

CHAPTER ONE

ON AN INTRODUCTORY LEVEL

1.1. PROLOGUE

A mere mention of the phrase *language teaching* conjures up in most people memories ranging from a closed-focused instruction on language structure and rules, and linguistic conventions, to the (much celebrated) Communicative Approach espoused by the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). To others, this phrase cannot be limited to these. The scope overlaps into issues pertaining to the role that language plays in constituting, and in being constituted by the society. The focus of language includes, therefore, developing critical awareness of ideological gaps and silences latent in everyday discourse.

These views stem from traditional Western values and Western Marxism respectively (Van Dijk:1997a:260). The first view sees language as static. The formalised linguistics conventions, structure and rules, regarded as legitimate, are universalised and regulated for social and academic convenience. Mastery of these linguistic conventions guarantees an individual's success in life. Deviation from these linguistic conventions is at an individual's own peril. Language Awareness (LA) owes its existence to similar social concern. Its usual association with terms such as *knowledge about language* to designate a more conscious attention to properties of language, and language use is a clear testimony to this (Fairclough:1992b:13). This knowledge about language is believed to be supplementing the insufficient verbal learning tools in the homes, extending access to standard variety to children whose homes do not give them -- enough verbal learning tools (Fairclough:1992b:13). Evident in this quotation is the LA movement's extension of the notional-functional approach and the solid foundation of CLT which aims to improve learners' communicative competence (Young:1993:65). The compassionate tone foregrounded by the framework of LA

referred to above may appear flawless at face value. However, a closer look at the following exposes the fundamental flaws of LA movement: The constituents of the linguistic conventions -- that is whether all sectors of the society contributed on an equal footing if ever included -- in setting up the conventions; who formalises and regulates the conventions; for whose convenience these conventions are; and on whose discretion is success guaranteed. All these questions unravel the implicit ideological domination carried through language. The linguistic power dynamics are subtly backgrounded under the pretext of ensuring success. The second view originates from the tradition that perceives language as an arena of class struggle--one focus of which is over the meaning of words (Van Dijk:1997a:262). It further claims that words and longer expressions are the material of ideology, and that all language use is ideological. It is likewise observed that:

Discourse is the place where language and ideology meet, and discourse analysis is the analysis of the ideological dimension of language use, and of the materialisation of language ideology. Both the words and meaning of words vary according to the position in class struggle from which they are used--according to the discursive formation they are located within (Pecheux: Cited by Van Dijk:1997a:262).

This points to the banality of any attempt to separate language and ideology. The dialectical interplay and symbiotic relation of the two are too complex to be separated. Ideology, for instance, resides in language and is carried through it. Its residing mode is implicit in that its intended targets accept it unconsciously. Concomitantly these targets are placed into position of sources of their discourse, whereas actually their discourse and indeed they themselves are effects of their ideological positioning (Van Dijk:1997a:263). The sources and the process of their own position are

hidden from them. They are typically not aware of speaking and writing from a particular discursive formation. Moreover, the discursive formation people position themselves within are shaped by the complex whole in dominance of discursive formations called “interdiscourse” (Pecheux: Cited by Van Dijk:1997a:263). Most people are, however, not aware of this shaping. The fact of the matter is that this complex whole of dominance of discursive formation is in the hands of the dominant or powerful minority within the society. They access the discursive formation to coax the majority, who do not have access to this discursive formation, into accepting whatever they propagate. Language is always involved in such circulations and promotions of certain ideology in preference to the other, hence advancing the interest of the dominant group (Morgan:1997:3).

1.2. SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHING TODAY

The main question, however, is which of the two views raised above (Closed-focused instruction on language structure and rules, and the development of Critical Language awareness) characterises a typical language teaching practice in South African schools today? The situation here is too complex in that choosing a particular view as the sole framework behind the typical South African language practice could be problematic. The core contributing factors to this complexity is among others, the political scenario prior to 1994. The apartheid system credentialed and labelled people into extreme dichotomies: Black-white, intelligent-unintelligent, control-subservient with whites associated with all the words on the left hand side of the pairs. These determined how each group should live, think, believe and be taught. It left little room for questions. Each group had a different education department. The then ruling National Party ensured that the educational system operated according to this plan. The classroom became a microcosm of the central government in that teachers were compelled to determine and to conduct the classroom activities that minimized the opportunity for questions. As a result, teachers became mere drifters or authoritarians. Their purely technical training or simplified competency-based approach turned them into what Greene

calls mere transmission belts (1978:38). The question of:

the freedom of those they try to teach, the question of their students' endangered selves: All these recede before the tide of the demands for "basics", "discipline" and "preparation for the world of work". Teachers (artlessly, wearily) become accomplices in mystification. They have neither the time, nor energy, nor inclination to urge their students to critical reflection: they themselves, have suppressed and avoided backward looks (Greene:1978:38).

