

REVIEW ESSAY

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Teaching Language As Communication. H.G. Widdowson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. xi + 168 pp.

The past decade has witnessed a revolutionary shift of emphasis in language teaching from a predominantly “structural” approach emphasizing grammatical correctness to a more “communicative” one emphasizing the appropriate *use* of language. H.G. Widdowson has played a pioneering role in this movement, particularly in his theoretical and pedagogical contributions to the rapidly growing field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In *Teaching Language as Communication*, he provides for the first time a comprehensive description of his version of the communicative approach. His purpose in doing so, he states, is not to argue for a “new ‘communicative’ orthodoxy in language teaching” but rather to make “an appeal for critical investigation into the bases of a belief and its practical implications.” (p. x) *Teaching Language As Communication* should be of interest to anyone engaged in language teaching today and, indeed, should be required reading for anyone teaching ESP. In what follows, I will (1) provide a critical summary of the book, arguing that it is strong in theory but weak in pedagogical implementation, and (2) offer some suggestions for pedagogical alternatives.

Summary

The book is divided into two parts, the first being more theoretical, the second more pedagogical. The main thrust of the first part is to draw a clear distinction between what Widdowson calls “linguistic skills” and “communicative abilities.” He defines the former as being those activities which operate only on “what is verbally manifested” and which require only a knowledge of correct grammatical usage. Communicative abilities, by contrast, “operate on everything that is communicative in the discourse as a whole,” (p. 73) including not just purely linguistic elements but also—and more importantly—non-

¹ I wish to thank John Lepp and Leslie Olsen for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

verbal elements, illocutionary acts, rhetorical conventions, and other pragmatic factors. They consist of those abilities which are needed for genuine communicative purposes and which are therefore engaged in the *use* of language. Communicative abilities embrace linguistic skills, but not vice versa.²

Pedagogical practices under the structural approach have typically sought to develop the student's linguistic skills by focusing his or her attention on isolated sentences. Such practices have long been under attack, and Widdowson wastes no opportunity to add his own criticisms. He points out that even when units larger than the sentence are considered, the structuralist treats them only as linguistic texts, i.e., interlocking pairs of sentences held together by various cohesive devices. But linguistic texts, he argues, are often not good examples of *discourse*. Genuine discourse is created not by cohesion but by *coherence*, that is, by "the relationship between illocutionary acts." (p. 31) For example, the following interchange is devoid of linguistic cohesiveness and yet can still be given a coherent interpretation:

- A. That's the telephone.
- B. I'm in the bath.
- A. O.K.

As Widdowson points out, we can easily imagine a situation in which A's first remark is construed as a request for B to answer the phone, B's remark as an excuse for not complying with the request, and A's second remark as an acceptance of B's excuse. This interpretation is made possible not by totting up the semantic content of these remarks but by pragmatically analyzing their illocutionary force. Similar examples lead Widdowson to conclude, rightly, that if we want our students to be able to use the language for communicative purposes, then we must teach them how to recognize and create coherence, i.e., how to interpret discourse. In short, we must teach them not just linguistic skills but communicative abilities as well.

This raises the crucial question, of course, of exactly how best to do this. Widdowson's response to this question—which constitutes the principal thesis

² Chapter 3 contains a rather elaborate taxonomy which can be summarized as follows: The linguistic skills consist of "speaking," "hearing," "composing," and "comprehending." The communicative abilities consists of "saying," "listening," "writing," and "reading." The communicative abilities can be used for either "reciprocal" or "nonreciprocal" activity, depending on whether or not an overt exchange of communication takes place. The reciprocal use of saying and listening is called "talking," and the reciprocal use of writing and reading is called "corresponding"; the nonreciprocal use of any of the communicative abilities is called "interpreting." This latter skill is the single most important one for the communicative approach. As Widdowson says, "Interpreting is represented here as the highest level skill: it is the ability to process language as communication and it underlies all language use. You cannot talk or correspond without interpreting but you can interpret without talking or corresponding . . ." (p. 66)

of his book, it seems to me³—is as follows:

I would argue . . . that a foreign language can be associated with those areas of use which are represented by the other subjects on the school curriculum and that this not only helps to ensure the link with reality and the pupils' own experience but also provides us with the most certain means we have of teaching the language as communication, as use, rather than simply as usage. (p. 16)

