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Learner Language and Language Learning

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Preface

This book is primarily intended for students of English who need a basic introduction to foreign language pedagogy. It should also be of immediate relevance to teachers of English at all educational levels.

The authors have been attached to PIF (*P*roject *I*n *F*oreign Language Pedagogy) since the mid-70s. The project has brought together a considerable number of researchers, teachers and students who share a wish to develop research into foreign language learning and teaching in Denmark. This book is one product of the investigations undertaken by the project and the teaching related to it. We should like to express our warm thanks to the many colleagues and students who have influenced our thinking over the years and commented on various drafts of the book.

The book itself has been written and rewritten over a period of several years. Knud Bæk Kristiansen has been a member of the book production team throughout its many phases. The final text owes much to his perceptive and constructive criticism. Esther Glahn participated in the early stages of shaping the overall structure of the book, and has made useful comments on many of the draft chapters. Birgitte Sneum typed the innumerable draft versions of the book with superb competence and has patiently converted our joint work into impeccable form.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support we have received from the following funding sources for the research on which the book is based: The Danish Research Council for the Humanities; the Department of English, the Department of Applied and Mathematical Linguistics and the Humanities Faculty of the University of Copenhagen; the Institute for Danish, English, French and German, Roskilde University Centre.

Abbreviations and transcription conventions

L1	first language, mother tongue
IL	interlanguage
L2	a second or foreign language

grades	6	sixth	class of the Folkeskole
	8	eighth	
	10	tenth	

1gs	first	year, languages line, of the Gymnasium
3gs	third	

–	short pause
––	longer pause
( )	explanatory information in learner texts
[ ]	phonetic transcription of the relevant word
" "	indicates Danish or Danish-based word in learner text

The phonetic symbols used are, for English, the same as in Davidsen-Nielsen 1975, and for Danish, those of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Spoken language is transcribed either with each speaker's turn in succession:

A bla
B bla
A bla bla (see for instance text 2)

or with speakers' contributions on parallel horizontal lines, this making it possible to indicate whether speakers overlap with each other

A bla bla bla
B bla (see for instance text 1).

In the pronunciation chapter, intonation is marked in the

v
e
r
tical axis, and s t r e s s by spacing.

Contact between participants is not always direct. Virtually all forms of written communication, or making a tape-recording and sending off a cassette, involve a delay in the contact. In these cases the *production* of language (eg writing a letter) takes place on a different occasion from its *reception* (eg the letter being read). A consequence of such NON-DIRECT CONTACT is that feedback is DELAYED, and occurs in a separate communicative event.

In communication in which there is no direct contact between participants, addressers need to express themselves more explicitly than otherwise: absence of direct contact, as well as irreversibility of the roles of addresser/addressee, deprives the addresser of immediate feedback.

2.1.6 Message

The term MESSAGE is used to cover what is said, the *form* in which a speaker's intentions are put across, and the *content* of what the speaker intends to say. A message can be as brief as one word, or a complete, lengthy text. Deciding on the number of messages in a text is a fairly arbitrary matter and will depend on the purpose of the analysis.

Our definition of message, covering as it does both content and form, can be readily applied in an analysis of foreign language learning. Text 2 is clear case of learners talking about something – Mr. Smith's job – and learning how to do so. Feedback from the teacher may relate to either content (eg a valid interpretation) or to form (eg correct pronunciation). The distinction between the two may at times be blurred. The teacher's echo question with rising intonation ("For the underground?" line 10) probably queries the content of Christine's statement a line earlier, but Christine's follow-up seems to indicate a concern with finding a new form ("criminal") for the same content.

2.1.7 Code

A CODE is a symbolic system, conventionalized as a means of giving form to messages. Codes can either be linguistic or non-linguistic.

In text 2, the LINGUISTIC CODE used is the special form of English

which can be referred to as English INTERLANGUAGE. The pupils and the teacher speak varieties of this interlanguage, ie versions of an L2 which in some respects contain traces of an L1 (see chapter 17 for a discussion of interlanguage).

In addition to interlanguage English, one more code is employed in the extract, namely Danish used as a NATIVE LANGUAGE. In this particular excerpt it is the pupils only who resort to their native language, but the teacher also makes use of it at other points during the lesson, for instance when translating or explaining difficult words. It is significant that pupils resort to Danish in circumstances where they are under pressure or wish to communicate something urgently. This is the case in line 19, where Christine resists the teacher's (possibly sarcastic) rejection of her contribution to the discussion. Christine breaks into a whole utterance in her native language. Such a change from one code to another is referred to a CODE-SWITCHING.

Another code which is relevant in all face-to-face interaction is the NON-LINGUISTIC CODE of facial expressions, posture and gesture. Raising a hand is a conventional way of indicating a willingness to speak, and functions as such in the text (in lines 3 and 7). Here a non-linguistic sign has been used as an alternative to calling out, a convention young school children have to learn. Also communicative, but not part of any linguistic code, are laughs (eg line 5) and hesitation phenomena (eg line 24). Prosodic phenomena (intonation, loudness, tempo, pauses) accompany words, and are complexly related to the linguistic code (see chapter 7), with features of both linguistic and non-linguistic codes.[6]

2.2 Face-to-face communication

In this section excerpts from three texts will be presented. They are all interactional, involving either two or three people in face-to-face communication. Since the excerpts are, inevitably, very brief, only a few seconds or so, our discussion draws on our familiarity with the complete texts from which the excerpts come.

Text 3[7] is part of a conversation between 3 men who are close friends. The physical setting is a room in a private house. The three are cheerful and relaxed after a drink, the two guests quite unaware

Chapter nine:
Communication strategies

In discussing fluency we pointed out that people do not always succeed in converting their communicative intentions into speech without running into problems. We also described a number of ways in which speakers may *cover up* for these problems without their fluency being affected. In this chapter we address ourselves to the related question of what possibilities speakers have for *solving* problems in communication. Although our focus will be on learners, much of the description will be valid for native speakers as well, especially when involved in asymmetric communicative events (either among themselves or with IL speakers).

Foreign language learners often experience a discrepancy between what they would like to say, their communicative intention, and what they know how to say in the foreign language, their IL knowledge. A similar discrepancy occurs in speech reception whenever learners are incapable of securing total comprehension (cf. chapter 8). In order to bridge the gap between communicative needs and limited communicative resources, learners may make use of COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES. This term covers problem-solving devices that learners resort to in order to solve what they experience as problems in speech production and reception.

9.1 Strategies in production

When learners cannot find the word or expression needed, the choices open to them are to give up completely, to reduce the original communicative intention, or to try to solve the problem by making creative use of the communicative resources available. Accordingly a distinction can be made between *reduction strategies,* the most extreme form of which is giving up, and *achievement strategies,* by which learners try to achieve what they actually intend to say. In the following extract from a PIF conversation the learner makes extensive use of achievement strategies:[1]

Text 20

NS	do you erm how do you go to school – – erm do you er go to school by bus
L	
NS	–
L	yes sometimes er sometimes I take my er – er – what's it called – er
NS	er your oh what does it look like –
L	– er – my – cykel – er (laugh) "knallert" – ['knælə] – er (laugh)
NS	(laugh)
L	you know er Puch – kn Puch – (laugh) you know so – er some people –
NS	mm – (laugh)
L	er have er a cykel (laugh) er – – no I can't explain it – you know
NS	aha aha yer
L	some people have a car – and some people have a bicycle –
NS	oh a
L	and some people have a er – erm – a cykel there is a m motor –
NS	bicycle – with a motor – no no it's – a
L	motor – is that a bicycle – oh
NS	motorcycle – yer – so you have a bi-cycle I mean or a bicycle and a
L	bicycle yer er
NS	motorcycle – (laugh) aha – and you you have a motorcycle –
L	oh yer – yer ...

