THE REVIVAL OF DRILLS IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Apart from those who view language learning in terms of a "creative construction model,"[1] most methodologists recognize the need for formal instruction in foreign language teaching, though there are conspicuous differences between one approach and another in relation to the selection of items and the way of presenting them. A model incorporating formal instruction has to provide for a certain amount of controlled practice and to define its relation to the free practice needed for the effective use of language in real-life situations. In structural language teaching,[2] the view of language as a habit system led to a form of controlled practice aimed at the automatization of speech habits. Moreover, it was assumed that the primary focus of attention should be on the linguistic system. In this framework, it was quite natural that _drills_ - exercises designed to ensure assimilation of some linguistic point through repetition or guided practice[3] - should have become a favourite teaching device. With the advent of the communicative approach, language came to be seen primarily as a system of communication and an instrument of social interaction. As a result, there was a general tendency to reject the techniques developed in structural language teaching, on the grounds that they prepared students only for the mechanical manipulation of linguistic elements.

In their enthusiasm for the new creed, supporters of the communicative approach tended to forget that a number of attempts had been made in the previous period to set up adequate forms of communication practice and that the innovations that were now being proposed were essentially revisions of former techniques, in the light of a reanalysis of language as a system of communication. To ascertain the extent to which the form of controlled practice used in communicative language teaching differs from that adopted in structural language teaching, in particular in relation to the use of drills, it is thus necessary to consider, in some detail, the techniques that were developed within the structuralist framework.

2. THE ROLE OF DRILLS IN STRUCTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

In structural language teaching language is viewed as a system of structural patterns (also called sentence patterns or language patterns), to be taught by means of pattern practice or pattern drilling, involving various types of pattern drills (also called pattern practice drills, structural pattern drills, structural drills, and structure drills), in the form of oral exercises. In the audiolingual approach, under the influence of behaviourist learning theory, drills were often used without special attention to the meanings of the forms being practised. British methodologists, on the other hand, made a point of contextualizing the presentation and practice of grammatical patterns. In both cases, however, the notions of structural patterns and drills were of fundamental importance.

According to the nature of the operation involved in each case, drills are classified into such types as repetition drills, substitution drills (sometimes subdivided into simple substitution drills, variable substitution drills, and progressive substitution drills (cf. Haycraft, 1978: 36-37) or into simple substitution drills, double substitution drills, correlative substitution drills, and multiple substitution drills (cf. Rivers & Temperley, 1978: 127-130)), conversion drills (also called transformation drills, subdivided by Rivers & Temperly (1978: 130-136) into general conversions combinations, and restatements), expansion drills, translation drills, question drills, substitution tables, and mini-dialogue drills (also called substitution dialogues). In all cases there is some form of patterned response, usually in a situational context.

It was recognized that language practice based on drills was not true communication, but it was expected that learners would subsequently be able to transfer the knowledge acquired in the classroom to a situation demanding real communication. In the course of time, it came to be realized that classroom activities of an essentially manipulative nature would never really develop the ability to use the language in real-life situations and that communication had somehow to be taught in the classroom. This insight, however, did not lead to a radical departure from existing practice, but rather to an adaptation of the dominant teaching procedures to the new mode. In other words, it was felt that some kind of communication practice should be added to the model then in vogue and that drills of a more creative type should be used for that purpose.

In keeping with the new view, Cosgrave (1971: 7) postulated that classroom work should consist mainly of two types of activity: habituation practice (consisting of dialogue memorization and pattern practice in the usual way) and communication practice (in which the learners would use a given pattern "for communicating their own ideas in carefully controlled exercises"). Communication practice would lead to the "establishment of communication habits" by means of "a situational approach involving language relevant to the students' daily life and experience." The need for "some kind of well-planned communication practice conducted

in class on a regular basis" was also recognized by Cole (1972: 2-3), who insisted on a fundamental distinction between the "formation of language habits" and the "development of communication skills." To achieve the latter aim, a "communication methodology," a "consciously applied methodology for fostering communication," would be needed. The author, however, did not make a specific proposal concerning such a methodology, but confined himself to suggesting that the adaptation of some techniques commonly used in group dynamics training courses might be a partial solution to the problem.

