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## Reviews/Comptes rendus

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### Communication in the Language Classroom

Tony Lynch

Oxford University Press, 1996

174 pages, ISBN 0-19-433522-4

*Communication in the Language Classroom* is a reference text for practicing language teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher trainers. The focus of the book is interaction-based teaching. One of the aims of the text is to show how real-life interaction works, thus giving teachers and teacher trainees a "more realistic picture of what to expect in the classroom" (p. 159) and a more realistic context in which to evaluate learners' performance. Another aim is to encourage teachers to include interaction tasks in their teaching by offering "the experience at second hand of seeing how various classroom tasks worked" (p. xv) in the author's teaching practice.

The book consists of two parts. Part One relates research findings on the nature of interaction among native and nonnative speakers of English. It talks about how teacher interaction with learners (teacher talk), learners' interaction with others (learner talk), the process of negotiating meaning, issues in comprehension, ways of modifying text (input), information and interaction, the role of interaction in facilitating language learning, and implications for classroom practice—how teachers can create better opportunities for interaction and communication for learners. Part Two focuses on applying the findings to teaching the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with one chapter devoted to each skill. Each chapter ends with a summary and suggestions for further reading. There is also a glossary of terms as they are used in the book and a bibliography.

The author uses a format that engages the reader on many levels. He appeals, demonstrates, and involves the reader in activities. For example, both in the Introduction and in the Postscript there is an appeal to each and every teacher of ESL or EFL, wherever they are, to consider the benefits of teaching through interactive tasks and to use them, no matter what their "valid" reasons against doing so may be. (The subtitle of the Postscript section, "Four reasons for not changing anything," indicates that the author is familiar with the realities of various language classrooms and the reasons for teachers' objections to interactive activities.) Throughout the book he demonstrates the complexities of creating discourse collaboratively and the validity of interactive teaching. He supplies illustrative examples from his own teaching practice and supportive evidence from research. The ex-

amples, real-life interaction transcripts of classroom tasks, transport the reader as an observer, overhearer, and analyst into situations of discourse-making in a second or foreign language, complete with illuminating insights into the learners' struggles as they negotiate meaning. The examples, admonishes the author, are not to be treated as "ready-made solutions" or "models of what to do or not to do" (p. xv); they are just samples for the reader to evaluate. The reader is also invited to get involved in "meta-activities," either to assess the problem or to decide on the answer regarding a particular communication situation.

One of the particular strengths of the book is that it effectively and continuously activates in the reader's mind the underlying principle of communicative teaching, that is, creating more opportunities for learners to engage in real interaction. It also brings into focus the main responsibilities of the language teacher: (a) mediating between the input and the learner, either through modifying texts or modifying interaction or tasks, and (b) making a teaching/learning item noticeable, that is, drawing the learners' conscious attention to the specific gap between their performance and that of a native speaker in communicating meaning through form.

The author's claim is not that all skills teaching should be (or can be) interactive in nature, but that a large number of techniques based on interactive principles could be successfully used for teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The chapters on reading and writing are particularly interesting from the communicative or interactive perspective. Teaching reading is viewed in the context of interactive comprehension processing and strategies, using background knowledge, context, and knowledge of language as the three main comprehension resources. There are implications for the selection of reading material and helping learners interact with the text and with each other about the text. A few techniques are shared with the readers: think-aloud interpretation, learners in a group taking turns as leaders through paragraphs, learners modifying same text for different readers, learners (not the teacher) setting comprehension questions about the text for each other. Teaching writing as an interactive process is viewed through the roles of the writer, the reader, and the teacher, all communicating "before, during and after writing" (p. 156). Considerations of *genre* (e.g., informal letter, notice, advertisement) and its specific reading audience would come first in the writing class, followed by all manner of feedback-gathering, meaning-negotiating interactive *process* with fellow learners and the teacher, and finished off by attending to the final *product* (correction and editing). A description of a writing lesson with a framework for interaction between writers and readers provides a concrete example of interactive, learner-oriented methodology.

Important issues of the classroom process in interaction-based teaching are discussed as well: the deemphasized role of the teacher in carrying out

classroom communication and the new role for language learners, especially when it clashes with their different cultural expectations, local educational norms, and traditions. To convince teachers of the feasibility and success of interactive language teaching outside the Western sphere of tradition, the author reports examples from numerically large classrooms of rural secondary schools in Orissa, India.