9.1.1 Achievement strategies

The learner in text 20 has the problem that she does not know the English word *moped* for Danish *knallert.* Instead of giving up and thus abandoning the topic she makes a series of attempts at conveying to the native speaker what she wants to say. We can list her attempts:

1. cykel
2. knallert
3. ['knælə]
4. Puch
5. some people have a ...

What we see illustrated here is two main types of ACHIEVEMENT STRATEGIES: strategies which make use of the learner's L1 (1, 2, 3, 4) and strategies that try to reach a solution by making creative use of the learner's IL knowledge (5). We shall discuss each of these in some detail, as well as two other types of achievement strategies, interactional and non-linguistic strategies.

L1 based strategies

It is convenient to distinguish between three types of L1 based strategies, two of which are represented in text 20.

Category	Description	Example	Comment
code-switching	learner borrows one or more words from L1, aware that it/they are not English	my "knallert"	Danish word for moped
anglicizing	learner tries to make a Danish word sound English, thinking it may now be English	[knælə]	modification of Danish word "knallert" to English pronunciation
literal translation	learner makes a word-for-word translation from the mother tongue	I take myself in the neck	Danish: "Jeg tager mig selv i nakken" = I pull myself together

Fig. 11: L1 based strategies

There is a considerable risk of such L1 based strategies not being comprehensible. In the case of the three quoted examples, none of them was understood by the native speaker in the contexts in which they were used. L1 based strategies may be a safer bet when the vocabulary has entered both Danish and English from the same foreign source (eg *spaghetti, restaurant,* and a lot of the technical or specialised vocabulary based on Latin and Greek).[2] For the same reason the learner's attempt to use *Puch,* an assumedly international brand name, was no bad idea. Had the native speaker known something about mopeds (which she apparently did not), she would probably have been able to understand what the learner was trying to say at this point.

IL based strategies

Both 'anglicizing' and 'literal translation' make use of the learner's IL knowledge. They have, however, been classified as L1 based because the point of departure in each case is a form in the learner's L1. With the four types of strategies listed below, there are few traces of the learner's L1 in the strategy.

Category	Description	Example	Comment
paraphrase	learner explains by means of other English words, often focussing on characteristic properties or functions of intended referent	some people have a car – and some people have a er bicycle – and and some people have a er cykel there is a m motor ...	she tries to explain moped as a category of transport between bicycle and car
generalisation	learner assumes that her original goal can be reached by using a generalised IL term	people from all country	original goal: young people from all parts of the world
restructuring	learner is unable to complete initial sentence pattern, breaks off and starts in a different way	I have four – I have er three sisters and one brother	learner realizes that she does not know the English for Danish *søskende* ('sisters and brothers')
word-coinage	learner constructs a new IL word	funny-dress ball	fancy-dress ball

Fig. 12: IL based strategies

IL based strategies have a better chance of being understood than L1 based strategies. The main risks with IL based strategies are that extensive use of paraphrasing and restructuring strategies may make considerable demands on the addressee's patience. Generali-

zation strategies may create an impression of vagueness. However IL based strategies offer the greatest scope for making creative use of one's communicative resources in a way which is maximally efficient, short of knowing the appropriate word or expression. The fact that the native speaker in text 20 drew the erroneous conclusion that the learner was talking about a motor-cycle is more a consequence of her lack of relevant knowledge of the world (mopeds are not significant in British culture) than of the learner failing to paraphrase exactly what she had in mind.

Interactional strategies

One choice open to the learner in situations in which there is direct contact with the addressee is to appeal for help.

Category	Description	Example	Comment
appeal	learner invites addressee to help her out directly or indirectly	my sweater is – er what colour is this	points to her sweater

It is easy to see that the strategy of appealing is closely related to what we termed self-initiated, interactional repair in chapter 4. The difference is that with repair work as we described it, the speaker first tries to express her intention in one way and then realizes that there is a problem, whereas the above example of an appeal contains no 'first attempt' which then needs repairing. This slight difference between repairs and at least some appeals should not, however, obscure the fact that there are strong similarities between interactional repairs and the use of interactional communication strategies.[3]

Non-linguistic strategies

In the example of an appeal above, the learner supports her verbal request by pointing to her sweater. This combination of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies such as gesture and facial expression is common in situations in which there is visual contact between the interactants. Occasionally, non-linguistic strategies are used instead of linguistic attempts, especially by beginners.

9.1.2 Sequences of achievement strategies

In the following extract from an intermediate learner,[4] we see gesture supplementing linguistic strategies. The text is chosen to illustrate how learners at this level often make use of L1 based, IL based, and non-linguistic communication strategies, and that a sequence of strategies is needed to reach the goal. The topic is why people move out of Copenhagen. The learner has a Danish concept in mind (»parcelhus«), and does not know an English equivalent for it.

Text 21

	transcript	comment	communication strategy
NS	why do you think they do that?		
L	mm they want a "parcelhuset"		code-switching
NS	uhuh what's that?		
L	erm it's a house erm it it's not an apartment	gesture indicates plot of land	paraphrase + non-linguistic
NS	mm		
L	but it's a big house where just THEY live	gesture shapes house	paraphrase + non-linguistic
NS	oh I see a a sort of totally detached house		
L	yeah		

The first paraphrase the learner uses is a negative definition, »it is not an apartment«, which puts the native speaker on the right track. With the additional linguistic information in the second paraphrase, plus the gestures, she is able to supply what she believes is the words the learner was needing. It is impossible to decide whether the learner actually recognizes the words »a totally detached house«, ie has it in his vocabulary, or whether he takes a bit of a gamble,

hoping that the native speaker has understood what he intended to say.

It is interesting to observe that the sequence of strategies in text 21 is similar to the sequence we listed for text 20. In each case the learner starts off with L1 based strategies but has to change to IL based strategies to convey her communicative intention.

9.1.3 Identifying achievement strategies

How can we know that a learner makes use of achievement strategies? With interactional strategies there is obviously no problem as the strategy itself is overtly marked as a request. Evidence for other types of achievement strategies is explicit as well as implicit, and we consequently distinguish between explicit and implicit STRATEGY MARKERS. In text 20 the learner says »what's it called« (learner line 2), while looking away from the native speaker (ie she is not appealing), and »no I can't explain it« (learner line 5). Both of these *explicitly* reveal her uncertainty. Supporting evidence for the achievement strategies in text 20 is the learner's repeated attempts to express one and the same intention. This is usually a reliable indication of the speaker experiencing a problem.

Signals of uncertainty such as pauses, laughs, hesitations, false starts, sighs, clicks and heavy breathing may be used with caution by analysts as *implicit* strategy markers. The problem is that as we pointed out in chapter 8, many of these signals have important functions in »normal« speech. The analyst therefore needs a combination of uncertainty signals in order to be reasonably sure that what follows these may be the result of a communication strategy. Text 20 contains many instances of this (filled and unfilled pauses, laughs, hesitations and false starts).