Another distinguished structuralist methodologist of the period, Prator (1970: 3-6), saw pattern practice and communication as antithetical to a considerable degree, since "true communication implies the absence of external controls." For him, communicative classroom activities would be "those that allow the student himself to find the words and structures he uses." He suggested a classification of classroom activities along a manipulation-communication scale involving four major groups:

a) completely manipulative (such as a drill in which students merely repeat sentences after the teacher);

b) predominantly manipulative (such as a substitution drill cued visually, by means of a series of pictures);

c) predominantly communicative (such as answers to questions about a text when the student cannot use the exact words of the text);

d) completely communicative (such as a free conversation among the members of a class).

Pure manipulation and pure communication would be the exception rather than the rule, for, according to Prator, "most activities are mixtures of communication and manipulation in various proportions." A gradual progression from manipulation to communication should characterize not only the whole movement from elementary to advanced English courses, but also each cycle of activities in a typical class.

The limitations of structural drills were also acknowledged by Garner & Schutz (1970:2-6), who recognize that pattern practice of the type used in the audiolingual approach would not enable the student to communicate effectively in real-life situations. They advocated a method that would "adequately bridge the gap between drill situations in the classroom and actual communication situations outside the classroom." Like most other specialists at the time, Garner and Schutz assumed that language teaching should involve a manipulation phase and a communication phase. The former would consist "largely of conventional pattern drills, with the focus on the form of the structural features being learned;" the latter would shift attention to the context, or meaning of the language, being "primarily concerned with developing the ability of the student to use the structural feature or features introduced in the manipulation phase." Some of the comments made by the writers

reveal a clear understanding of fundamental aspects of the use of language as a system of communication, since they point out that communication involves a "transfer of content" and that the process of language learning should "culminate in the student's ability to communicate in given socio-linguistic situations in an appropriate manner and with acceptable competence." At the same time, however, they show their adherence to the structural approach and to behaviourist learning theory, for they insist on special attention to structural features even while the focus is on communication, and the procedure suggested to develop the ability to communicate is not free from external controls but simply a technique that allows for much more controlled responses on the part of the student than the cue-response manipulation-phase drills."

Rivers (1970:9-10) distinguished two levels of language behaviour, the manipulative and the expressive, claiming that the former involved "the manipulation of language elements that occur in fixed relationships in clearly defined closed systems," whereas the latter would be concerned with "the expression of personal meaning," involving a complex system with "infinite possibilities of expression." In view of the difference between these two levels, foreign language teaching should take different forms, so as to provide both for the training in habit formation necessary to master the manipulative level and for the understanding and use of the system represented by the expressive level. The two levels would be in a hierarchical relationship, since language use at the second level would require "sufficient knowledge of the total possibilities of the language to be able to make higher-level choices, as well as skill in the manipulation of numerous lower-level elements in accordance with the higher-level decision." A number of elements placed by the writer at the higher level - "the type of message to be conveyed, the situation in which the utterance takes place, the relationship between speaker and hearer or hearers, and the degree of intensity with which the message is conveyed" - are now treated as part of the pragmatic component of a linguistic description. Moreover, she insists that methodologists should be more concerned with "effective ways of inducing language behavior at the second level," instead of concentrating their attention on the development of "techniques for the lower-level manipulative operations." However, she makes no specific proposals in this respect.

The authors that have been mentioned so far considered the relation between the ability to use the linguistic system and the ability to communicate from the standpoint of the audiolingual approach. In the structural-situational approach, the answer to the problem was summarized by the British methodologist W.R. Lee (1969:1) in the following remarks:

> Ability to make 'well-formed sentences' is one thing; ability to use these, and perhaps sentences less well-formed, for communication is another thing. The necessity of repetition arises out of the need to feel at ease kinaesthetically, auditorily, and visually with the patterns of the

language being acquired, but also with the matching of these patterns to those of the situations of use.

The various proposals that have just been summarized reflect a common belief that the limitations of pattern practice could be remedied by some kind of communication practice based on drills of a different type. In such communication practice, drills consisting of purely mechanical operations of repetition, substitution, etc., would be replaced by exercises related to the students' interests and involving the use of forms that would sound natural in real-life situations. These personalized and situationalized drills would be essentially of two types: situational drills (or situation drills) and dialogue frames (or pattern dialogues).

A situational drill is defined by Hubbard et alii (1983:331) as one "in which the cue is a situation to which the student must respond." For Garner & Schutz (1970:3-4), it is a technique designed "to introduce a new structure in a relevant socio-linguistic context." The writers point out that this type of drills is essentially of a manipulative nature, with a focus on form, though it involves a context factor as well.