His argument is based on the following line of reasoning: (1) Communicative abilities develop out of a combination of linguistic skills and pragmatic skills (interpretive strategies relating to discourse conventions, nonverbal elements, etc.). (2) By the time most students begin to study a foreign language, they have already developed, or are developing, communicative abilities in their native language, including communicative abilities associated with specific school subjects. (3) Linguistic skills are language-specific, but pragmatic skills are not. (4) Thus the pragmatic skills necessary for developing communicative abilities in the foreign language—or those pragmatic skills associated with certain school subjects, at least—*are already available to the learner*. (5) Therefore, if the student is continuing his or her study of those same subjects while transferring from the native language to the foreign language, we need only associate the teaching of the foreign language with the teaching of those school subjects in order to tap those pragmatic skills. “We thereby represent (without misrepresenting) foreign language learning not as the acquisition of abilities which are new but as the transference of the abilities that have already been acquired into a different means of expression.” (p. 74)

We can illustrate this process of foreign language learning with the following diagram:⁴

³ That this is Widdowson's principal thesis (as distinct from principal *purpose*) seems evident from the fact that he concludes each of the three “theory” chapters with a reiteration of this point and then devotes most of the remaining three chapters to a description and discussion of procedures for implementing it pedagogically. This is not to say, however, that it is original with this book. Instead, Widdowson has been promoting this idea since at least the late 1960's (see, for instance, Widdowson 1968).

⁴ Widdowson's own description of the process (p. 74) unfortunately confounds communicative abilities and pragmatic skills. For example, he makes statements like “What still has to be done is to associate these communicative abilities, previously related to linguistic skills operating on their own language” and “We need to remove these [communicative—TNH] abilities from a dependence on linguistic skills in the mother tongue and associate them with linguistic skills in the foreign language.” Such statements, it seems to me, imply that communicative abilities and linguistic skills are mutually independent, contrary to Widdowson's earlier comment that “communicative abilities *embrace* linguistic skills.” (p. 67) [emphasis mine—TNH]

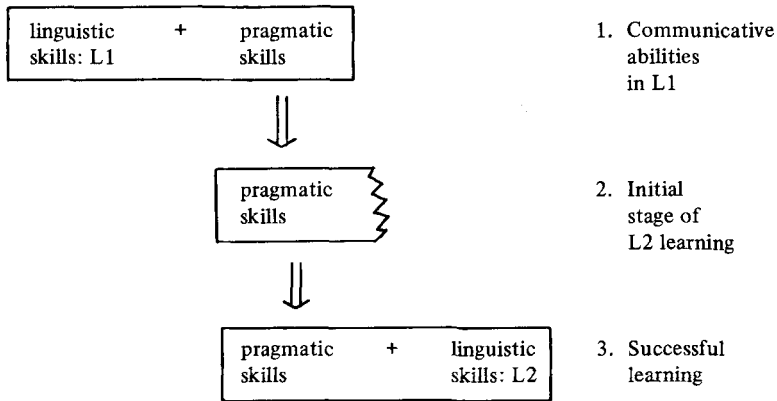


Figure 1. The process of communicative language learning according to Teaching Language as Communication

At stage 1, before commencing the study of the foreign language, the student has already learned to use his or her native-speaker linguistic skills in conjunction with various pragmatic skills (e.g., interpreting illocutionary acts, integrating nonverbal elements, utilizing rhetorical conventions, etc.) so as to manifest such communicative abilities as reading, writing, and conversing. At stage 2, the student is beginning to study the foreign language. Even if the student has not yet developed any L2 linguistic skills, he or she will nonetheless have a head start toward developing L2 communicative abilities by virtue of already possessing the necessary, cross-linguistic pragmatic skills. At stage 3, the student has successfully acquired L2 linguistic skills and can utilize them together with the above-mentioned pragmatic skills to engage in reading, writing, conversing, and other communicative activities in the foreign language.

The key to this approach, of course, lies in Widdowson's assumption that the necessary pragmatic skills for study in a particular subject (physics, say) are specific to the subject and not to the language. In other words, the pragmatic skills needed to study physics are assumed to be basically the same regardless of whether it is being studied in English or in Farsi or in any other language.