As the information on the back cover states, this book is intended as a basis for courses and seminars. Indeed, the language in the book sometimes resembles spoken discourse, characteristic of a lecture or a seminar setting. One gets the impression that the writer is physically present and addressing the audience as a lecturer would. It feels like participating in a live demonstration and sharing ideas. However, perhaps for that very reason, the book may be difficult to follow at times; for example, the absence of the visual contextual support of the in- and out-of-classroom oral interactions in the transcribed examples, although alluded to by the spoken discourse signals, makes greater cognitive demands on the reader and requires full attention to detail in following the text. Students in the university course that I taught, when asked for their opinion of the book as the course text, conceded that it requires great concentration to follow and understand but found it illuminating. They particularly appreciated the inclusion of transcripts and the analytic approach to interactions between learners presented in the broader context of classroom interaction research.

In summary, *Communication in the Language Classroom* is an engaging book with a sound pragmatic focus, well grounded in research and translates its findings into classroom techniques and procedures; a particularly useful text in TESL/TEFL teacher training, but practicing teachers will find it an interesting resource to consult as well.

*Grazyna Pawlikowska-Walentynowicz*

#### *The Reviewer*

Grazyna Pawlikowska-Walentynowicz, an ESL/EFL teacher, researcher, and lecturer, works at the Language Assessment, Referral and Counselling Centre (LARCC) at Catholic Social Services in Edmonton. She obtained her MSc in Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. Grazyna wrote the revised *Canadian Language Benchmarks: Working Document*, 1996.

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## **Idioms and Idiomaticity**

*Chitra Fernando*

Describing English Language series, Oxford University Press, 1996  
275 pages, ISBN 0-19-437199-9

Linguists have long been fascinated with idioms, such as *red herring*, *down in the dumps*, and the well-studied *kick the bucket*. They usually try to respond to the following questions: What distinguishes idioms from nonidioms; what

are logical criteria by which to categorize idioms; and how do idioms arise? Chitra Fernando, in her book *Idioms and Idiomaticity*, makes a useful contribution by posing and answering a fourth: What are the functional uses of idioms in discourse?

She begins with a review of some of the work of others who have examined idioms. She divides their thoughts into two parts: those that concern lexically and grammatically "regular" idioms, such as those mentioned above, and those that deal with "idiosyncratic" idioms, that is, those that involve either lexical or grammatical irregularities. Instances of lexically idiosyncratic idioms are *kith and kin* and *hell[bent] for leather*, and of grammatically idiosyncratic instances, *fancy free* and *the X-er the Y-er*, as exemplified by *the more the merrier*.

Also in Chapter 1, Fernando introduces two definitions of idiom. One makes a broad reference to language structure: Idiom relates to the extent to which certain expressions can have constituent parts altered in some way. The other sense, though, serves as her own working definition, that is, an idiom is a multiword expression that is conventional, not novel.

The author concludes this part of the book by making a few observations. First, the lexicon of English has a considerable number of verb + particle/preposition idioms, as well as of body part idioms. Second, idiosyncratic idioms can arise from either productive or nonproductive lexicogrammatical patterns. An example of a productive pattern is *the X-er the Y-er*, and of a nonproductive one, *fancy free*. Finally, she suggests that language learners would have more difficulty acquiring nonproductive idiosyncratic idioms, presumably because they have no recourse to a standard grammar rule or meaning composition.

In roughly the first half of Chapter 2 Fernando reveals her concept of idiomaticity and explores three salient characteristics of idioms. It appears that idiomaticity is the degree to which a multiword expression exhibits the properties of being an idiom. (I must confess that I did not find a clearly identifiable statement of what idiomaticity is throughout the book, including its Glossary.) Her lexicogrammatical classificatory scheme is not a discrete distinction of what is and what is not an idiom; rather, it is a continuum or scale.

According to Fernando, all idioms are conventional expressions: The constituents habitually co-occur. The lexicogrammatical structures of idioms range from invariant to restrictively invariant with respect to word substitutions, additions, and deletions, as well as to grammatical transformations. Instances of invariant idioms are *you're telling me* and *the tip of the iceberg*, and of restrictively variant, *rain/pour cats and dogs* and *keep one's cool/temper*. No idiom has constituents that are freely variant.

Moreover, idioms are multiword expressions. The shortest length is a two-word compound structure. Fernando claims that the maximum limit is a complex clause with no more than two subordinate clauses.