Dialogue frames take the form of short conversations on a predetermined model, containing both fixed and variable parts. The students replace the items corresponding to the variable parts, fitting their own ideas into the structural framework provided. These exercises are a form of controlled practice, like the similar type sometimes called mini-dialogue drill (cf. Hubbard et alli, 1983:23, 118) or substitution dialogue (cf. Haycraft, 1978:39), in which all the alternatives to be used in the variable parts are provided. [4]

The search for drills suitable for communication practice led to a general classification of drills as mechanical, meaningful, realistic, and communicative (also called communication drills), though these terms are not always used in the same way.

A mechanical drill is "one where there is complete control over the student's response, and where comprehension is not required in order to produce a correct response" (Richards et alii, 1985:172).

In a meaningful drill there is still control over the response, but the student has to understand at least part of the sentence in order to be able to respond.

A realistic drill is defined by Hubbard et alii (1983:331) as one "which is disguised to resemble a natural conversational exchange." In other words, in addition to being meaningful - in the sense of requiring the student to understand what is being said - a realistic drill involves the use of a cue and a response which might occur naturally together in actual communication. An example would be the following model conversation for practising reflexives:

> Cue: Peter's just fallen down the stairs.
> Response: Oh dear! Has he hurt himself?
>   (Hubbard et alii, 1983:25)

Palmer (1971:15-10), made a general distinction between pattern-practice drills and communication-practice drills, defining the latter as exercises in which "the student finds pleasure in producing a response that is not only linguistically acceptable but which also conveys information personally relevant to himself and other people." A similar distinction is made by Cosgrave (1971:7), who uses the term communication drills to refer to "exercises designed to permit the class members to express their own interests an ideas."

The notion of communication drills in the context of the structural approach was refined by Paulston (1971 - in Croft, 1980:300-316), who called them communicative drills, distinguishing them from two other types of drills - mechanical and meaningful - on the basis of the four following criteria:

- a) expected terminal behaviour;
- b) degree of control;
- c) the type of learning process involved;
- d) criteria for selecting response.

For her, a communicative drill would be aimed at the production of normal speech for communication (with the free transfer of patterns to appropriate situations), would be marked by some control of patterns but no control of lexical items or possibility of anticipation of the answer, would involve problem solving (analysis) and would require the student to provide new information about the real world. Emphasizing the importance of the last of these criteria, the writer points out that a question-and-answer exercise in which the student says "My shirt is red" is an example of a meaningful drill, since that information is supplied by the situation, and everybody can see it, whereas in a classroom situation in which the student says "I have three sisters," we have an example of a communicative drill. Interestingly enough, this criterion is equivalent to the principle of the information gap, which has come to play such an important part in communicative language teaching. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of communicative drill under consideration fails to satisfy other criteria of "communicativeness" set up more recently.

In the model proposed by Garner & Schutz (1970:3-6), the communication phase of language teaching would be marked by the use of narrative activity, a technique beginning with questions and answers and developing gradually into "rather free conversation." Essentially, the technique would consist in the use of a narrative in which the structures taught in the manipulation phase would be used as often as possible and, at the same time, the student would be acquainted with certain ideas, values, and concepts of American culture. In this way, the student would

"communicative, using the structures in culturally oriented discussion."

3. THE ROLE OF DRILLS IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

3.1 Theoretical background

As a result of the communicative movement, there was a shift of focus in language teaching from mastery of language structure to the development of the ability to use language as discourse. Quite naturally, this led to a reexamination of the form and function of both controlled practice and free practice, in terms of a basic distinction between activities intended to promote accuracy in language production and activities designed to develop fluency in language use.

It is generally recognized that both communicative and non-communicative activities have a place in the EFL classroom and that an adequate balance of the two types of activities is essential for the success of a language teaching programme (cf., for example, Littlewood, 1981:85-89; Harmer, 1982:168; Byrne (1983:78).[5] Littlewood calls the non-communicative activities 'pre-communicative activities' and defines them as those intended to "equip the learner with some of the skills required for communication, without actually requiring him to perform communicative acts." The writer distinguishes two categories of pre-communicative activities: structural activities (such as mechanical drills) and quasi-communicative activities (intended to create links between the language forms being practised and their potencial functional meanings).