Given this assumption (which seems to me reasonable, though one should not overlook the role played by educational systems in the development or nondevelopment of pragmatic skills), there are at least three major benefits to be gained from linking language learning to other subjects in the curriculum. First, as emphasized above, the teacher can draw on pragmatic skills which the learner has already developed or is in the process of developing rather than having to help the learner develop these skills from scratch, thus saving considerable time and money. Second, instead of teaching general L2 linguistic skills, the teacher can concentrate on those linguistic skills which are most important vis-a-vis the learner's pragmatic skills; this too should result in more efficient teaching and learning. Finally, the obvious effort by the teacher to tailor instruction to the learner's primary interests should result in greater motivation on the part of the learner, this in turn leading to better learning. As one who has been following this approach in ESP classes for a number of years, I find that these benefits do indeed accrue.

Of course, a sound theoretical framework is one thing, the proper implementation of it quite another. In order to be truly effective, the paradigm illustrated in Figure 1 must be followed faithfully. In particular, each step of the learning process must make genuine demands on the one component that holds everything together: the pragmatic skills. Whenever the pragmatic skills are not brought into play, the learning ceases to be of a communicative kind and becomes instead a version of traditional structuralism (and often a poor version at that). To prevent such a degradation from occurring, Widdowson recommends the adoption of three pedagogic principles: "rational appeal," "integration," and "control." The first of these refers to the need to associate foreign language learning with areas of nonlinguistic knowledge "so that the learner knows what he is doing and why he is doing it . . . What we are aiming to do is to make the learner conceive of the foreign language in the same way as he conceives of his own language and to use it in the same way as communicative activity." (p. 159) The principle of integration refers to the need to teach linguistic skills as they relate to pragmatic skills, not in isolation, as well as the need to represent various language activities (reading, writing, composing, speaking, etc.) as all being aspects of a single underlying activity: interpreting. The principle of control reflects Widdowson's concern that teaching materials be neither communicatively irrelevant nor linguistically too difficult. That is, the subject matter must engage the learner's interest without introducing linguistic complexity exceeding the learner's capacities.

Each of these principles, it seems to me, is well-founded. Unfortunately,

however—and herein lies the major shortcoming of the book, in my view—the sample exercises intended to illustrate them (which take up most of the second half of the book) generally fail to achieve that purpose. Most of these exercises have been drawn from the well-known *English in Focus* series, of which Widdowson is coeditor. Having tried a number of exercises from this series on my own first-year undergraduate students, with virtually no success, I cannot be persuaded that exercises of this type manifest any of the pedagogic principles described above, except perhaps for adolescents.⁵ As has previously been pointed out in the pages of this journal (Long 1978), the subject matter of these exercises is usually so elementary that only beginning students of the subject would find it at all interesting. Consider the following example:

Discourse 1. Some liquids which act as conductors of electricity decompose when an electric current is passed through them. Such liquids, usually solutions of certain chemicals in water, are known as electrolytes. The process by which they are decomposed is called electrolysis. In electrolysis, two wires or pieces of metal connected to a battery or cell are placed in a vessel containing an electrolyte. These are called electrodes. The electrode connected to the negative terminal of the battery is called the cathode and that which is connected to the positive terminal is called the anode.

When the current is switched on, it passes from the battery to the anode and then through the electrolyte to the cathode, passing from there back to the battery. As the current passes from one electrode to the other a chemical reaction takes place. (p. 147)

In the United States and, I believe, in almost any modern educational system around the world, electrolysis (as described above) is a standard feature of beginning science courses at the 7th-8th grade level; i.e., it is already familiar to most pretechnical students by the time they are 13 years old. Thus, it is hard to see where there would be any “rational appeal” in it for students who have studied the subject long enough to have developed communicative abilities in it (as in Figure 1, stage 1).