The third characteristic concerns semantic opacity, that is, the idiom's meaning is not merely the sum of its constituents' meanings. Fernando maintains that a conventional multiword expression need not exhibit this property to be classified as an idiom. Rather, idioms show a range of literalness. Pure idioms are nonliteral, for example, *spill the beans*; semi-idioms have at least one literal constituent sense and at least one nonliteral constituent sense, for example, *drop names*; and literal idioms obviously have no nonliteral element in their meaning, for example, *tall, dark, and handsome*.

The second half of Chapter 2 introduces the major focus of the book, Fernando's classification of idioms by their discourse function. The author identifies three types: ideational, interpersonal, and relational. Each class is discussed in detail in the three chapters that follow.

Fernando claims that ideational idioms serve to relate either the discourse content itself or its characterization in terms of specificity. Idioms that focus on content meaning may refer to actions, events, activities, entities, or attributes of these things. Examples include *do a U-turn*, *turning point*, *be in a pickle*, *a lounge lizard*, and *lily-white* respectively. Content meaning ideational idioms may also express the evaluation of items, for example, *matter-or-fact* and *a Trojan horse*, or convey emotions, as in *green with envy* and *walk on air*. Ideational idioms may refer to specificity, for instance, *to be exact/precise* and *the question is*, or nonspecificity and vagueness, for example, *and so on* and *kind/sort of*. The author concludes Chapter 3 with an interesting observation: Ideational idioms tend to allow restricted variance in their lexicogrammatical structures. This feature is important in that language users can thereby produce more figurative, elaborate, and cohesive discourse. For instance, she compares the use of the standard idiom *wave an olive branch* to an attitude-tinted variation *wave an olive twig*.

Interpersonal idioms communicate interactional strategies such as greetings and leavetaking, commands, agreement, opinion elicitation, and rejections. Examples are *bye for now*, *tell you what*, *say no more*, *what do you think?* and *come off it* respectively. Such idioms, like ideational idioms, can also characterize the discourse message, but instead, they can convey newsworthiness, sincerity, calls for brevity, or doubt, as exemplified by *guess what*, *believe you me*, *get to the point*, and *mind you* respectively. In Chapter 4 Fernando examines the use of interpersonal idioms in a variety of situations: requests for service, small talk, the conveying of good wishes and sympathy, forums and talk shows, and arguments. She notes that interpersonal idioms tend to be literal, not given to imagery, and formulaic in nature.

Relational idioms help discourse cohesion, and thereby its coherence as well. They promote the semantic unity of a group of utterances and structure

their juxtaposition. In Chapter 5 the author states that these idioms can be likened to one-word conjunctions with respect to their functional role in discourse. Some signal the sequencing of items, for instance, *in the first place* and *up to now*. Others integrate text by indicating contrast, comparison, cause, concession, or addition. Examples are *on the contrary*, *on the one hand ... on the other*, *so that when*, *at the same time*, and *in addition* to respectively.

Fernando covers a range of diverse topics in the sixth and last chapter, but one section titled "Practicalities" stands out as being particularly valuable to ESL teachers. Here she states that learning idioms helps language learners comprehend discourse structures, for example, lectures, in a topdown processing of information. Moreover, a knowledge of idioms saves the language producer from having to create completely novel structures and texts: They can use the conventional to bolster cohesion and coherence. In this section she reviews two ESL workbooks that are designed to aid in the acquisition of various types of idioms, such as phrasal and prepositional verbs.

The author herself suggests a couple of strategies to help language learners acquire idioms more readily. She relates the use of writing advertising copy and composing dialogues that incorporate idioms. Another way is by inference in reading: Learners are given authentic texts containing an idiom and are asked to determine the meaning of the idiomatic expression from the context.

I personally find the book *Idioms and Idiomaticity* to be thought-provoking. First, Fernando has a broad definition of idioms. Many would exclude Fernando's literal idioms from being idioms at all; rather, the optional characteristic of semantic opacity would become obligatory in their frameworks. Second, her use of multiple schema by which to classify idioms is perhaps a tacit acknowledgment that the definition of idiom is not straightforward. However, such variety gives ESL teachers and linguists a flexibility needed to help explain to others the many structures and uses of idioms.

I also like her prolific use of exemplifying idioms in her discussion, and her incorporation of authentic contexts, gathered personally by the author or mined from large general corpora. However, the book's Glossary is too brief and excludes some seminal concepts such as idiomaticity.