It follows that it is not always possible to identify achievement stragegies in learner language performance in a rigorous fashion. A fair amount of interpretation is needed. More valid results can be obtained by consulting the learner immediately after she has produced an utterance and asking her to introspect about (1) what problems she experienced and (2) how she solved them. Experience with *introspection* shows that this is a technique which has to be used with considerable caution. In particular, you cannot expect learners to be able

to describe how they solved their problems unless they have been instructed about communication strategies beforehand.

Let us complete this discussion of how to identify achievement strategies by briefly pointing out an approach which *cannot* be recommended. One might reason that as communication strategies are used when a learner does not know how to express herself in the foreign language, there might be a direct link between the use of communication strategies and *errors*. However, there is no simple relationship between strategy use and errors.

The result of a communication strategy *may* be an error, as when a learner says *animal hut* for *cage*, referring to what her canary lives in. But often strategies do not result in errors, as will have appeared from our discussion of IL based and interactional strategies.

Similarly, the occurrence of errors in IL performance is not necessarily the result of the learner having made use of a strategy. When a grade 6 learner says »can I English can I 'lidt' [æmərɪkænsk]« it is just possible that he experiences a problem in how to say 'American', but it is less than probable that he is aware of any problem relating to the use of *can I ..., can I ...* (modelled on Danish syntax), or that the use of Danish *lidt* ('a little') is the result of a conscious problem-solving procedure. Errors cannot be regarded as indicators of communication strategies.

9.1.4 Reduction strategies

So far we have concentrated on strategies by which the learner tries to get her communicative intention across. However, many learners tend to choose the opposite way out, ie to reduce their communicative goal.

REDUCTION may take place at both the pragmatic and the referential level. Reduction at the *pragmatic level* is a typical feature of many intermediate and even advanced learners, who have difficulties in marking appropriately for politeness and social distance (cf chapter 3). One reason for this may be that learners do not pay sufficient attention to the importance of expressing speech acts appropriately because in the »traditional« foreign language classroom they only produce language at one level of formality. When placed in different situations, they are forced to reduce compared to the way they

would express themselves in their L1.

Reduction may also occur at the *referential level*. The degree of reduction varies from saying nothing at all about the topic introduced, ie *topic avoidance*, to saying something approximating to what one would like to say, ie *meaning replacement*. Here is an example of meaning replacement:

intended communicative goal:	»Macbeth is a despairing and unbalanced ruler with a lust for power«
realized message:	»Macbeth is a very bad tyrant«.

When a learner produces utterances like this, the effect may well be that her interlocutors find her imprecise, vague or even naive. Vagueness, which is typical of much learner language, may be due to meaning replacement or caused by the learner overusing generalisation, eg using superordinate terms such as »flower« for »tulip«, and »thing« to refer to everything under the sun. In our analyses, generalisation seems sometimes to blend into meaning replacement.

9.2 Strategies in reception

In the section on speech reception in chapter 8 we discussed the process of *inferencing*. Addressees draw on their cultural and linguistic knowledge, problems are clarified as the situation evolves, and conscious and subconscious inferences are drawn. Inferencing is consequently a normal reception process, but learners may have to rely more on inferencing procedures than native speakers.

A learner experiencing real difficulty in comprehending an utterance, ie a learner who is unable to infer meaning, may resort to an interactional strategy. In terms of repairs, the learner would request the interlocutor to self-repair, ie the repair would be an other-initiated interactional repair. The repair request could be either of the following types:

(1) *general repair request*, learner expresses lack of understanding in general, without specifying what the comprehension problem is (»I don't understand«, »what«)

(2) *specific repair request:* learner specifies at what point in the discourse the comprehension problem occurred (»*where* did she go?«).

General repair requests are typically expressed by means of routinized formulae like »what« or »what mean you« (common in the IL of elementary Danish learners of English). The utility value of such formulae for beginning learners is no doubt significant, and although native speakers often just repeat their turn verbatim after a general appeal (though more slowly and distinctly), there are instances in which a general repair request is followed by a specific repair. Both possibilities are illustrated in the examples below from the PIF corpus:

NS: y you don't want to visit England particularly
L: what
NS: you don't WANT to visit England particularly
L: no

NS: how long how much time do you spend at the stables
L: what
NS: how how much time do you spend with the horses
L: I don't know erm

A more reliable way, however, of eliciting a specific repair is to utter a specific request:

NS: is it an exchange
L: I don't know what that is
NS: it means ...

NS: d'you like going to the cinema
L: to the what
NS: the cinema
L: yeah

The division into production and reception strategies is not watertight. A hybrid strategy, *pleading ignorance*, is interesting in that it de-

monstrates how reception problems become indistinguishable from production problems. »I don't know« serves the double function of constituting a minimal reply in itself, without initiating a repair-sequence, and concealing a comprehension or production problem.

9.3 Communication strategies and proficiency levels

Various studies have been undertaken of the ways in which strategies are used by learners at different levels of proficiency in the foreign language.[5]

At *lower proficiency levels*, learners make extensive use of L1 based achievement strategies like code-switching, as is to be expected. Often non-linguistic strategies are substituted for linguistic strategies. As for appeals, it is worth noting that some learners use them extensively and others hardly at all. Learners who do not use appeals would benefit from being made aware of the advantages of asking for help instead of just giving up or using a Danish word.

At *intermediate levels*, learners use a larger repertoire of strategy types, although individual learners often have their own preferences for specific types. There is some evidence (Bialystok/Fröhlich 1980, Brodersen/Gibson 1982) that those learners who have the most limited linguistic skills are also the least efficient strategy users. This is hardly surprising, as a prerequisite for using the more efficient IL based achievement strategies is the presence of IL knowledge.

At the intermediate proficiency levels, learners fall roughly into two groups: those who generally try to use achievement strategies, *»achievers«*, and those who do the opposite, *»reducers«*. Why do some learners achieve and others reduce? We believe that there are at least two major determining factors. First, there is the learner's personality. A person who is careful and who never runs risks, if these can be avoided, may prefer reduction strategies rather than risk making mistakes. The second factor is the learner's experience of communication in the foreign language classroom. It is fair to assume that teachers who encourage their learners to chance their arm, who prefer an erroneous attempt to no attempt, will tend to encourage »achievers«, whereas teachers who focus on correctness, on form rather than on content, will »produce« »reducers«.

Finally, at *advanced levels*, one might expect to find few communication strategies, because learners who have proceeded this far might be expected to have a closer fit between their IL resources and their communicative needs. However, it could be argued that the better one's proficiency in the foreign language, the greater one's communicative ambitions. For this reason one might still expect a fair number of strategies, even in the speech of advanced learners. In the conversations of advanced learners in the PIF corpus, it is difficult to find strategies which are clearly marked as such by the presence of (explicit or implicit) strategy markers. What happens at these levels might be that learners are more like native speakers in that they are better at anticipating problems and at solving these during the normal planning of speech. As a result there is no sign of problem-solving at the points in the learner text at which there might be recourse to a strategy.

Notes to chapter 9

1. PIF informant no. 73, grade 10.
2. There is evidence that 9th grade learners have considerable awareness of which L1 words are loan words, cf Brodersen/Gibson 1982.
3. Whether one characterizes a specific instance of learner performance as a repair or an interactional strategy is very much a question of whether one is interested in the *discourse* category of repairs or in the *psycholinguistically* oriented category of communication strategies.
4. PIF informant no. 89, grade 10.
5. The most systematic of these is reported in Bialystok/Fröhlich 1980. Our description is based partly on this, partly on analyses of the PIF conversations, see Haastrup/Phillipson 1983.