A distinction between two basic types of classroom activities in a communicative methodology is also made by Abbs & Freebairn (1983:IV), who define pre-communicative activities as those involving the presentation of "language in contexts through realistic dialogues, controlled practice in model utterances followed by further practice in controlled contexts using simultaneous pair-work exchanges." The scheme set up by the writers (1984:VIII) comprises a controlled practice stage, "where the emphasis is on correct production," and a free stage, "where the emphasis is more on successful communication." Each teaching unit contains sets of exercises for practising language functions and oral exercises intended to "provide systematic practice of the functional, structural, lexical and intonational features which are integral to the unit." The oral exercises, designed to be used in the language laboratory or in the classroom, include even purely mechanical drills in the form of choral and individual repetition. Unlike the drills of structural language teaching, however, they are not intended for practice of language forms as such but rather as the exponents of notions or communicative functions, a point which was emphasized by Abbs et alii, in a previous book (1975:V), in the following explanation:

The aim of the oral exercises, while giving the student practice in manipulating the structures, is to make him aware of their function in a broader context, so that he will know not only how to use them but when to use them.

In an analysis of the process of teaching speaking on a communicative basis, Scott (1981:72, 75) asserted that such a process would involve a practice phase, consisting in drilling the relevant language items. For such practice, however, pattern drilling would often not be useful, since "communicative teaching aims to build up sets of language items for a given function, not formal paradigms per se." Moreover, there would be an essential difference between the type of practice used in structural teaching and that adopted in communicative teaching, because only the latter would involve some amount of information gap and contain an element of feedback. It is worth noting, however, that the two types of practice would be very similar in other respects, since, as pointed out by Scott, the procedure used in a communicative methodology

may start with choral repetition by the students of the language presented and then move into individual responses directed by the teacher. The teacher can ask students to repeat a line and give the answer himself. He can then ask individual students to ask the question and prompt individual answers. When he is sure that students are competent (not necessarily perfect) in handling the language, he can put the students into pairs and ask them to practise the dialogues with each member of the pair taking it in turns to perform the two roles and make appropriate substitutions.

In a paper also conerned with the teaching of speaking, Byrne (1983:76) considers the relation between controlled practice and free practice in terms of a distinction between activities designed to promote accuracy (accuracy-oriented activities) and activities intended to develop fluency (fluency-oriented activities). The former would consist of drills and exercises involving the whole class (whole class accuracy-oriented activities) and pairwork based on the use of conversatinal models (pairwork accuracy-oriented activities). The simulated conversations of students working in pairs would take the form of gapped mini-dialogues (in which the students work with a ready-made model, supplying lines or words) or of mapped mini-dialogues (in which students clothe functional outlines in appropriate language).

The writers that have just been mentioned share a conviction that drills are compatible with a communicative methodology and remain an essential part of language teaching.[6] The inclusion of drills in a communicative methodology was also defended by Morrow (1981:61), who expressed the view that "very mundane and prosaic activities such as pattern drilling can be given a communicative dimension if

teachers and students ask themselves why they are doing them and are able to relate them to the performance of some communicative task." Going even further, Johnson (1982:156-162) suggested a concept of <u>communicative drills</u> as part of a "communicative structural" approach (cf. p. 114, note 8). According to the writer, there is no incompatibility between controlled practice or "drilling" and "communicative" language practice, and by following quite simple procedures, it is possible to change traditional drills into more communicative ones. Such communicative drills would have the following features:

> a) they would involve an information gap;
> b) the student would be required to "utilize" information given in the course of the exercise;
> c) the language generated by the drill would be natural to the practice situation and likely to be useful to the student outside the classroom.

The notion of communicative drill has gained some currency but was rejected by Harmer (1982:167), who saw it as a contradiction in terms in the light of a clear distinction between communicative and non-communicative classroom activities. Suggesting such a distinction on the basis of six criteria, Harmer characterized a communicative activity as one marked by a communicative purpose, a desire to communicate, a focus on content, the use of a variety of language (not just one specific form) by the students, the absence of teacher intervention, and the absence of materials control.[7] These six characteristics would apply at one end of a continuum, at the other end of which would lie ´non-communicative´ activities. Different types of drills would have different degrees of ´communicativeness´ in terms of this continuum, but, according to Harmer, no drill may be described as a genuinely communicative activity in the sense of meeting all the six criteria under consideration.

