

Peter Gannon and Pam Czerniewska. *Using Linguistics: An Educational Focus*. London: Edward Arnold, 1980.

Until very recently, publications in the field of applied linguistics tended to concentrate almost exclusively on second-language acquisition and teaching. Gannon and Czerniewska's *Using Linguistics* represents something of a departure from the norm in that the focus here is on the potential value of linguistics in the development and improvement of mother-tongue skills. It is argued that 'if children learn language by using it and by seeing how it is used, then the teacher needs to be able to monitor and direct such exploration; and the authors have aimed to provide an introduction to the principles of language which the teacher can use to provide a structure for children's language learning'.

Despite being an introductory text, *Using Linguistics* treats a remarkably wide-ranging set of topics, most of which seem to be of decided relevance to the authors' purposes. A brief overview of the book's contents should make this clear.

In the first chapter, *Linguistics and Education*, the authors give notice, quite unabashedly, of their intention to pursue an eclectic course, declaring that 'so long as the concepts and principles drawn from different theories are not self-contradictory, it is entirely reasonable for the teacher to ransack, without compunction, the available stores of linguistic knowledge'. They then go on to discuss some of the misconceived notions about language which the teacher, fortified by his plunder, will want to challenge. Although it is rather hard to believe that some of these misconceptions, such as 'every utterance has a verb', 'there are three tenses in English' and the hoary old prescription that 'sentences should not end with a preposition', are still alive and well and inhabiting the consciousnesses of modern educationists, the authors' general point is taken: the English teacher should be master of, not lackey to, the language materials he happens to have at his disposal. Some of the potentially more damaging misconception such as those relating to the distinction between standard and non-standard variety are dealt with in more detail in a later chapter.

Chapter 2, *Principles and Procedures*, introduces and develops the idea of language as a syntagmatic-paradigmatic system à la Saussure. Salient differences between traditional and modern approaches to linguistic description are pointed out and then, in their introductory discussion of syntax, the authors manage to marry constituent-structure and dependency approaches very successfully without at any stage waxing forbiddingly technical.

In the third and longest chapter, *Analysing English*, semantic

relationships, syntactic structures and functions, word structure and phonology are discussed and illustrated, the focus here being exclusively on English. The treatment of sentence structure is i'functional-syntactic, the six functional sites Subject, Verb, Direct Object, Indirect Object, Complement and Adjunct being identified and defined, together with the types of structure which each site admits. It is interesting — and heartening — to see that, despite the premium on space in a book of this nature, the authors manage to include a brief discussion of adverbial scope, as exemplified by the difference in meaning of sentence pairs such as

*Frankly, she told me the truth*

and

*She told me the truth frankly.*

This rather important notion is one which is all too rarely given coverage in much more ambitious introductions to linguistics.

Another positive feature of this chapter is the section on discourse structure, and to my mind the authors could have devoted even more attention to this area of investigation because of its particular relevance to the teaching of both composition and reading.

In the chapter which follows, *Children's Writing: a Linguistic Comment*, discourse errors, as well as others, are dealt with. Three passages, written by children of different ages, are closely analysed and diagnoses are made, but it is a great pity that the authors did not see their way to following through and providing pointers as to how the teacher, armed with his newly-acquired linguistic knowledge, could set about improving the writing skills of his pupils. This teacher, it is true, will no longer be content to speak vaguely of 'poor syntax' or 'disorganised writing' on the part of his pupils, but the vital question as to how he might act on his linguistic insights remains largely unanswered.

Chapter 5, *Which Approach?*, presents an overview of the historical development of the major linguistic approaches, concentrating on the work of two of the leading twentieth-century linguists on either side of the Atlantic: Martinet, Halliday, Bloomfield and Chomsky. It is then argued that any theoretical model of language should be assessed by the educationist in terms of its ability to describe three things: the adult language system; the child's developing language system; and language variation. In the light of the fact that arguably the most successful investigations of all three of these areas have been made within the transformational-generative paradigm, the authors' conclusion that Chomsky's

model 'is of little direct use for those involved in education' is hardly justified. This conclusion possibly results from a failure to distinguish clearly between the value of a theoretical model as a source of linguistic insights and its value as a means of talking about language problems to pupils in the classroom. Halliday's model is declared to be the most suitable one and it is obvious that the authors owe more to his approach than to any other. Unfortunately, however, the grounds on which this decision is made are not clearly spelt out.

The sixth chapter, *Whose Language?* concentrates on three main topics: language varieties and their relation to educational achievement; children's acquisition of language; and the demands made on children's language by classroom materials. What the authors present in this chapter is, in effect, a very relevant, useful and admirably clear introduction to both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

The book concludes with a chapter entitled *Using Linguistics*, in which three main classroom approaches are identified, i.e. 'traditional', 'creative' and 'functional', and these are then assessed in the light of modern linguistic knowledge.

As already noted, the most serious weaknesses of this book are, from the teacher's point of view, the lack of explicitness on the question of practical application of insights and, more from the applied linguist's point of view, the authors' failure to justify properly the selection of their particular eclectic blend of linguistic approaches. Apart from these problems, one might also quibble about minor infelicities such as the definition of an infix as a bound form that interrupts a 'word' (morphemes have already been discussed by this stage) and the assertion that 'the linguistic approach' discounts all reference to the situation in which an utterance occurs (perhaps 'microlinguistic approach' would have been more appropriate here). Gremlins have also infiltrated the printing presses on occasion, although the resulting 'typo's' are few and far between.

As counterweights to these weaknesses one might mention the general clarity and freshness of exposition, the regular use of examples and summaries as aids to clarification, the complete absence of pedantry, the sheer comprehensiveness of the work as a reflection of what is going on in linguistics today and, last but not least, a rather helpful glossary of the linguistic terms used. The English-as-a-first-language educationist who would like his teaching to be better informed and his own horizons broadened would do well to regard *Using Linguistics* as compulsory reading.

E.H. Hubbard  
*University of South Africa*