The learners did not have any choice except to be taught the cultural experience and history as structured by the apartheid system, and were expected to internalise them. This kind of approach to education had, and still has, a great impact on language teaching. The audio-lingual method, which dominated the language teaching scenario in the first half of the 21st century, is redolent of most of the features that could have been fundamental in setting up the political system outlined earlier. It focuses on the sheer teaching of linguistic rules. It resorts to a deductive approach. The teacher as the bearer of knowledge of the linguistic rules, the knower and the educator takes an authoritative role. The learners passively receive the instructions from the teacher without question.



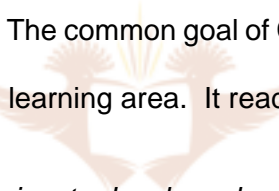
The kinds of questions which the learners may risk to ask are limited to linguistic rules. Graves rightly captures the essence of this scenario when he says that the teacher is the keeper of language rules, he owns it and learners merely rent it (cited by Monareng:1997:7). They, according to Dias and Hayhoe, use language in accordance with the owner's terms, for the language is not "theirs to mess around with" (1988:7). The authoritative facade presented by the teacher in the classrooms is nothing else but an indication of the dominion of the government over him. He himself cannot choose what and how to teach, and which textbooks to use. It is the exclusive realm of the ruling system, of which he is merely serving as its agent. The above teaching methodologies produce learners who might know language rules and can write correct sentences but can neither communicate in the target language nor use the language for ordinary day-to-day communication

purposes (Van der Walt:1999:12). The classic example is that learners can change a sentence from the affirmative to the negative form but they are unable to use the language to order a packet of chips in a restaurant. The formulation and the introduction of the communicative approach was the direct response to the limitation of these teaching methodologies. This approach revolutionised the language teaching industry. Its basic tenets are that the learners could communicate competently if: Grammar is taught functionally; teaching is learner-centred, that is, learners are engaged in a more active role such as group discussion and role play, to mention just a few, which will eventually encourage them to apply their linguistic knowledge as it is done in their daily conversation; and the four language skills are integrated in each lesson whilst technology and media are used as the resources for the lessons.

The central role given to learners challenges the dominant authority of the teacher and of the ruling system. The audio-lingual method, with its great potential to manifest and sustain a system of domination and control, is still the core language teaching method. Although some aspects of communicative approach are incorporated, most teachers still maintain that their learners need to know the rule before they can communicate (Van der Walt:1999:12). The main goal of the communicative approach, on the other hand, is too parochial in the current paradigm. A radical revision of the objectives of language teaching is imperative. A paradigm shift in the South African schools curriculum is characterised by the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). The emphasis of OBE is, among others, on the development of learners' critical and creative thinking, and on an integrated approach to education which rejects a rigid division between academic and applied knowledge, between theory and practice, knowledge and skills, and between head and hand (Gultig *et al*:1999:5). Language, Literature and Communication (LLC), and Art and Culture are some of the core learning areas that reflect this integrated approach. The connection between the two learning areas, for instance, is important to note. Language serves as a communicative vehicle for expressing artistic and socio-cultural norms. Since it shapes and is shaped by the

society, language is embedded within ideology. It is therefore not neutral. The possibility of subtly perpetuating a particular ideological position at the expense of others, discursively, is high. Contemporary social life and processes of social change are centrally and essentially linguistically mediated (Fairclough:1997:3).

It is within this context that the Critical Language Awareness (CLA) perspective becomes crucial. Grounded on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), CLA contextualizes language study within the society and critically highlights the role played by language in creating, recreating and maintaining the discursive practices of the society. The emphasis is on a theory-practice link for developing consciousness about language and power (Bloome and Talwalkar:1997:105). This role of CLA is in line with the quest of curriculum 2005's (C2005) for an integrated curriculum and the development of learners' creative and critical skills. The common goal of CLA and C2005 is further indicated by the Specific Outcome 2 (SO2) of LLC learning area. It reads:



This specific outcome aims to develop a learner's understanding of the way in which language is used as a powerful instrument to reflect, shape and manipulate people's beliefs, actions and relationships. The complexity and sensitivity of a multilingual context specifically requires the development of a learner's skills to interpret and consciously reflect on how language is used (Western Cape Education:1997:17).