The reservations that have just been mentioned about the dregree of ´communicativeness´ involved in most of the exercises commonly used in the communicative approach should not be interpreted as a reaction against the use of drills, since Harmer himself, as pointed out at the beginning of this section, regards non-communicative activities as an essential part of language teaching. Moreover, the importance of drills has recently been reasserted by Winddowson (1984:219) in a note of warning about the risks of "a too exclusive concern for presenting language <u>as</u> communication." Pointing out that such an attitude "could lead to the neglect of procedures which contribute to the teaching of language <u>for</u> communication," the writer stresses the need to see the natural use of language in terms of both the higher level skills and the lower level skills it involves. The latter, represented by all the distinctions described in linguistics at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels of organizations, are viewed by Widdowson

essentially in the way they were interpreted in behaviourist learning theory, as shown by the following comments:

> The lower level skills have to remain in the background, utilized without conscious awareness, and so they have to become habitual. Since they normally operate at a subsconscious level they would not normally have an executive role to play in actual communication... [which would be busy with notions and functions]. They are crucial <u>for</u> communication however, and their function <u>for</u> communication depends on their automation, which is where repetitive drills come in. Drills which provide repetitive practice for sound discrimination or for the absorption of sentence patterns into habitual behaviour do not of their very nature deal with authentic language <u>as</u> communication. But they could provide an indispensable service in developing language <u>for</u> communication.

3.2 <u>A radical departure from former practice or simply an adaptation of old tools to new purposes</u>?

It is often assumed that, apart from the case of mechanical drills like choral or individual repetition, the exercises used for controlled practice in a communicative methodology are radically different from those used in structural language teaching, in view of the presence, in the former, of such elements as an information gap and feedback. It has also been claimed that the communicative approach has introduced a new type of contextualization in language teaching, since, in the words of Scott (1981:74),

> whatever type of contextualization is used in a structural approach, ... the concern is to convey the ideational content of the form, not its use. To contextualise communicatively, however, you have to do more than convey this level of meaning. Indeed, from a communicative point of view, an item only takes on meaning as a result of the total context in which it is used and an item without context in this sense cannot properly be said to have meaning at all. It must therefore be made clear to the students, as a general observation about how language works, that what you say takes on its meaning as a result of the context, where context is taken to mean a constellation of factors, such as who the speakers are, their relationship to one another, what they are trying to do, what has just been said, where they are, and so on, in addition to the ideational content of what they are saying.

It is open to question, however, whether the innovations brought about by the communicative movement should be interpreted as radical departures from the communication practice" developed in structural language teaching or as revision and extension of that practice, in the light of a reanalysis of language as a system of communication. It may well be the case that the main difference lies in a general tendency towards a large-scale use of drills and exercises "dressed up in communicative clothing,"[8] which reminds us of a similar trend, at a time when the structural approach was still in vogue, towards the use of response drills "masqueraded forth as communication."[9] The arguments in support of such an interpretation are very strong indeed, since:

a) as shown by Widdowson (1979:245-254), there is no reason to believe that language is automatically taught as communication by defining the context of teaching in terms of concepts and communicative functions instead of making use of an inventory of lexical and grammatical items;

b) as suggested by Byrne (1983:76), the mini-dialogues used in pairwork accuracy-oriented activities, though involving face-to-face communication and providing useful samples of conversational language, practise <u>speaking</u> rather than <u>talk</u>;[10]

c) as pointed out by Harmer (1982:164), controlled information gap exercises cannot be regarded as a genuinely communicative activity;

d) as recognized by Morrow (1981:61), even role-play "can become merely empty mouthing" if not properly conducted, i.e., if not seen "as contributing to the performance of some real and specific task in the foreign language."

Moreover, an examination of a representative sample of the exercises intended for controlled practice in <u>Strategies</u> (by Abbs & Freebairn) and <u>Spectrum</u> (by Constinett et alii) - two series of books in which the communicative approach is used - suggests that the various forms of guided practice provided by the writers are essentially improved versions of the different types of mechanical, meaningful, realistic and communicative drills used in the structural approach.

Indeed, in <u>Building Strategies</u>, Students' Book, p. 11, for instance, there is an exercise intended for practice of the communicative function of giving reasons. Two model exchanges are provided, viz.