Finally, I caution ESL teachers, particularly North Americans, on a couple of points. First, this book is a formal, scholarly work about idioms; it is not a user-friendly resource of ESL methodologies and activities for learners. Second, Fernando is Australian, so some of the idioms chosen for amplification are not used in North America. *Jane and Joe Bloggs*, a two-gender equivalent of the North American *Joe Blow*, is an example of this problem: It is used in five section headings. Moreover, the authentic texts used seem to be either Australian or British, and many refer to past events in Australian

politics and news. This diminishes the effectiveness of the authentic texts' explanation and inference values for North Americans.

Mary MacKeracher

### *The Reviewer*

Mary MacKeracher graduated with a TESL Certificate from the University of Toronto in 1994. She is currently working on an MA in Linguistics at the same institution. Her Forum paper is on collocation, a topic closely related to idiomaticity.

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## Language Testing in Practice

Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer

Oxford University Press, 1996, 377 pages, ISBN 0-19-437148-4

Among educators, language testing (LT) often appears to have the reputation of being a highly specialized domain, possibly best left to the experts. Yes, it is true that LT involves many considerations, but a sound base as to the components involved should and can be made accessible to all those coming into contact with language tests for whatever reasons. *Language Testing in Practice* provides such a forum. It helps to demystify the design, development, and use of language tests by walking the reader through an approach that demands a close look at procedure. Rather than considering test tasks and the testing situation as inauthentic and unrealistic, it treats performance on tests as a particular genuine instance of language use. In a conceptual framework it accomplishes this by systematically relating test tasks to language use tasks (i.e., relating test tasks to non-test language use such as real-life tasks and/or language instructional tasks).

It must be stated from the outset, however, that reading through *Language Testing in Practice* is no quick and easy task. If one is not familiar with language testing discourse, parts of the book may appear challenging. A strength of the book is that the authors define all of their terms and give effective examples for clarification. In addition, chapter summaries, practical exercises, and further suggested readings are provided. On the other hand, even if you are familiar with language testing discourse, you may have to restructure your thinking in terms of measurement qualities. The field of LT is in the process of expanding some of its classical terms such as *validity* in order to address more appropriately current views of communicative teaching and testing. These book characteristics will become more evident as the content is described below.

*Language Testing in Practice* is organized into three parts: Conceptual bases of test development (Chapters 1-4), Language test development (Chapters 5-12), and Illustrative test development projects (Projects 1-10). The authors, therefore, first situate their approach to test development in a theoretical framework; second, they describe the approach; and third, they

provide 12 examples of authentic test development projects to illustrate the different uses of their approach.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the book and sets the tone by putting forth the rationale and objectives from the authors' point of view. Its content is central to the rest of the book and therefore time is spent here on its description. It is evident that Lyle Bachman and Adrian Palmer want to break down the barriers and misconceptions concerning what language tests should do and what they should be like. Their purpose is to help people become competent in language testing, either to develop new tests or to select existing tests. Part of this competence is knowing that each test is specific and therefore needs to be useful and appropriate to a given purpose, context, and group of test-takers. There is no one best test for any given situation (p. 7). The readership of the book is clearly stated and is based on the authors' experience in working with a variety of groups who appear to have benefited from their approach: language teachers, testing specialists, material developers, textbook writers, professional test developers, researchers, and university students. Again, due to experience, the authors believe their approach applies to a wide range of contexts. Examples throughout the book span from classroom quizzes and exams to high-stakes language tests for university entry or professional positions.

The remainder of Part One (Chapters 2-4) sets out a theoretical framework that builds on the content put forth in *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*, a book by Lyle Bachman published in 1990. The purpose of this framework is to provide a conceptual base to help demonstrate what the authors consider as the two basic principles for any testing effort: (a) the need for a correspondence between language test performance and language use in real-life or instructional settings; and (b) a need for a clear and explicit definition of the qualities of test usefulness. Because test results (i.e., scores) are used to make inferences about individual's language ability and often to make decisions about her or his future, Bachman and Palmer believe that anyone involved in any type of testing is responsible for maintaining these principles.