Furthermore, most of the exercises are over-controlled to the point of requiring little more than mechanical responses having little or nothing to do with the use of pragmatic skills. For example, having read discourse 1, the

⁵ Widdowson does not state what level student (in terms of year in school) his exercises are intended for, nor does any of the *English in Focus* advertising. I am assuming that they are intended for students in their first year at university. This assumption is based on the fact that the stated target group for the *English in Focus* series is intermediate to advanced students of English, that at least one of the series titles (*English in Mechanical Engineering*) refers to a subject not normally taught at the secondary level, and that Widdowson has elsewhere described the series as aimed at students in “the first year of higher education.” (Allen and Widdowson 1978:59)

student is asked to complete several “interpretation checks” by assessing the truth or falsehood (and explaining the basis for his or her assessment) of such statements as the following:

- (a) Liquids which decompose when an electric current passes through them are called electrolytes.
- (b) Electrolytes are solutions of certain chemicals in water.
- (c) A chemical reaction takes place when an electric current passes through an electrolyte. (p. 147)

To help the student arrive at a T/F assessment of each statement (though one wonders what sort of student would need such help), “explanatory solutions” are provided in which the student is expected to fill in the blanks with an appropriate word or two. Here is the “explanatory solution” for statement (a):

Some liquids decompose when an electric current _____ through them.

Such liquids are _____ electrolytes.

i.e. Liquids which _____ when an electric current is passed through them are _____ as electrolytes.

= Liquids which decompose when an electric current passes through them are called electrolytes. (p. 147)

Widdowson asserts that “the aim of solutions of this programmed kind is to get the learner to participate actively in the reasoning process which is required for interpretation to take place.” (p. 107) But is any reasoning at all really required, even for learners who happen not to know anything about electrolysis? If the learner merely knows the meaning of the word *such* (as can be expected of intermediate-to-advanced learners, the stated target group of the *English in Focus* series from which this exercise is taken), then it is hard to imagine how he could *fail* to make a correct assessment of statement (a). No pragmatic skills are necessary.

Similar criticism can be directed at the next step in Widdowson’s recommended sequence, a sentence-combining exercise:

Exercise 1

With reference to the passage, combine the following groups of sentences so that they make appropriate statements:

- (a) Some liquids act as conductors of electricity.
Some liquids decompose when an electric current passes through them.
- (b) The vessel contains an electrolyte.
In this process, two pieces of metal are connected to a battery.
In this process, two pieces of metal are placed in a vessel.
- (c) One electrode is connected to the positive terminal of the battery.
One electrode is connected to the negative terminal of the battery.
One electrode is called the cathode.
One electrode is called the anode.
- (d) A chemical reaction takes place.
The current is switched on.
The current passes through the electrolyte. (p. 148)

Although such an exercise may provide useful practice in forming various types of relative clauses and/or performing other linguistic manipulations, it hardly requires “interpretive reference to the reading passage” at this point, as Widdowson claims (p. 148).

Moving on to the next exercise in the sequence, the student is asked to combine the output sentences from Exercise 1 with four other sentences (given in the book), thus arriving at a second instance of discourse which is simply a restatement of the first:

Discourse 2. Some liquids which act as conductors of electricity decompose when an electric current passes through them. Such liquids are known as electrolytes and the process is called electrolysis. In this process, two pieces of metal, known as electrodes, are connected to a battery and placed in a vessel containing an electrolyte. One electrode, called the cathode, is connected to the negative terminal and the other, called the anode, to the positive terminal of the battery. When the current is switched on, it passes through the electrolyte from one electrode to the other and a chemical reaction takes place. (p. 149)

Widdowson contends that such sequencing of exercises (which he calls “gradual approximation”) is needed in order to avoid overburdening the learner’s capacities. But is this indeed the case? It seems to me that the only challenge for the learner in such exercises, given the fact that he or she is simply restating what has already been given and is thus not engaged in a genuinely communicative process of conveying new information to someone, is simply that of forming grammatically correct sentences. This should give the learner practice in forming relative clauses or in using anaphoric terms, no doubt, but it is difficult to see how it could lead to much development of communicative abilities.

The points just raised with regard to the principle of control pertain also to the principle of integration. That is, to the extent that Exercise 1 and others like it (of which there are many in the *English in Focus* series, some even simpler) can be completed without drawing on pragmatic skills, such exercises do not serve their intended purpose of developing the learner's communicative competence. Furthermore, the attempt to integrate two or more communicative abilities in a single sequence of exercises suffers from the repetitiveness of the content. Despite Widdowson's emphasis on a "single underlying interpreting ability" embracing the more specifically defined communicative abilities of reading, writing, saying, and listening—which may be a useful notion in characterizing *ultimate* language-learning success—the fact is that the communicative abilities of language learners usually develop at different rates. For example, the reading ability usually develops faster than the writing ability, often much faster, given the amount of time devoted to it in school. Consequently, exercise material suitable for writing practice may be completely unchallenging and thus as boring as reading practice.