A: Why do you live in Bristol?
B: Because I like living in Bristol.
A: Why do you always get up early?
B: Because I like getting up early.

and four similar questions have to be answered on the same model. Apart from the use of a final comment – <u>Well, it seems you and I are different, that's all</u> (Teacher's

Book, p. 8) - to round off the "dialogue", the exercise consists of the repetition of a single grammatical pattern throughout, with a slight adaptation of the vocabulary contained in the questions. It is, therefore, an example of a purely mechanical drill.
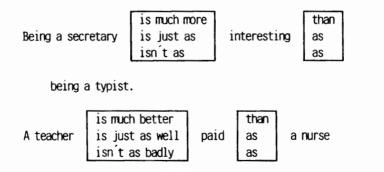
Two other exercises of a purely mechanical nature are to be found on p. 34 of the same book. They are intended for practising the use of <u>not any</u> and <u>no</u> with plural count nouns. In the first, under the heading <u>Facilities</u>, the student has to imagine he/she is in Sutton listening to a number of statements of the type <u>I´m looking for a hairdresser´s/cinema/library</u>, etc. Every time the student has to respond <u>Well, there aren´t any hairdressers´/cinemas/libraries here</u>. In the second exercise, described as Extra Work, the student has to re-express the responses, using <u>no</u> instead of <u>not any</u>, like this: <u>Well, there are no hairdressers´ here</u>. To make the first exchange more realistic, the first speaker says at the end: <u>Really! What sort of place is this</u>? (Teacher´s Book, p.32). Like the exercise about giving reasons, however, the two under consideration are simply substitution drills dressed up in communicative clothing.

In Exercise 5 of <u>Building Strategies</u> (Students´ Book, p.27) the student has to answer questions about his/her daily activities, like this:

> What time did you get up this morning?
> I got up at (6.30).
> What time did you go to bed last night?
> I went to bed at (11 o´clock).

This exercise is an example of a personalized drill, but the same grammatical pattern ($\underline{I}$ + verb in the past tense + <u>at</u> + indication of time) is used in all the answers, so that it is a form of repetitive practice.

On p.25 of <u>Developing Strategies</u> (<u>Strategies 3</u>, Students´ Book), several exercises are provided for practice of the notion of comparison. In the first exercise, statements about different ways of comparing features of jobs are presented in a number of tables, like this:

Being a secretary	is much more is just as isn´t as	interesting	than as as

being a typist.

A teacher	is much better is just as well isn´t as badly	paid	than as as	a nurse

Then the student is asked to make as many statements as he/she can from the tables, saying only what he/she thinks is true and referring to different jobs optionally. The exercise is a drill of the type called <u>substitution table</u> in the structural approach.

The use of <u>have got</u> in interrogative and negative sentences is practised in two exercises on p. 55 of <u>Building Strategies 2</u>, Students´ Book. The first, under the heading <u>Confirm that you´ve got things</u>, consists of a number of questions and answers with the formulas <u>Have you got any</u> (+ mass noun or plural count noun) and <u>Oh, yes, lots if</u> ..., like this:

> Have you got any eggs?
> Oh, yes, lots of eggs.
> Have you got any butter?
> Oh, yes, lots of butter.

In the second, in answer to questions of the type <u>What about...?</u>, the student has to say <u>Well, there´s/there are some...</u>, <u>but we haven´t got any...</u>, like this:

> What about milk and eggs?
> Well, there´s some milk, but we haven´t got any eggs.

In both cases the exchange ends with a statement intended to make it sound more realistic - <u>Well, then let´s make a potato omelette with grated cheese</u> in the first exercise and <u>In that case, we´d better go and do some shopping. Come on.</u> in the second - but again we have essentially the same type of question-and-answer drill as that used in the structural approach.

In <u>Spectrum 2</u>, p. 40, the authors present the following table of negative imperatives.

| Don´t | forget worry | to buy stamps. about it. |
| | make go | a left turn. out of your way. |

The students have to complete four conversational exchanges using sentences from the table, like this:

1. A: Oh, no! I forgot to call Harry.
   B: <u>Don´t worry about it</u>. I´m going to see him later anyway.

2. A: I´ll turn left at the next corner.

Greengrocer's: lettuce, beans, onions, oranges
Sweetshop:
Newsagent's:
Chemist's:

Then, he/she asks another student for the things he/she wants, as part of the following exchange:

A: I'm going to the greengrocer's. Do you want anything?
B: Oh, yes. Could you get me some beans, some onions and a lettuce, please? And could you get me some oranges as well?