This kind of practice challenges any language pedagogy that sees language solely as an object of study -- an object that is totally unrelated to other social practices. The CLT's chief concern of purely developing learners' communicative competence is also challenged as not good enough. The fact that the larger part of our language teaching community, particularly the English Second Language (ESL) context, still adopts the audio-lingual perspective, with some sparsely tinted aspects of CLT, is worrisome. Firstly, this practice is in direct conflict with the current paradigm reflected by the Critical (Cross-Field) Outcome (CO) outlined in the South African version of OBE - - that is, the development of an autonomously critical, problem solving and creative individuals.

Secondly, by implication this is an irrelevant practice, because learners produced by this system are ill-prepared to contribute to social debates that critically question, model and remodel the basic framework of our democracy for the advancement of the society. Their sheer functional linguistic training does not enable them to recognise and question the social, political or ideological roots of either a written text in black and white or an oral text presented by, for instance, a political demagogue. They neither value their own thoughts nor exercise their autonomy to challenge an opinion. Their chances to develop a multi-dimensional view of the world is remote. They regard an oral or a written text as a container of meaning which reflects an absolute reality (Monareng:1997:62). Such a closed-ended perspective deprives them of the opportunity to partake in the dynamic participation for the democratic citizenry. Thus a research project which attempts to suggest how a language learning programme that develops learners' critical communicative competence can be implemented in ESL is inevitable. If the said language learning programme perceives language as an irreducible social practice with inherent contesting ideologies it becomes more relevant to the 21st century (Hodge and Kress:1993:202). Furthermore, if that language practice brings in the critical dimension to the way language is used in the society, it behoves language researchers to pursue it. This obligation is the driving force behind this study.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research attempts to address the following question: How could the CLA perspective be adopted to facilitate ESL learners' development of their critical response to everyday discourse?

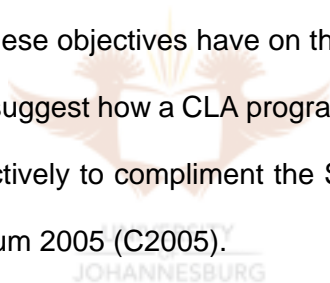
This question is based on three assumptions: Ideological power-play inherent in our daily discourse is likely going to continue to undermine any attempt to build a vibrantly fair democratic society; ESL speakers are likely victims of subtle manipulations and ideological domination mediated through a language that is not their mother tongue, and this likelihood becomes worse if their mother tongue pedagogy does not address issues related to language and ideological power; and efforts to incorporate critical perspectives language study such as CLA in an ESL class are inadequate. In an

attempt to answer this main question, the following sub-questions arise:

- What are the typical classroom activities, textbooks and teaching methods used currently in an ESL class?
- How do all these define the subject specific outcomes of language teaching?
- What are the actual observable language teaching objectives?
- What impact do these objectives have on the development of the learners' critical response to language use?
- How can a CLA programme facilitate this development?
- How can it be introduced effectively?

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are to: Establish the typical ESL classroom exercises, textbooks and teaching methods in vogue; examine all these to determine the implied language teaching objectives; determine the impact these objectives have on the development of the ESL learners' critical response to language use; suggest how a CLA programme can facilitate this development and how it can be introduced effectively to compliment the SO2 of the South African version of OBE, otherwise known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005).



1.5. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research was conducted in the Goldfields area which is situated in the Free State province. This area is made up of two school districts, namely, Welkom and Odendaalsrus. A map showing the location of the Goldfields area is attached as Appendix A. Both districts have fifty one public secondary schools that offer ESL. The focus of this research was on ten of these schools (that is twenty percent of the fifty one schools). Five schools from each of these school districts were selected for this purpose. Grade eleven was the main focus of this research.

1.6. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data were collected in the form of questionnaires completed and recorded interviews conducted on grade eleven ESL learners and teachers of the ten selected schools. The phenomenological mode of analysis was used in analysing the interviews and questionnaires. In the case of the interviews the following procedure was adopted:

Listening to the interviews for a sense of a whole: transcription of the interviews; delineating units of general meaning and meaning relevant to the research question; eliminate redundancies; clustering units of relevant meaning; determining themes from the cluster of meaning; writing a summary of each individual interview; identifying general and unique themes for all interviews; and writing a composite summary of all the interviews which [captured] the essence of the phenomenon [under investigation] (Cohen and Manion:1995:292-6).