Chapter 2 specifically describes the concept of test usefulness. In other words, the most important quality of a language test is the use for which it was intended. Ideally, we wish to control the quality of tests. The authors set out a model of test usefulness to be used to evaluate a test throughout the complete development process. It includes the following qualities: reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality. Lengthy definitions and examples are given of each test quality. Briefly *reliability* refers to consistency of measurement; *construct validity* pertains to the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the interpretation that we make on the basis of test scores (p. 21), *authenticity* refers to the degree of correspondence between language test tasks and language use tasks (real-life or



instructional tasks); *interactiveness* is the extent and type of involvement of the test taker in accomplishing a test task (p. 25); *impact* refers to the effects that tests have on individuals, educational systems, society; and *practicality* considers the relationship between the resources required for any testing effort and the actual resources that are available. Bachman and Palmer consider these qualities to be integrated and stress that the individual qualities of any test cannot be evaluated in isolation; they must be evaluated in terms of their combined effect on the global usefulness of the test.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe further considerations for the test development framework. Because one of the authors' principles is the need to demonstrate a correspondence between language test performance and language use in real-life and instructional settings, two more components are to be considered. First, characteristics of tasks in tests and real life, and second, characteristics of the test-takers or language-users. The latter consists of personal characteristics, topical knowledge, affective schemata, and language ability. Language ability is not only language knowledge, but also how to use it as well (i.e., strategic competence). These components are considered in an interactional framework to serve as a basis for understanding how to design and develop language tests and how to use the results properly. After presenting a theoretical basis for developing and using language tests, Part Two (Chapters 5-12) provides a detailed discussion of the actual test development process. Three main stages are identified and gone through in detail: test design (Chapters 5-8), test operationalization (Chapters 9-11), and test administration (Chapter 12). Chapter 5 gives an overview of the process. Chapter 6 discusses how to write a design statement for a test including a description of the purpose, the real-life or instructional domain and task types, the test-takers, and a definition of the construct (ability) to be measured. Chapter 7 shows how to develop a plan to assess the usefulness of the test at all stages of the process, thus ensuring that the process is kept on track. Chapter 8 looks at the practical side of identifying, allocating, and managing the necessary resources for a test. The second stage of test development and use, operationalization, is begun in Chapter 9, which describes how to transform the design statement that was developed in Chapter 5 into an actual test through producing specifications for test tasks, a blueprint, and test tasks. Writing test instructions is dealt with in Chapter 10. The important component of scoring is described in Chapter 11 by considering a wide range of methods that are appropriate for specific types of tasks. Part Two ends with Chapter 11, which describes procedures for administering tests as well as how to collect information to ensure the usefulness of the test.

The purpose of Part Three is to provide examples of authentic test development projects that illustrate the approach of test development and use put forth in this book. The authors have chosen a wide range of 12 projects including contexts from a university placement test for a writing program,

an exit test for an adult immigrant conversation class, and an achievement test based on a classroom syllabus for primary schoolchildren, to name only a few.

Part Three serves its purpose well and can keep a reader on task throughout other parts of the book that may lose the reader. The main example of this is Part Two, which is extremely informative, but also dense. Although examples are provided in the chapters, it is often challenging to try to envisage this intricate process. A reader can easily become overloaded and then overwhelmed in attempting to follow and apply the explanations. So as not to lose this valuable information, one might turn to Part Three and select an illustrative example (Project 1 is the most complete). After reading through a step explanation in Part Two, one can then turn to Project 1 and immediately see how that step was applied. Graduate students have found this methodology helpful.

To conclude, this book is an in-depth undertaking into the development and use of language tests. It is important to note that it is not a "cookbook ... along with a list of recipes and procedures" (p. 8), but a theoretically based approach. It includes components that are consistent with the current views of communicative teaching and testing in a systematic manner. Such considerations have been voiced in the literature, but not described in an interactive framework and procedure such as is put forth in this book. The reader is sensitized to the seriousness and importance of appropriate testing and shown how well-developed tests can have a positive impact on individuals, educational systems, and society in general.

The hope of the authors is that this book will provide understanding and help develop confidence in the reader to make appropriate judgments and decisions in either selecting or developing language tests for a specific context. Whether it accomplishes its purpose is really contingent on the specific reader, but as demonstrated in this review the information is there for the taking. In my opinion this book can only benefit the reader in becoming more knowledgeable in the field of language testing, which is an area that can be accessible and does not have to remain a mystery.

*Carolyn E. Turner*

#### *The Reviewer*

Carolyn E. Turner is an associate professor in the Department of Second Language Education at McGill University. Her main fields of interest and research are testing and evaluation and curriculum development in second language education.

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