In short, it seems to me that the sample exercises in *Teaching Language as Communication* do not do the one thing that communicative exercises *must* do: They do not make genuine demands on the pragmatic skills. Instead of promoting the development of communicative abilities, they merely exercise a few linguistic skills; instead of engaging the learner in genuinely communicative behavior (i.e., where his or her attention is focused on the conveying or receiving of new information), they ask the learner only to make simple linguistic manipulations.

Some Suggestions for Pedagogical Alternatives

Since much of the problem lies in the elementary nature of the subject matter, one might suppose that elevating the level would solve the problem. Widdowson himself suggests, at various points in the book, that the subject matter should be adjusted for different learners.⁶ But I think this would only

⁶ In fact, he has even made (elsewhere) precisely the same argument I am making here, that communicative teaching materials must be based on subject matter of real interest to the learner:

What factors do we have to take into consideration in designing a model of grammar for advanced or remedial language teaching? We may assume, firstly, that a pedagogic grammar for advanced learners must provide the student with fresh and stimulating material. As was suggested earlier in this paper, there is no point in presenting a remedial English class at the University level with a speeded-up version of the secondary school syllabus, for the class will rapidly become bored

be a partial solution. Too many of the exercises can be completed with hardly any knowledge of the subject matter involved or with hardly any knowledge of how to interpret discourse. In other words, too many of the exercises are basically of the same isolated-sentence type that Widdowson properly condemns at the beginning of his book. What is needed, it seems to me, is a greater willingness (on the part of ESP teachers generally) to let go of learners' hands and force them to come to grips with the complexities of genuine discourse. As readers or listeners, they must be exposed to imperfect, even confusing samples of discourse, i.e., the kind we are all exposed to every day. They must be made to make educated guesses, to dig out main points, to recognize and interpret "hedges." As writers or speakers, they must be made to adapt their discourse to the needs and expectations of various audiences, to construct arguments, to exercise persuasion, to focus the reader/listener's attention on important points. In short, only by being forced to exercise their pragmatic skills can learners reasonably be expected to develop communicative abilities in the second language.

Let me illustrate what I mean with a few writing exercises from an English for Science and Technology course designed for first-year undergraduate or graduate engineering students with English deficiencies.⁷ In this course, the students typically represent a diverse array of engineering fields as well as different language backgrounds. Nonetheless, they all share certain characteristics emanating from their desire to become professional engineers, and these can be exploited in the devising of communicative EST exercises. For example, all engineers are trained to be problem-solvers from the very first day of their engineering studies. As their training advances and they learn more about their field, they learn that engineering problems in the real world are not solely technical in nature but intersect with economic, social, environ-

and resentful even if they show evidence of not having fully mastered the material. The rejection by students of the rapid repeat technique of remedial teaching is a familiar experience in higher education, and should occasion no surprise. Not only do advanced learners have a natural reluctance to cover familiar ground for the second or third time, they have, in fact, reached a stage in their studies when they may no longer be able to benefit from the oral, inductive type of teaching employed at a more elementary level. As was pointed out earlier, it is this fact that prompts us to propose an approach which gives recognition to the real needs of advanced students. It must be stressed that the task for the advanced learner is not simply to experience more language material, but to develop a complex set of organizational skills over and above those which he needed to cope with the elementary syllabus, and to learn to put these to use in serving a variety of communicative purposes . . . (Allen and Widdowson 1978:67)

⁷ That is, with Michigan Test scores in the 72-84 range (corresponding roughly to 450-520 on the TOEFL).

mental, and other constraints. Thus, professional engineers must be not only problem-solvers but cost-benefit analysts as well, which means they must be able to construct arguments justifying their engineering projects in terms of addressing a wide range of factors for a diverse audience. In short, they must become professional communicators. This does not mean, of course, that first-year students normally possess these communication skills; quite the contrary. What it does mean is that students can be made to recognize these role requirements and to begin developing them in the EST classroom, using the teacher and other students as audience. In other words, students can be given exercises which force them to perform simultaneously as problem-solver, cost-benefit analyst, and/or specialist-to-layman communicator. Here is an example:

POCKET CALCULATORS

Inspect the following data and then write a report recommending one of the three calculators as being a better value than the other two. Assume that the data comprise a table attached to your report.