Chapter 9. Follow-ups

1. Following the instructions in follow-up 3, chapter 2, identify the achievement strategies used and classify them according to the categories introduced in this chapter. Are there problems of classification? How are the strategies marked? Is there a pattern of strategy use by particular learners?
2. Record a communication task and go over the recording with the learner immediately afterwards, asking her to identify communication problems and strategies (tape-record the introspection discussion as well). Prepare a transcript of the original recording and identify strategies by means of strategy markers. Compare this with the learner's own identification of problems and strategies.

Are there examples of reduction strategies? of achievement strategies which are not accompanied by strategy markers?

3. Divide a group of learners into two. Provide one group with a list of Danish words which they do not know the English equivalent of (or which do not have exact equivalents). Ask one learner at a time to explain the word in English to the other group, who assist in guessing what is referred to. Having completed the task, the group listen to a tape-recording of it and note down the explanations used. This is used as a basis for a discussion of types of interlanguage based strategies and the effects that these might have on native speakers.
4. It might be argued that learners are already strategy users in their L1. Discuss how this could be utilized in foreign language teaching. Are there any obvious ways of organizing teaching so as to enable learners to develop appropriate achievement strategies?
6. Consider ways in which compensatory fluency can be increased in advanced learners in connection with strategy use.

Chapter 9. Sources and further reading

Færch/Kasper 1983b contains a comprehensive collection of studies ranging from discussion of criteria for defining and classifying communication strategies to empirical investigations of the occurrence and function of strategies. The problem of how to identify communication strategies is discussed in two studies. The book also contains an extensive bibliography.

Sproglæreren published a series of articles in 1982 on communication strategies. Brodersen/Gibson 1982 contains a description of an experiment in teaching communication strategies in the Folkeskole.

Chapter ten: Communicative competence

Communicative competence has tended to be something of a vogue term in language teaching circles in recent years, with all the hazards that new fashions involve. The term has often been used without clear statements of what is covered or excluded by it. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is essential to the concept "communicative competence", partly by pulling together some of the many threads from earlier chapters, partly by introducing three new dimensions. One of these, the question of what impression different types of interlanguage make on native speakers, is of general relevance to communicative competence both in and out of school. A second dimension, which covers the relationship between learners' general cognitive and social development and their language proficiency, is of particular relevance to foreign language teaching in schools, as is the final dimension, learners' metacommunicative awareness.

10.1 The components of communicative competence

Historically the term communicative competence evolved as a result of a shift of emphasis among theorists in linguistics, a move away from the rules of language form, traditionally associated with grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, towards an emphasis on the ability to use language.[1] The essential components are the ones that we have presented in earlier chapters in the book. Provisionally we can state that communicative competence consists of the following:

	Components
Communicative competence	phonology/orthography grammar lexis pragmatics discourse communication strategies fluency

The components relate to each other in the following way:

(A) Phonological/orthographic, grammatical and lexical knowledge are commonly referred to as LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE. What it is important to note is that linguistic competence in no way represents an alternative or counterpart to communicative competence. It is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being lingustically competent.
(B) Pragmatic and discourse knowledge provide the link between linguistic competence and actual *language use* in specific situations. These components account for speakers' capacity to act by means of language in ways which are appropriate to their communicative intentions, to the contexts in which they communicate, and to the discourse into which their verbal contributions fit. The combination of linguistic competence and pragmatic and discourse knowledge will be referred to as PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE. (We use this for want of a better term, and need to stress that pragmatic competence covers more than pragmatic knowledge, as described in chapter 3).
(C) STRATEGIC COMPETENCE refers to speakers' ability to solve communication problems by means of strategies. It can therefore be considered compensatory relative to other types of competence: the activation of strategic competence presupposes an inability to make use of parts of linguistic or pragmatic competence.
(D) *Fluency* refers to speakers' ability to express what they want to say with ease. As with strategic competence, fluency is superimposed on linguistic and pragmatic competence. But whereas strategic competence presupposes a lack of (accessible) knowledge, fluency covers speakers' ability to make use of whatever linguistic and pragmatic knowledge they have.

The relationship between the various components of communicative competence can be represented as in fig. 13.

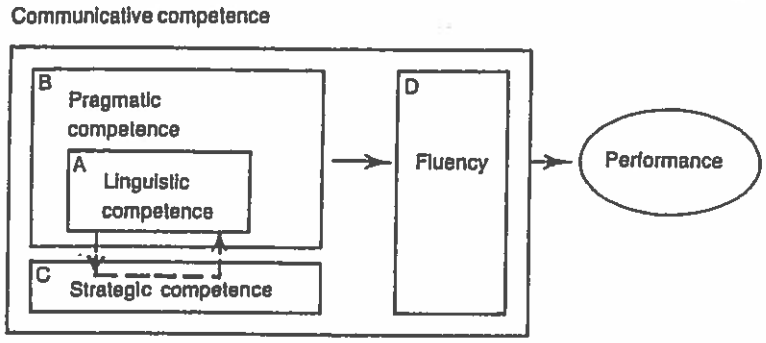

Fig. 13: Components of communicative competence
(the letters refer to the text above)

Before we exemplify this by discussing the relative importance of the various components in two hypothetical communicative events, a few general points concerning communicative competence need to be made.

The fact that linguistic competence is an essential part of pragmatic competence does not imply that learners first have to master all the rules of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation before they can proceed to pragmatic and discourse knowledge. The belief that it is necessary to learn linguistic competence first in schools, and that pragmatic competence can be left to post-school communication, a stance often associated with traditional foreign language teaching, is indeed questionable. In point of fact English teaching in Denmark throughout this century has, at least at the elementary levels, always been concerned with developing learners' ability to communicate in English. It has aimed at giving them the wherewithal to understand and use English within a particular cultural tradition, to put them in a position to use the skills and knowledge acquired in school later in life. The recent emphasis on "communicative competence" is therefore very much a question of focussing *more* on communicative competence rather than introducing something entirely new. Unfortunately, some of the proponents of communicative competence, and publishers needing to promote new teaching materials, have tended to distort the issues by presenting communicative competence as somehow an alternative to, for instance, grammar. This can be seen in the following excerpt from an ad:

"Teaching in the Folkeskole until the 9th class is designed to build up communicative competence, and *for this reason* there is no concentration on grammar or written work."[2]
(our translation and underlining)

This quotation contains two fundamental misconceptions, firstly that grammar is unimportant for communicative competence, and secondly that communicative competence is only concerned with the spoken language. A related unjustified restriction of communicative competence is the belief that it applies to production only. Communicative competence in fact covers listening and reading as well as speaking and writing.

For teachers of English there have been plenty of descriptions of linguistic competence available for most of this century, whereas it is only in recent years that pragmatic and strategic competence have been at all adequately defined and described. The increased insight into these has resulted from research into how language is actually used and in particular how learners perform. Descriptions of communicative competence can be of use in many ways, for instance in specifying learner goals, in analysing texts, and in planning and structuring learning activities. Neither the communicative events presented in chapter 2, nor the two to be discussed below, can be adequately described without concepts which go far beyond what traditionally constituted "linguistic competence". But at the same time, linguistic competence is essential.

A related point is that emphasizing the need for learners to master rules of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation/orthography for them to be communicatively competent does not imply that this linguistic competence has to be correct in all respects. The issue of correctness *is* obviously important for learners' communicative competence, as we shall discuss below. There is however an unfortunate and widespread misconception that teachers who stress linguistic competence are preoccupied with correctness, whereas teachers who give high priority to pragmatic competence have a more lenient attitude to errors. We want to emphasize that it is perfectly possible for a teacher to hold simultaneously the view that learners ought, for instance, to master highly productive syntactic rules and the view that learners cannot be expected to apply *all*

grammatical rules correctly.