The same procedure was followed in the analysis of the questionnaires. However, the first two steps were replaced by: reading through the questionnaires to gain a sense of a whole. The section, on the questionnaires, that required biographical details was subjected to basic statistical analysis for instance, an indication of the total number of male and female respondents, the total number of respondents in accordance with their first languages.

1.7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions, based on the presuppositions outlined in this chapter, are drawn from both the theoretical and empirical chapters. Recommendations, appropriate to the purpose of this study, are thereafter made.

1.8. OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter two provides a descriptive account of the debate around the phenomenon of world

Englises under one main theme: Standard English versus Non-Standard form of English in Education context. It presents the social and political dynamics that oblige Anglophone countries to consider the re-standardisation of English to accommodate non-standard English varieties used by people whose mother tongue is not English. A brief account of the status and struggle of Ebonics in America and the South African Black Englishes is given by examining the pros and cons of using these non-standard varieties in Educational Institutions. The stance of this study in this regard is clarified. This shapes and gives the concept and the application of CLA perspective a focus within the limit of an ESL context.

Chapter three is a psycholinguistic account. It seeks to clarify the question of ESL teaching by focusing on the relationship between language and thought, and language and learning. The significant point is to posit possible area(s), within the relationship between the former pairs, in which language teachers may intervene to facilitate a profitable language teaching thus creating a better foundation for the application of the CLA perspective. The logical starting point is the discussion of views ranging from Psychologists, Educationists to Linguists. Theories of people such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Ausebel, Feuerstein, Bloomfield, Saussure and Chomsky are synthesised. A reference to Krashen's study on second language acquisition is also made to further illuminate the nature and challenges associated with second language teaching.

Chapter four presents the theoretical foundation of Critical Language Awareness. Three interrelated themes are described and reflected upon with regard to language study: What it entails, why and how it changed over a period of time. These thematic questions are discussed in relation to shifting paradigms. Hence an extensive examination of language movements starting from discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis to critical language awareness is undertaken. A reference to the concept of critical literacy and to emancipatory discourse is also made. The complexity of the term discourse is acknowledged by a brief outline of various definitions of the term

given by different scholars -- ranging from Foucault, Van Dijk to Fairclough. The intention is to relate CDA with CLA. A closed-focused review of both CDA and CLA is done to scrutinize the manner in which language as a social phenomenon, and as a carrier of cultural codes can become more clearly apparent in the engagement with works of writers and speakers for whom language is not merely a deterministic tool, but a sufficiently malleable medium through which socio-cultural assumptions and the taken-for-granted of much of everyday life can be revealed and challenged (Bakker:1985:9).

Chapter five contextualises this study within the current South African educational paradigm. It discusses OBE within the framework of C2005. A reference to the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) is made. An expository comment on the implications of the generic language syllabus-- LLC-- on language teaching is made. The questions of skills and competences to be achieved by the learners are discussed in relation to the SO of LLC and the CO of the C2005. Furthermore, this chapter briefly collates the thematic issues raised in the preceding three chapters so as to establish the implications these issues have on current language educators' training programmes. The essence of an ideal teacher, language teacher in particular, is explored intensively by focusing on Greene's concept of Wide-Awakeness and Moral Life, Thoreau's dictum of arousing people from somnolence and ease, and Camus' idea of "the plague"-- the terrible distancing and indifference. All these are juxtaposed with a multitude of theories as epitomised by Cushman in the following quote:

The true pedagogue is a dialectician. In the first place, he knows how to induce perplexity where ignorance is joint with conceit of knowledge. By plying the mind of the pupils with appropriate questions he invites a reconsideration of conventional and engrafted opinion. He engages in joint-inquiry with his pupil... He solicits response and cross-examines each answer with a view to its implications. In this way he clears up the false assumption of deposited opinion (Cited by Abbs:1979:14).

The main point is to discuss and discern the theoretical foundations and convictions behind an ideal language teacher. The influences of these foundations and convictions are linked with the approaches, methods and contents and activities appropriate to the current and to the future language teaching and language teachers education paradigm.

Chapter six explains how the research instruments were used to collect data. It also explains why these research instruments were preferred to others. It further details the problems encountered in collecting the data.

Chapter seven gives detailed information of the research data and its analysis. Some of the actual wording of the questionnaires and the transcripts of the interviews are presented and analysed.

Chapter eight draws conclusions from the literature review and the empirical components by referring to the pages within the dissertation which exhibit that: The CLA perspective is an integral part of a meaningful language learning and teaching; and that this perspective is not adopted as part of language learning and teaching in the context under investigation. The strategies that could be adopted to implement the CLA mode of language learning and teaching are suggested.