The first of the exercises under consideration is a substitution dialogue in which the student merely repeats a number of model sentences, inserting a number of nouns in appropriate places; in the second the student has to make a list of things sold in different types of shops, but the exchange is also based on a conversational model.

Sets 2 and 3 of Unit 8 of Building Strategies (pp. 60-61 of the Students' Book) deal with language used to invite, accept invitations, refuse invitations, and make excuses. The following model is provided for invitations and acceptances:

Would you like to come to our party?
Yes, I'd love to.
That would be lovely. Thank you.
Thank you. I'd like to come very much.

Working in pairs, the students go through a list of invitations and practise inviting and accepting invitations. Models are also provided for what to say when refusing invitations and making excuses:

A: Would you like to come for a meal this evening?
B: Thanks very much. I'd love to, but I'm afraid I ought to do my homework.
A: Would you like to come to a party?
B: That's very kind of you, but I'm afraid I ought to do my washing.

Working in pairs, the students go through four lists of excuses, thus getting a lot of practice in refusing invitations politely. The language of the two exercises is appropriate, and it is certainly important for students of English to know how to perform the communicative acts dealt with in the unit. The simulated conversations are essentially of the nature of drills, however, since the students have to use a number of formulas and to follow a prescribed course of action in doing the

exercises.

In <u>Spectrum 2</u>, p. 7, there is an example of the type of roleplaying activity called <u>Your Turn</u> in the book. A brief description of the activity is given, followed by a detailed specification of all the steps of the conversation:

Archie Baxter is a new mechanic at Steve's repair shop. He introduces himself to Margaret Morelli, another mechanic, and they talk about where they live and about sports. Act out the conversation.

Archie	Margaret
Says hi and asks if she's Margaret Morelli	Says she is and asks his name.
Tells her his name.	Says it's nice to meet him. Says to call her Maggie.
Says it's nice to meet her.	Asks where he lives.
Says he lives on Clifford Street, across from the park.	Says she lives near the park, too. Says she and her husband play tennis there. Asks if he plays any sports.
Says he doesn't, but watches hockey and basketball on TV	

In comparison with the other types of exercises that been considered, this one demands a lot more from the two students who act out the conversation, but the fact remains that everything they have to say is modelled on sentences occurring in previous sections of the unit, and the activity involved is clearly accuracy work, or, more specifically, an example of a "mapped mini-dialogue," to use Byrne's term, since the students are "clothing functional outlines in appropriate language."

The simulated conversations presented in <u>Strategies</u> and <u>Spectrum</u> are certainly more stimulating than those to be found in most books following a structural approach, but they are similarly based on conversacional models or model exchanges. Again, the gapped and mapped mini-dialogues used in the series of books resemble the mini-dialogue drills and pattern dialogues of the structural era, in spite of the greater degree of authenticity of the language in which they are clothed. Even the open oral exercises and the open dialogues provided in <u>Strategies</u> are marked by a degree of control that is characteristic of drills. Indeed, as explained by ABBS & Freebairn (1984:XI), the open oral exercises, which are intended to "encourage students to answer as they wish," are done in pairs after the students have listened to a model exchange and been given an idea of "the sort of responses that are acceptable." Again, the open dialogues are intended to "bring together a range of responses," but in each case the students' work is preceded by "an example by the teacher of acceptable responses."

4. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The conclusions that may be drawn from the considerations made in the course of this paper may be summarized in the following points:

1. As a result of the communicative movement, there is now a general tendency to avoid purely mechanical drills, though choral and individual repetition is retained in some versions of communicative language teaching.

2. There is also a general tendency to practise grammatical forms as the exponents of notions and communicative functions and not to use drills specifically intended to teach grammar points (such as different constructions with <u>both</u> and <u>all</u>, the use of the inflected genitive and that of the periphrastic genitive, and the implications of the verb forms <u>will</u> + infinitive and <u>be going to</u> + infinitive when used to denote intention). In view of this change, we may say that <u>structural practice</u> has generally given way to <u>functional practice</u>.

3. Controlled practice continues to consist essentially of patterned responses in a situational setting, in the form of controlled information gap exercises, controlled response drills and controlled dialogues (whether gapped or mapped). Such exercises are basically a continuation of the realistic and meaningful drills of the structural era, though the focus of attention is to longer the production of correct sentences.

4. As shown in the table below, the current debate on the form and function of controlled practice and its relation to free practice parallels, in a number of respects, the discussion of similar issues in the period when the structural approach was in vogue.