It is impossible to specify communicative competence in any absolute sense; it needs to be done relative to the socio-psychological characteristics of individuals, to their communicative needs and to the situations in which they communicate. IL users are generally in a situation which in significant respects (see chapter 17) differs from that of native speakers. In order to state what is required for Danish learners to be communicatively competent in English, it is necessary to relate communicative competence to the communicative events in which learners participate, to their communicative intentions, and the social roles which their interlocutors (native speakers or other IL speakers) assign to them. An important consequence of this is that it is false to equate communicative competence in native speakers with communicative competence in IL speakers.

By restricting our coverage of communicative competence to the components listed above, we have ignored the fundamental fact that communicative competence never exists independently of SOCIAL COMPETENCE. L1 communicative competence is part of language users' capacity to interact with other members of the same speech community. Pragmatic knowledge is a particularly clear instance of communicative competence interacting with social competence. Speech act knowledge constitutes part of a more general knowledge of what acts (verbal and non-verbal) are possible in social groups, just as expressing speech act modality appropriately presupposes a basic ability to identify relevant social roles and the status associated with these. It is therefore obvious that for learners to be able to communicate with people from different communities (the social norms of which may differ from those of the learner's own community), and to understand textual products from that community, it is necessary to possess not just communicative but also social competence.

Whereas the link between communicative competence and social competence is a fairly obvious one, the relationship between general *cognitive abilities* and communicative competence is less clear. Cognitive and linguistic (L1) development are intimately related in primary and secondary socialisation, but it is impossible to claim the same for foreign language learning. It is intuitively plausible that learning a foreign language is facilitated if the learner has advanced cognitive abilities (eg can abstract, generalise, draw analogies, etc.),

but at the same time it is possible that such cognitive abilities are fostered by foreign language learning. There is research evidence in the field of bilingual education which indicates that this may be so (Swain/Lapkin 1982).

10.2 Exemplifying communicative competence

To demonstrate the use of the components identified so far, and the integration and interaction of these, we will present two hypothetical communicative events which exemplify the kinds of situation that intermediate to advanced Danish users of English may be involved in.

Communicative event 1. A Danish medical student reading an anatomy textbook in English

As is the case with most higher education studies in Denmark, this student finds that some of the obligatory textbooks are written in English. At school she read plenty of English and American literature, but only a limited amount of non-fiction, mostly journalistic and social-historical texts. Her new anatomy textbook, however, is a dense presentation of a wealth of factual material. It is a totally different genre from what she is used to. Luckily she is highly motivated (she will also be examined for detailed understanding of the content).

Reading the text makes demands on her *receptive* competence in English; she makes notes in Danish. There are many unfamiliar *lexical* items, but these are well covered in the dictionary, even the more technical terms. However as she has as yet little experience of dissecting the human body in the laboratory, much of the content is rather remote from her experience. The task is cognitively demanding (in the terms of our speech production model, she has difficulty with top-down processing). As she is fairly new to her studies, her *pragmatic* competence, when reading scientific English texts, is limited, in particular her capacity to follow the structure of the arguments, relationships such as generalisation, exemplification and conclusion. The textbook makes great demands on her discourse knowledge, for instance how to interpret markers of cohesion between sentences, relationships of contrast, condition, result and many of the other characteristic features of scientific discourse. In short she lacks experience in handling the kind of expository prose that is common in academic textbooks. As reading is essentially a private activity, and as she is working on her own, she has only her own resources to draw on when making a synthesis of all the elements (pragmatic, discourse, lexical and grammatical) which together express the writer's communicative intentions.

Communicative event 2. Scandinavian teenagers in informal discussion at a peace movement gathering

The discussion begins with polite greetings, smiles, embarrassed pauses and a good deal of uncertainty about how they should get going. Present are one Finn, one Norwegian and a Dane. They agree on speaking English when it emerges that the participants are unable to understand each other's mother tongues. Once these introductory steps are over the Finn gets the business part of the discussion going by presenting a proposal for action. Making a coherent presentation makes great demands on her *pragmatic* competence, but as she is very familiar with the subject of planning peace demonstrations, the necessary *lexical* items can be *fluently* activated. The Dane and the Norwegian have no trouble in understanding the Finn, as they are familiar with the vocabulary and the sort of arguments presented. This is so, even though the Finn makes *grammatical* and *pronunciation* errors: she does not seem to be consciously monitoring for correctness, but rather concentrates on getting her points across, at times drawing on her *strategic* competence (she uses paraphrases and gesture) to fill in some lexical gaps. The Norwegian has been eager for some time to interrupt, but the Finn has held the floor successfully, making it clear by means of gambits and intonation that she has not finished. When there is a silent pause, it is the Dane who successfully takes over the initiative, coming in swiftly and politely with a request for the Finn to clarify whether she was making a suggestion or merely stating a fact: there were gaps in the Finn's *pragmatic* competence, as a result of which she had expressed herself ambiguously. It transpires that the Norwegian was anxious to clarify the same point, but that he has much less experience in participating in this kind of discussion than the Dane, who is therefore more confident than the Norwegian in operating in English.

These are very fragmentary descriptions of the two imagined communicative events, but they hopefully serve to make a number of points clear. All the components of pragmatic competence as listed earlier are necessary in any communicative event; different aspects of these components, as well as of the additional components of strategic competence and fluency, are drawn upon in different communicative events; some tasks make greater demands on particular components of communicative competence than others.

10.3 Dimensions of communicative competence

So far, our description of the components of communicative competence has been equally valid for communicative competence in a native language and in an interlanguage. With the exception of fluency, which we have restricted to spoken communication, all the components are necessary for anyone to be communicatively competent. We now discuss a number of 'dimensions' which are also relevant in a characterization of communicative competence, but which are of particular interest for descriptions of *communicative competence in a foreign language*, especially when the foreign language is taught as a school subject.

10.3.1 Communicative competence in a foreign language as assessed by native speakers

We pointed out earlier that the relationship between communicative competence and correctness is not a straightforward one. An important issue in the description of learner communicative competence is whether it is possible to state what effect learner divergence from a native speaker norm has on native speakers. This is an area where teachers are at a serious disadvantage. Often they are so familiar with learner language that they can understand most learner utterances, not least those containing transfer from L1. But how do native speakers react to the speech of learners? How significant are errors for comprehensibility? What do native speakers find distracting in learner language?

One way of providing answers to these questions is to use TOLERANCE TESTS. These are tests which elicit native speaker (in this case, British) reactions to samples of English produced by foreigners (here, Danes). Tolerance tests attempt to assess the effect that learner language has on native listeners, to specify which aspects of communicative competence are particularly important, and what impedes communication.

The risks that learners run are essentially of two kinds:

- learner language may be *incomprehensible*
- learner language may *distract* the attention of the listener away from the message and onto the form in which the message is expressed.[3]

In chapter 19 (19.5) we shall summarise a tolerance test which focussed on the comprehensibility of learners' written language. The main finding of this study was that lexical errors impede comprehension far more than grammatical ones. We shall here present a tolerance test of spoken language covering distraction as well as comprehensibility[4].