	<i>Casio</i>	<i>APF</i>	<i>Sears</i>
Length	6 cm.	10	13
Width	4 cm.	7	8
Thickness	1.5 cm.	2	2.5
Weight (w/ battery)	150 g	200	240
Number of digits	8	8	10
Number of arithmetic functions	9	8	12
Maximum battery-life	200 hrs.	390	330
Price	\$28	\$13.50	\$18.95
Warranty period	12 mos	6	6
Visibility of read-out figures	fair	fair	good

This example, simple though it is, conforms to all three of Widdowson's pedagogic principles. The subject matter has rational appeal for engineering

students, since pocket calculators are virtually indispensable today for engineering studies and since engineering students are therefore inevitably faced with this kind of choice. Different communicative abilities are integrated, because the learner must interpret the figures in the table, compare them according to personally selected criteria, and then construct a persuasive argument supporting his or her point of view. Finally, the principle of control is adhered to insofar as the subject matter usually interests students without introducing too much linguistic complexity. This particular exercise, of course, requires considerable control of comparative constructions; if the teacher suspects that the student is weak in this area of grammar, he or she can provide suitable practice before handing the exercise out. If the student lacks a rhetorical model for the constructing of an argument, the teacher can provide one like the following (adapted by Leslie Olsen from Young, Becker, and Pike 1970:234), using appropriate examples from published sources to illustrate its usefulness:

Outline for the Argument of Fact/Policy

- I. Introduction
 - A. Direct the audience's attention toward the problem.
 - B. If it is useful, give your credentials, i.e., explain why you can speak with authority on the subject, and establish common ground by pointing out shared beliefs, attitudes, experiences.
- II. Background of Problem [if appropriate]
 - A. Point out the nature of the problem: 1) its historical background, 2) causes
 - B. Explain how it concerns the audience.
- III. Argument
 - A. State the criteria for judgment, i.e., the desirable characteristics of the subject under discussion. Include explanation where necessary.
 - B. State your position or solution to the problem posed along with any necessary clarification.
 - C. Demonstrate the soundness of your position/solution by showing it meets the criteria established in III, A. This step should be accompanied by ample evidence: facts (illustrations, statistics, examples of successful application of the solution) and statements of authority. Be sure to identify the authorities if they aren't widely known.

- D. If there are competing positions/solutions, demonstrate the superiority of your position/solution by showing how these fail to meet the criteria as completely as yours.
- IV. A. Explain briefly the benefits to be gained by accepting your position/solution or the dangers of rejecting it.
- B. Summarize your argument: 1) restate your position/solution (III, B); 2) restate your reasons for accepting it (III, C).

Of course, the above outline was designed for general purposes, not specifically for the pocket calculator exercise. As such, it can be followed selectively, to suit particular purposes. A student using it for the pocket calculator exercise, for example, would probably want to devote minimal space to points under I and II and go fairly directly to the points listed in Section III. On the other hand, an essay question like the following might require considerable discussion of the points under I and II:

Essay question. Write an essay of 300-500 words on the following question:

Do you see nuclear energy as a viable long-range solution to the growing energy crisis? If possible, include discussion of economic, environmental, and social factors in your answer.

It is important to realize that EST (or, more generally, ESP) exercises do not necessarily have to deal with specialized subject matter. Consider, for example, the following logic puzzle (adapted from Meserve and Sobel, 1969:17):

THE ISLAND PUZZLE

A sailor lands on an island inhabited by two types of people: The Alphas always lie and the Betas always tell the truth. The sailor meets four inhabitants on the beach and asks the first one, "Are you an Alpha or a Beta?" The man answers, but the sailor doesn't understand him and asks the second person what he said. The man replies: "He said that he was a Beta. He is, and so am I." The third inhabitant then says: "That's not true. The first man is an Alpha. And you can trust me, because I'm a Beta."

Bewildered, the sailor turns to the fourth inhabitant and says, "This is all very confusing. Which one of these two men is telling the truth?" The fourth inhabitant replies, "Don't listen to either one of them. They're both liars."

Can you tell who was lying and who was telling the truth? Explain your reasoning.