STRUCTURAL APPROACH	COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH
Manipulation vs. communication Habituation vs. communication	Accuracy vs. fluency
Pattern practice/structural practice vs. communication practice	Communicative vs. non-communica- tive activities Pre-communicative activities vs. communicative activities
Pattern-practice drills vs. communication-practice drills	Accuracy-oriented activities vs. fluency-oriented activities
Manipulation-communication scale (Prator, 1970)	Communicative-noncommunicative continuum (Harmer, 1982)
Higher-level decisions and the production of interdependendt lower-level elements (Rivers, 1970)	Higher-level skills and lower- level skills (Widdowson, 1984)
Comunication drills (Cosgrave, 1971) Communicative drills (Paulston, 1971)	Communicative drills (Johnson 1982)
Structural dialogues, mini- dialogue drills/substitu- tion dialogues, dialogue frames/pattern dialogues	Functional dialogues, gapped and mapped mini-dialogues

      5. The fact that most of the exercises used for controlled practice in the communicative approach are actually drills "dressed up in communicative clothing" and the express recognition of drills as part of a communicative methodology, especially in terms of the justification proposed by Widdowson (1984), suggest that, contrary to what might have been expected, there has been a revival of drills in present-day language teaching.

NOTES

1. As explained by Littlewood (appud Edge, 1986: 171), a creative construction model
   is based on the scheme INPUT FROM EXPOSURE —> INTERNAL PROCESSING —> SYTEM
   CONSTRUCTED BY LEARNERS —> SPONTANEOUS UTTERANCES, whereas a skill learning
   model (which underlies most teaching) follows the schema INPUT FROM INSTRUCTION
   — PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY —> SYSTEM ASSIMILATED BY LEARNERS —> SPONTANEOUS
   UTTERANCES. The input in the latter model "includes the presentation of controlled
   samples of the language, together with guidance as to the system which underlies
   them." Johnson (1982: 131) mentions a similar distinction (proposed by Breen,
   Candlin, and Waters) between a product approach "in which aspects of the language
   are itemised in the syllabus an presented discretely," and a process approach, in
   which prior selection and organization are abandoned and "communicative abilities
   are developed through the learning process."

2. The term structural language teaching is used here to refer to various
   methodologies based on the assumption that learning a language is a process
   consisting in mastering a certain grammatical system and acquiring an adequate
   vocabulary. It thus covers the direct method, the audiolingual approach and the
   structural-situational approach, in spite of the differences between these three
   methodologies in several respects.

3. According to Johnson (1982: 162), the central characteristic of a drill is that it
   "involves repetition of a restricted area of the language system."

4. The term mini-dialogue frameworks is used by Grellet et alii (1982: 28) to refer
   to exercises in which all the alternatives are provides.

5. Byrne asserts that "accuracy activities alone (such as simulated conversations or
   exercises´) will never lead to fluency, while fluency activities by themselves
   cannot, in the short term, in average classroom conditions, give the learners the
   mastery of form which they need for effective communication."

6. Brumfit (1980: 121), however, sees drills as an optional part of the post-
   communicative model of foreign language teaching. The author summarizes the
   traditional model in the formula PRESENT —> DRILL —> PRACTICE IN CONTEXT and
   the post-communicative model in the formula COMMUNICATE AS FAR AS POSSIBLE WITH
   ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES —> PRESENT LANGUAGE ITEMS SHOWN TO BE NECESSARY TO
   ACHIEVE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION —> DRILL IF NECESSARY.

7. Some definitions of a less specific nature have been proposed, a fact which
   accounts for a great deal of confusion in the discussion of the question. Thus,

for instance, Abbs & Freebairn (1983: IV) define communicative activities as those giving the learner "a purpose for relating the language in focus to personal situations, experience and knowledge of the world" and Littlewood (1981: 86) as those in which "the learner is engaged in practising the total skill of communication" and "has to integrate his pre-communicative knowledge and skills, in order to use them for the communication of meanings." Cf. also Prator´s definition mentioned in section 2.

8. Byrne (1983: 76) points out that many accuracy-oriented activities used at present are of this type.

9. Cf. also Harmer (1982: 165), who points out that "a controlled dialogue involving the functions of asking for and giving opinions, for exemple, can hardly be called communicative if students are only asked to apply an identical formula to different information."

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