The corpus consisted of extracts from authentic conversations between a young Englishman with no knowledge of Danish and Danish intermediate learners. The learner texts were processed in two ways: a linguistic performance analysis was undertaken, and the tolerance of 300 British informants to extracts from the conversations was tested. For the linguistic analysis all lexical, grammatical and phonetic errors were identified. On the basis of this an error density measure (the ratio between the number of errors and the total number of word tokens) was calculated. A test was then constructed consisting of extracts lasting 2–3 minutes from the tapes of five learners, who between them spanned the top, middle and bottom of the error density spectrum. The tolerance test involved the British native speakers assessing the learners on a five-point scale for 14 bi-polar criteria, covering *language aspects* (eg good/bad grammar), *personality* characteristics (eg tense/relaxed), the *content* of what was said (eg interesting/boring), and *comprehensibility* (eg easy/difficult to understand).

One of the significant findings of this study, which involved a considerable amount of computer-assisted statistical analysis, was that native speakers were able to make significant judgements for each of the four factors, in other words that each of the learners was rated separately for language, personality, content and comprehensibility.

A second finding was that there was no evidence that a particular category of error (eg lexical) impaired comprehensibility more than others. In continuous text, such as conversation, there are many other cues which the addressee can make use of in order to reconstruct meaning. Thus one learner stated: "in 1933 the boys and girls get together in one [kɔ:ps] but er mostly there are girl troops

or scouts and boy scouts." Pronouncing the word "corps" as [kɔ:ps] did not lead to misinterpretations – though probably to a good deal of mirth – because in the context words like "scout organization" and "patrol" had also been used. Errors which were most likely to lead to actual misunderstandings or low comprehensibility were discourse level inadequacies such as incorrect use of conjunctions or pronominal reference across sentences. The authors conclude that, because there is no direct correlation between measures of correctness and of comprehensibility, whether an error will lead to poor comprehension or not will not so much depend on whether the error is of a particular kind (eg lexical, grammatical or phonetic), as on the linguistic context in which the error occurs. The negative effect of lexical errors may be alleviated by contextual support, whereas with discourse errors this is less likely.

A third finding was that low comprehensibility was related to extensive use of hesitation phenomena. It is reasonable to conclude that poor fluency, whatever the cause of it, leads to limited comprehensibility. In the light of this finding the authors draw the conclusion that in interaction with native speakers, and given contextual support, it may be more important to be fluent than correct.

As regards how far deviation from the target language code is distracting, it is hypothesized that distraction is directly predictable from the number of errors which an interlanguage text contains, regardless of error type.

The study does not provide definitive answers to questions about the relative importance of each constituent of communicative competence in relation to the reception of learner language but, to summarise, the results seem to imply:

- that none of the components of communicative competence can be ignored
- that lexis and inter-sentential cohesion, when used erroneously, are likely to lead to breakdowns of communication, but that in continuous discourse, such as interactional communication, isolated lexical errors may be clarified by contextual support
- that poor fluency impedes comprehensibility
- that a high density of errors, of whatever kind, is distracting.

10.3.2 Context-reduced or context-embedded language

As we have just seen, one and the same error, eg a lexical error, may have very different consequences depending on the context in which it occurs. Any sample of language use could be placed on a continuum at one end of which there is no support for understanding the language provided by the situational context, whereas at the other end there is a great deal of contextual support. At the CONTEXT-EMBEDDED end of the continuum, language is supported by a wide range of paralinguistic and situational cues, and meaning is actively negotiated and created by the participants. Comprehension is checked through immediate feedback. CONTEXT-REDUCED communication, on the other hand, relies primarily on linguistic cues to meaning and requires mastery of the symbolic system conveying the message.

For children, communication at home, with friends and in the playground is generally context-embedded, whereas school activities like reading and writing are much more context-reduced. The latter involve operating almost exclusively with abstract linguistic cues for such purposes as to narrate, to explain, to gain knowledge, to generalize, to enter a fantasy world, etc. An important aspect of success in school is learning to operate with context-reduced language.

In foreign language learning at the beginning stages, a basic problem is that the learner has limited experience both of the relevant linguistic code and of the contexts in which the language is used by native speakers. The text-based tradition of English teaching in the Danish Gymnasium attempts to develop language proficiency while introducing learners to an English-speaking world which is foreign linguistically, culturally and often also historically. It is therefore not surprising that those learners who are relatively more dependent on context-embedded language in their L1 have trouble in developing communicative competence in relation to texts of which they can only grasp the linguistic and cultural content with difficulty. More recent teaching methods and materials acknowledge this problem by providing much more contextual support for language than was the case 20 years ago, through illustrations, video, etc. Still, it is

important to remember that one of the end-goals of foreign language teaching, except perhaps for a minority of learners, is to be able to use the foreign language not only in context-rich, but also in context-reduced situations like reading and writing. It is therefore no solution in the long run to alleviate the task for learners by providing only context-rich environments for language learning.

10.3.3 Metacommunicative awareness

In our discussion of the components of communicative competence, we referred to the various types of "knowledge" which the individual must possess in order to be communicatively competent. We need to emphasize that "knowledge" is used here in a broader sense than in everyday language, where "knowledge" carries strong associations of consciousness. Communicative competence sometimes refers to the ability to communicate, to be proficient in communication, without the speaker having much understanding of the principles which underlie this proficiency. But communicative competence can also be regarded as referring both to knowledge in the sense of being *able* to communicate and to knowledge *about* communication. We believe that communicative competence, when it is an objective in foreign language teaching within general education, should incorporate more than just foreign language proficiency. Learners should also develop what we shall refer to as METACOMMUNICATIVE AWARENESS, conscious knowledge about the components of communicative competence, their interdependence and social functions.

In the same way as communicative competence encompasses linguistic competence, the notion of metacommunicative awareness has as one of its components metalinguistic knowledge, knowledge about grammar, phonology and lexis. It is therefore easy to see that there is nothing revolutionary about the idea that metacommunicative awareness should be a teaching objective within foreign language teaching. All teachers have probably found themselves trying to pass on to their learners knowledge about rules of grammar and pronunciation. But two points need to be made, to avoid misunderstanding.

Firstly, when teaching rules of grammar and pronunciation, only very restricted areas of metacommunicative awareness are covered. Indeed, one can argue that the areas covered are not *in themselves* terribly relevant, unless they are related to pragmatic and social considerations. Metacommunicative awareness assumes a focus on *pragmatic* competence.

Secondly, the teaching of meta*linguistic* knowledge is typically motivated by the belief that conscious knowledge will assist learners in developing their proficiency in the foreign language. This means that metalinguistic knowledge is taught as a means to an end (proficiency), not as an end in itself. Whether this is a good teaching approach or not in relation to proficiency is debatable (see chapter 11), but not directly relevant here. What we want to stress is meta*communicative* awareness as a teaching objective in itself, irrespective of whether or not this awareness will help improve proficiency.

Our plea for metacommunicative awareness in foreign language teaching might be countered by the following argument. Metacommunicative awareness should first be developed in relation to the code which learners know best, namely their L1, in which case it is the responsibility of L1 teachers to prepare the ground for foreign language teachers by raising the learners' consciousness about L1 communication. However, there is evidence that such consciousness-raising may work better if the process is initiated in an area in which the person is not directly involved (eg L2 communication), but which is similar to situations the individual can recognize from personal experience (L1 communication). This point is well expressed by the American anthropologist Muriel Saville-Troike (1982, 4–5):

> "One of the best means by which to gain understanding of one's own 'way of speaking' is to compare and contrast these ways with others, a process that can reveal that many of the communicative practices assumed to be 'natural' or 'logical' are in fact as culturally unique and conventional as the language code itself. A valuable by-product which emerges from this process is an essential feature of all ethnography: a sense of cultural relativism."