It might be argued that the Island Puzzle does not belong in an EST course, inasmuch as it does not treat a typical scientific or technical subject. But this would be misconstruing what science and technology are all about. The essence of science and technology does not lie in subject matter but in problem-solving methodologies. Since logical reasoning figures importantly in such problem-solving, and since it is also needed for scientific/technical explanation, it makes sense to give EST students exercises which demand logical reasoning both for solving the problem and for explaining the solution. Note, in addition, that this kind of exercise also satisfies Widdowson's three pedagogic principles. It satisfies the principle of rational appeal by drawing on the student's nonlinguistic knowledge is a genuinely communicative activity. It satisfies the principle of control by engaging the learners' interest in the first place and then letting them explain their reasoning in their own terms (as with the pocket calculator exercise, the teacher can anticipate a need to give weaker students preliminary practice with appropriate linguistic constructions and vocabulary, e.g., connectives like *thus*, *therefore*, *hence*, etc.). Finally, it satisfies the principle of integration by first genuinely challenging the reading ability (e.g., some students have trouble perceiving the last statement, "They're both liars," as a false statement if only one of the referents is a liar) and then requiring a clearly articulated, well-organized written explanation, supplemented perhaps with a visual aid.

I have given the Island Puzzle to about 75 EST students, ranging from first-year undergraduates to first-year graduates, with entirely positive reactions. All seemed to have found it both stimulating and challenging; some even offered gratuitous embellishments in the form of visual aids, alternate solutions, logical formalizations, alternative puzzles, etc. I have given the puzzle to different groups of students at different stages of the course, allowing it to be used as an indicator of the effectiveness of the communicative approach in the development of communicative abilities. Here too the results are encouraging. The examples in Appendix A and B, by way of illustration, are from four first-year graduate engineering students newly arrived in the United States and having about equal composition-writing ability at the start of the course (Michigan Test scores ranging from 73 to 77).⁸ All four students had the same amount of time in which to respond to the question, and all four got the same (correct) answer. What is noticeably different about their answers has to do, I believe, with the fact that students A-1 and A-2 did the exercise at the beginning of the term while students B-1 and B-2 did

⁸ Corresponding roughly to 445-470 on the TOEFL.

it at the end, three months later: compositions B-1 and B-2 display better organization, better step-by-step reasoning, and a more effective use of grammar (note especially the difference in the use of modal verbs). This is not to say that students B-1 and B-2 do not make grammatical errors—far from it; they have simply learned to *communicate* more effectively.

Of course, a writing course for newly entering EST students cannot be based entirely on open-ended exercises like those described above. Standard grammar exercises are also needed, along with lectures or other forms of instruction on various topics ranging from vocabulary to discourse patterning. The point, however, is this: If exercises are to be genuinely communicative (i.e., if they are to help the student develop communicative abilities in the second language), then they must simulate the kind of communicating that goes on in the real world. That is to say, they must confront the learner with situations in which he or she is trying to convey knowledge to someone who doesn't already possess that knowledge. This, of course, is entirely unlike student communication in the academic world, where the student typically tries to convey knowledge to someone (e.g., the professor) who already possesses it. Thus, in devising communicative language exercises, the ESP materials designer should not feel obligated to simulate academic subject materials but should instead try to simulate the kinds of communicative exigencies which the student will encounter when he or she becomes a professional in the real world. This, I claim, demands a far greater use of open-ended problem-solving, persuasion, and argumentation than currently exists in published EST/ESP teaching materials. This point of view is not inconsistent with Widdowson's philosophy of communicative language teaching; it simply opens up a much wider range of pedagogical possibilities, especially since it relieves the language teacher of the burden of having to be as knowledgeable (in terms of subject matter) as the student.⁹

