparently subjectless sentences are common in English', as in *Bless you* (p. 125). In the process of justifying the need to consider the concepts 'noun-phrase' and 'verb-phrase' reference is made to Plato who first defined the typical constituents of a

sentence as 'noun' and 'verb'. Links of this kind abound in the manual and should go a long way towards reconciling the traditional, analytical views of language and the twentieth century's synthesising views. Within the covers of this book there are references to most grammatical approaches, including phrase-structure and transformational grammars, and the authors have drawn on the best aspects of each theory.

The third section concentrates on *Vocabulary and Meaning*. For students and teachers of English language and literature there is much of value in this section. Once again the point of departure is often the traditional one but the unsatisfactory elements of this approach are succinctly illustrated. For example, the traditional definitions for *subject* and *object* in a sentence are shown to be unsatisfactory for passive sentences such as: 'The tent is being re-erected by the politicians'. The rejection of this view is soundly reasoned:

... 'subject' and 'object' are *syntactic* relationships to a verb, but the definitions traditionally given them are *semantic*; school grammar has, in short, confused two entirely separate kinds of relationship, the semantic relationships of agent and patient, and the syntactic relationships of subject and object.

(p. 336)

A strong case is thus made for treating semantic role requirements as basic to the meaning of the constituents of sentences.

Also in this section is an exploration of metaphor; this is not confined to metaphor's role as a literary device. Metaphor is shown to occur in virtually all kinds of English from teenage slang to scientific reports. The use of metaphor enables the communicator to '... "break the rules" and thereby adapt language to new purposes' (p. 327).

The last section of the manual is entitled *The Sounds of English*. Here, as in the rest of the work, many examples are drawn from South African practice. As an introduction to phonetics and phonology with particular reference to the problems encountered by second language learners of English, this section is extremely functional. The text is enhanced by useful diagrams and illustrations.

As is the case with the other sections, the relevance of the sounds of English to literary study is also explored. While sympathising with John Locke's statement that 'sounds have no natural connection with our ideas, but have all their significance from the arbitrary imposition of men' (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,

Book III, Ch. 9, 1690), the authors reveal that there is a language-independent sound-symbolism associated with certain words or sounds. They refer to an experiment by J.R. Firth (*Papers in Linguistics*, OUP, 1957) in which subjects were presented with the following shapes and words and were asked to match the words to the shapes:



1. kikiriki



2. oombooloo

Virtually all of the subjects linked 'kikiriki' with the figure on the right. This is convincing proof of their claim that in poetry there is obviously some conscious phonetic structuring based on this interpretative tendency.

Professor Branford and his co-authors succeed in bringing together traditional grammar and recent linguistic studies. *Structure, Style and Communication* is a useful introductory reference text and provides a survey of the English language. Each sub-section ends with a series of exercises called *Workpoints*. The ideas contained in these practice and revision exercises are plentiful and varied, but they are better suited to supervised work than self-study. As a workbook the Manual would have been enhanced by a section of answers (where feasible) for the *Workpoints*. There is however, an extensive glossary with notes on how terms are used in the text and cross-references to the sub-section concerned with each entry. Another functional feature are the lists of suggestions for further reading; these lists are interspersed throughout the various chapters.

This Manual provides a sound introduction to contemporary English language studies. The authors suffer from no delusions: in pointing out how to use this book they state that a language text 'requires reading and study of a rather different kind from that which works best for fiction and plays'. Relying heavily upon the authors' own analogy I believe that this book will become as valuable to students and teachers of English who are prepared to master each section, as a motor manual is to a mechanic.

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