Footnotes to chapter 10

1. The concept of "linguistic comptence" is usually ascribed to the American linguist Noam Chomsky (see eg Chomsky 1965). One of the first major criticisms of this concept was by Dell Hymes, the American anthropologist, who emphasized the need for extending competence to comprise various aspects of language use (see Hymes 1972a).
2. The ad was printed in "Gymnasieskolen" in 1981.
3. We prefer the term "distraction" to "irritation", which was coined by Johansson 1973.
4. This study is summarised in Albrechtsen/Henriksen/Færch 1980.

Chapter 10. Follow-ups

1. Consider a number of more polemical articles on communicative competence and foreign language teaching in journals, eg *Sproglæreren*, and assess how the concept is used. Are some of the disagreements due to conflicting views on what is covered by the term "communicative competence"?
2. Analyse the declared goals for foreign language teaching in Folkeskole and Gymnasium and the relevant official guidelines in terms of the components and dimensions of communicative competence presented in this chapter. Could a more specific statement of goals for various levels of proficiency be envisaged? The present-day goals could be contrasted with those in earlier legislation, and changes traced.
3. "In order to state what is required for Danish learners to be communicatively competent in English, it is necessary to relate communicative competence to the communicative events in which learners participate, to their communicative intentions, and the social roles which their interlocutors (native speakers or other IL speakers) assign to them". Is this feasible?
4. Write out communicative event 2, section 10.2, as a textual transcript of what the participants might actually have said. What additional information on the event do you need in order to perform this task?
5. It might be claimed that social competence in Denmark and Britain does not differ significantly and therefore does not constitute a learning problem. Is this so?
6. Is it a reasonable goal to set for all learners of English that they should be able to communicate in context-reduced situations? Could one envisage collaboration between teachers of Danish and English to achieve this?

Chapter 10. Sources and further reading

For general surveys of the history and uses of "communicative competence", see Canale/Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Munby 1978 ch. 1 and Andersen/Risager 1981. There is a more explicit link to pedagogical applications in Piepho 1974, Breen/Candlin 1980, Edmondson/House/Kasper/Stemmer 1982, and Savignon 1983. See also the references in chapters 13 and 14.

On the principles of tolerance testing, and details of a number of ingenious experiments, see Johansson 1973 and chapter 18.

Theory-building in relation to bilingual education, in particular the elaboration of context-free and context-embedded language, and cognitively demanding operations, is principally the work of Cummins, see Cummins 1980, 1981. For a consideration of parameters in the spoken language, in relation to assessing the communicative competence of adolescent native speakers, see Brown 1981.

Chapter seventeen: Interlanguage

One approach followed in the study of foreign language teaching and learning rests on the principle that decisions about teaching necessarily presuppose an understanding of what is involved in *learning*. It is assumed that the primary source of knowledge which can lead to such an understanding is the language produced by learners when they use their own version of the foreign language. This "learner language" can be described as an INTERLANGUAGE, a language which is between two languages, the learner's L1 and an L2. Research in which the point of departure is an analysis of IL is referred to as INTERLANGUAGE STUDIES. This chapter begins with a short historical presentation of the background to IL studies. It then presents some central assumptions about the formal properties of IL systems and about ways in which IL functions in communication situations in which at least one of the speakers uses an IL.

17.1 Historical background to interlanguage studies

The boom in foreign language learning and teaching research, prompted by specific needs during World War II, particularly in the US, was for a long time strongly associated with developments in general linguistics. There was a well-established tradition, going back to the turn of the century, of systematically comparing two or more languages as a means of reconstructing prehistoric stages of the same languages. This approach was utilized for a different purpose during the 50s and the 60s: to describe areas of similarity and difference between two languages, namely the mother tongue of a group of learners, and the language they are to learn. The underlying assumption, based on behaviourist psychology, which was widely accepted at the time, was that learning would be easy in those areas where the two languages were similar, whereas problems were to be expected in areas of difference. Large-scale projects were initiated in the early 60s by the Center for Applied Linguistics

in Washington, D. C., and contrastive analyses of English in relation to German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian were produced. Contrastive analysis projects were established in a number of European countries in the late 60s, and contrastive linguistics became one of the most flourishing areas of linguistic research.[1]

That contrastive analysis is not capable of handling all the problems of foreign language learning was brought out clearly when the results of analyses of learner language became available.[2]

In the first place, many predictions about ease and difficulty in FL learning, based on a contrastive analysis of learners' L1 and L2, were not confirmed by analyses of the errors of foreign language learners in speech and writing. There was no simple one-to-one correlation between linguistic difference and learning difficulty. Areas which were assumed to be difficult sometimes turned out not to lead to errors, and vice versa.

Secondly, foreign language learners were observed to commit errors which could not be accounted for by contrastive analysis. These errors seemed to indicate that foreign language learning was in important respects similar to the process of L1 acquisition. For example, errors like *comed,* which are caused by a generalisation of a regular pattern, can be found both in children's L1 and in the language of some foreign language learners.

Dissatisfaction with contrastive analysis, and a shift in psychology from behaviourist to cognitivist theories, resulted in the emergence of a completely different type of research, which took as its point of departure not the two linguistic *systems* in general but three "languages" as they meet in the learner: that part of the L1 that learners know and master; the parts of the L2 that learners are actually exposed to; and, as something new, the learners' own version of the L2, their interlanguage. These are the essential components identified for analysis in Selinker 1972. Dealing with learner language as a language in its own right had already been advocated by Corder 1967.

This shift of focus from contrasting linguistic systems in general to languages actually present in the 'contact' situation (Nemser 1971) was greatly inspired by research in L1 acquisition. A number of research projects in the 60s and early 70s had carefully recorded and analysed the language produced by children and their caretakers, in order partly to outline the development of child language,

partly to assess how caretakers' language shapes the development of child language.[3] It was felt that the progress of learners of foreign languages could be analysed in similar ways.

The most important methodology within IL studies in the early 70s was ERROR ANALYSIS. This involves studying those elements in the learner's interlanguage which are considered to be erroneous in relation to a target language norm. A primary objective of such analyses was to decide what psycholinguistic processes may be responsible for the errors. A second aim was to describe the relationship between these processes and the social context in which the IL has been learned or produced. In later developments, studies were carried out which related errors to correct parts of learners' IL. Usually these studies were restricted to a certain field, eg use of the expanded tense (see Zydatiss 1976). Such 'performance analyses' (Svartvik 1973) provided a useful check on conclusions based on an analysis of errors only. Towards the end of the 70s, a number of researchers extended the scope of interlanguage studies in the direction advocated by Selinker in 1972, by relating interlanguage to the L2 to which the learner has been exposed, primarily in the foreign language classroom. This resulted in a number of studies of "teacher talk", the language used by teachers when addressing the class, as well as in studies of the interaction in the classroom between learners and teachers (see Seliger/Long 1983, Sinclair/Brazil 1982). Furthermore, a number of studies have appeared reporting on how learners perform in communication outside school (see eg Kasper 1981, Edmondson/House/Kasper/Stemmer 1982, Færch/Kasper 1983b).[4]

17.2 Interlanguage: definition and characterisation

One way of defining an IL might be as follows: an IL is a variety of language which is both formally and communicatively reduced when compared to languages used as native languages by adults. As well as applying to the language of foreign language learners, such a definition would cover child language, pidgin languages and, possibly, reduced varieties of native languages like "foreigner talk" (ie the way native speakers sometimes address foreigners by simplifying their L1).[5]

This definition has primarily been adopted by researchers who have been concerned with analysing the similarities between these various types of language. An alternative definition would be: an IL is a variety of language which exists in a contact situation between a learner's L1 and an L2. According to this, an IL typically has features in common with both a learner's L1 and with the L2, which means that the other varieties covered by the first, broader definition are excluded from consideration. It is this narrower definition of interlanguage that we have adopted in this book, as this is the variety we are specifically concerned with. This practical decision, however, does not exclude insights of a theoretical or methodological nature in parallel work on any of the other varieties of language.