⁹ Williams (1978) presents several arguments similar to mine, advocating what he calls a "wide-angle" approach to EST teaching. In particular, he argues that "The major problem with a narrow-angle EST course is the teacher/student gulf in terms of SP [Specific-Purpose-TNH] context." (Williams 1978:26): "However good the linguistic grid may be, a restricted specialist context may well be de-motivating to the student and/or teacher. It will not motivate the student if the technical context is too elementary; and the teacher's motivation will suffer when the specialist context is beyond his comprehension." (p. 25) Williams' proposed solution, again similar to mine, is to concentrate on more open-ended exercises relating EST to the larger social context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Teaching Language as Communication* is a stimulating and important book. It lays down a solid foundation of theoretical and pedagogical principles which should be of great help to the many ESP practitioners who normally have to prepare their own teaching materials to suit their own particular circumstances. I have pointed out what I consider a shortcoming of the book—namely, that the pedagogical procedures suggested in the second half do not satisfy the principles laid out in the first half—and I have sketched out some alternatives. But this does not, of course, invalidate the principles themselves (it will be recalled, in fact, that my own alternatives are constructed on the very same principles). Indeed, I believe that Widdowson's general philosophy of teaching language as communication is both realistic and theoretically sound. Of particular importance in this philosophy is his insistence that teachers must be theoreticians as well as practitioners, that they must try to create their own teaching materials based on the communicative use of language. As he says in closing, "It has been my concern in this book to enquire into principles and to explore their implications for the teaching of language as communication. If it provokes teachers into a systematic investigation of the ideas that inform their own practices, and stimulates them to enquire into the pedagogic possibilities of other ideas, then it will have achieved its object." (p. 163)

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APPENDIX A

**Responses to the Island Puzzle
1st week of course**

Student A-1 (Michigan Test composition score at beginning of course = 77)

I think that the real Betas are the first and second persons, because they did not try to blame another person. It is usually that the person who does not have the reason wants to win. So then, they want to argue a lot in order to persuade to the contrary person. This behavior was characteristic of the third and fourth person. From the other point of view. If the first said that he was an Alpha the third was right and the second was wrong. On the other hand if the last one was right all the other were wrong, and it was only one Beta in this group, so only the first and second person are not contradiction. The third person was lied because he said that the first one was an Alpha and the Alpha, lie. So, the third person was an *Alpha*. Then, the last one said that only was a Beta in the group. It implies that the first was said the truth, so he had to be a Beta.

As a result, the first and the second are Betas, and the third and fourth are Alphas.

Student A-2 (Michigan Test composition score at beginning of course = 75)

If the fourth inhabitant is "Beta," he says the truth and then he is the only "Beta." So the others are alphas. If so the second lie and the third too. But they said opposite answers about the first, so the fourth is lying. If the second is Beta, he said the truth and as the first said he was Beta, he is so. Thus the third is lying because of his reflexion on the first.

So the first and the second are Betas and the third and the fourth are alphas.

APPENDIX B

Responses to the Island Puzzle 13th week of course

Student B-1 (Michigan Test composition score at beginning of course = 73)

Before we start the discussion, we had better know what the first should answer. If he is a Beta, he will answer the truth, "I am a Beta"; if he is a Alpha, he will tell a lie "I am a Beta". Whether the first one is a Alpha or a Beta, he must answer "I am a Beta"

Then we can see how the second one answers. The second says "He said he was a Beta" This is a true statement. Because the second tell a truth, we can know that he must be a Beta.

The second one continues to say "he is a Beta". So we can get a result that the first one must be a Beta because the second is a Beta and he must always tell a truth.

The third one says "The first man said he was a Alpha". This is a false statement, so we can know that the third one must be a Alpha.

The fourth one says "I am the only Beta in the group" This is also a false statement. Because he tells a lie, he must be a Alpha.

From the above discussion, we have the results as following: the first one is Beta, the second one is Beta, the third one is Alpha, the fourth one is Alpha.

Student B-2 (Michigan Test composition score at beginning of course = 73)

Before discussing who is a Beta or an Alpha, we must know what is the possible reply from them. Since Betas always tell the truth, they always say they are Betas. And since Alphas always lie, they say that they are Betas. Therefore, the possible reply which we can get from them is that they say Betas.

According to this conclusion, the first man said he was a Beta. However we still do not know whether he said truth or not. So we must examine the second man's statement. The second man said that the first said he was a Beta. Yes. This is true. Therefore the second man is a Beta. Further he said the first was a Beta. and he was a Beta, too. *Therefore the first and the second are Betas.*

The third said "The First man said he was an Alpha". But this is not true

since Alphas never say that they are Alphas. So the third man is an Alpha.

The fourth man said that he was the only Beta. But this is not true since the first and the second are Betas. Therefore the fourth is an Alpha.

Consequently, we can conclude that *the first and the second are Betas, and the third and the fourth are Alphas.*