Interlanguage can be looked at from two angles:

- in terms of *formal* characteristics, which have to do with interlanguage seen as a linguistic system
- in terms of *functional* characteristics, which specify how the interlanguage system is put to communicative use.

17.2.1 Formal characteristics

Probably the most important assumption of interlanguage studies is that interlanguage shares important characteristics with native language (cf Adjemian 1976). Interlanguage is therefore *not* seen as a distorted and amputated variant of a native language, but as a linguistic system in its own right.

This means that IL is assumed to be *systematic,* ie governed by rules. If one did not expect to find systematicity, there would be no point in describing learner language linguistically. There are two important points to be aware of, however, in connection with IL systematicity.

First of all, IL rules which account for such systematicity may differ considerably from native language rules. L2 rules are in principle of no relevance when describing IL systematicity. Put differently, whether or not IL rules are in accordance with L2 rules is not a relevant issue when describing their systematicity.

Secondly, systematicity may be different for different learners, even if these belong to the same group and have received teaching in

common. In descriptions of a native language, a certain amount of idealization of the data is needed when the objective is a description of rules observed within a certain speech community.[6] By contrast IL descriptions cover individual variation within groups of learners, because an important objective, beyond describing their language, is to clarify the role of psychological and social processes in FL learning. Systematicity is therefore typically of a much less general nature in IL studies than in descriptions of a native language.

A second feature of ILs, which they share with native languages, is that they are assumed to be *systematically variable,* ie that a language user may use different rules for expressing the same content, depending on the context in which the language is used. Stylistic variation by a native speaker might involve using "intoxicated/inebriated" in formal contexts and "drunk/tight/sloshed/..." in informal ones. Similarly, learners vary their performance systematically, not in the sense of using stylistic variants like native speakers, but regressing at times to previous stages of learning in more informal situations. A learner might write "he wants his parents to leave" in an essay but say "he want that his parents leave" in a group discussion with other learners.

Stressing similarities between interlanguage and native language in terms of systematicity should not obscure the fact that interlanguage differs from native language in important respects.

Interlanguage systems are typically *reduced systems,* compared to native language systems, both as regards the number and complexity of rules (pragmatic, syntactic, phonological, etc.) and the number of words they contain. An important concern of IL researchers has been to compare the IL of foreign language learners with other types of "simplified systems" (eg child language and pidgin languages), in order to find similarities, assumedly of a universal nature.

The following example is one of "teacher talk", observed in an English language class in California (Hatch 1978b, 416):

(Teacher (native speaker of English) explaining how to take telephone messages:)
"I want speak other person. He not here. What good thing for say now".

Foreign language teachers in Denmark are very unlikely to simplify grammatical structures in this way, and they often hesitate to acknowledge any similarity between pidgins and the language of their learners. Some degree of syntactic simplification is, however, a characteristic trait of learner language. Many Danish intermediate learners tend, for instance, to express futurity exclusively by using one of the following: *shall/will*/present tense + adverbial. In many contexts a different form *(to be to/going to/be about to/...)* would be more appropriate. This means that compared with native speakers, such learners use only part of the available repertoire: they have a simplified system.

Interlanguages are typically *dynamic systems* in the sense that they are likely to change, both by incorporating new rules and words and by revising already existing rules. This is an essential aspect of IL systems in the context of FL teaching. An alternative way of characterizing the dynamic nature of IL systems is to describe them as "permeable", as opposed to being "fossilized" (see chapter 11).

In specific cases, it would be an oversimplification to characterize an IL system as such as either dynamic/permeable or as static/fossilized. A more precise characterization would be to describe specific areas of the system as more or less permeable/fossilized. A particular IL speaker may have a fossilized phonological system but have a relatively permeable lexical or pragmatic system. .

When an IL is not kept active, there is a risk of it neither progressing nor fossilizing but regressing to a less developed stage. In spite of the fact that this is familiar to anyone who has given up using an L2, there have been few analyses of IL regression (but see Lambert/Freed 1982).

When interlanguage is looked at as a system in its own right, it is a contradiction in terms to talk about *erroneous* aspects of the system. The concept of error implies the presence of a linguistic norm, and as discussed above, an interlanguage sets its own norms. However, as norms play an essential part in education, there is a clear need to characterize parts of IL systems as erroneous relative to an educationally-defined norm. Although the notion of error is therefore not consistent with the internal logic of the interlanguage system, the analysis of errors serves an important function when interlanguages are described within specific, norm-oriented situations.

17.2.2 Functional characteristics

As compared to native language communication, IL communication for most individuals serves a more restricted range of purposes. It is typically used for communication in certain types of event only, and even within these events, communication may be reduced at the pragmatic, the referential and the modal level (see chapter 9). In this respect, IL communication is comparable to communication in pidgin languages (cf Todd 1974), which are typically used for restricted commercial transactions.

The native language serves an important function in creating group identity. ILs do not generally serve this function as they are not used for communicative purposes within social groups. Furthermore, there is a close link between native language and personal identity, established through primary socialization, whereas ILs do not usually attain the same affective or social significance for individuals.[7]

One of the reasons why IL communication is often reduced, compared to L1 communication, is that IL users may have difficulty in achieving their communicative goals because of limitations in their communicative resources. IL users sometimes experience this as having to function with a "reduced personality" (Harder 1980).

The pressures in IL communication are not on the IL user exclusively. The native speaker has to assess the level of the IL user's competence and adjust her language accordingly. Furthermore, the native speaker may become distracted (cf chapter 10) by the form of the IL user's speech, having difficulty in attending to content as a result. Such distraction may be triggered off by foreign accent, by frequent or salient errors, or by the production difficulties already referred to. Finally, native speaker and learner alike often have to resort to repairs and to use the language metacommunicatively in order to ensure mutual comprehension. This accounts for the sometimes tortuous and often demanding nature of IL communication.

Footnotes to chapter 17

1. For a general introduction to the history, purposes and methods of contrastive analysis see James 1980. The classic example of this approach is Lado 1957. Examples of the results of contrastive analysis are Stockwell/Bowen/Martin 1965, and Moulton 1962. For studies of the application of contrastive analysis to language teaching, see Fisiak 1981.
2. See Richards 1974 for a collection of papers.
3. See Brown 1973, Snow/Ferguson 1977. Hatch 1983 summarises input-studies in second language acquisition research.
4. For collections of articles reflecting these developments, see Richards 1974, Richards 1978, Hatch 1978c, and Corder 1981.
5. See Corder 1981 and Meisel 1980.
6. For a summary of these principles see Corder 1973, chapter 8.
7. But see Börsch 1982, which documents instances of learners experiencing foreign language learning and IL communication as emancipatory, when compared to communication in their L1.