

THE LANGUAGE FOCUS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH

Mahmoud Okby
English Department
Kuwait University

ABSTRACT

This research investigates a problem rooted in the perpetuated tradition of English instruction at the liberal arts college. It treats of a discernible **underaction** in the provision of adequate training in **language proficiency** for learners of English, both Native and Nonnative.

It is hypothesized that a diffusion of the necessary focus on English-as-a-language may be accounted for in terms of:

1. Some false assumptions relative to the status of English as a language in the context of humanistic studies.
2. Confusing language training with linguistic studies.
3. Handling of literature within the narrow limits of verbal art forms.
4. Equating the incidental, textual study of English with organized training in the actual use of that language in specific communication situations.
5. Allowing little or no room in the English curriculum for the unified conduct of such training at all levels.

Following an exposition of the foregoing assumptions, a model of language use is presented, whereby a sharp focus on language training is maintained, while the natural integration of English language and literature is spontaneously effected.

For all practical purposes that can no longer be overlooked, the way to achieve our ultimate objective is to devise new programs for training in consorted **language behavior**. Thus, by accomodating the development of English as a Medium of Communication (EMC), we can equip the liberal arts graduate for the multiplicity of tasks involved in the **production** and perception of literature at large. His own interests and inclinations would be expected to guide his choices from a dispensed balance of courses and activities.

Whether the humanities in a modern liberal arts college are still traditionally oriented, or whether they have opened up to an extent favourable to the reception of influences from the developing social and behavioral sciences in close proximity, is a broad question which rests, in the main, on the efficiency of responses made by the respective academic departments to new challenges necessitating one form of curriculum change or another. It is fairly well known that some leading English departments, at various colleges and universities all over the English speaking world and elsewhere, have sooner or later reacted positively to the pressing advocacy for curriculum change. They have done so, partly in compliance with the need to meet new developments within the English discipline, such as the emergence of modern English linguistics, both theoretical and applied, and partly in response to student practical needs in a fast changing world. However, when the particular change called for is observed to be somewhat overdue, in spite of the availability of scholarly expertise and technical facilities, a serious problem is suspected, and exploratory research of this kind is on its way.

The problem of 'underaction' in providing adequate language proficiency training at the college level for learners of English, both Native and Nonnative, is not newly identified.¹ What is suspected, however, is that the intricacy of the problem may stem from misinterpretations of the basic philosophy of 'humanistic' training in a 'traditional' liberal arts college, where efforts to introduce changes to move up with the times have been resisted one way or another. It is not to be inferred, of course, that, at any time in the past, there was some kind of permissiveness, within the typical liberal arts college, relative to the acquisition of mastery in the English language. On the contrary, such a college had a special clientele, and language competence was almost taken for granted. But other times, other teachings. If liberal arts students today are different in basic interests and academic inclinations; if their outlook on possible occupational requirements determines countless other uses for English in life; and if the liberal arts college has incorporated within its ranks social and behavioral scientists, who can shed some light on the concept of language as human behavior, on what is involved in language learning and communicative interaction, among other related notions — then something truly effective must be attempted, at the root, to meet this emergency in college English instruction. It may be fairly stated that underachievement in the field of **English as a language**, English as **communicative behavior**, has never been so acutely sensed, as it is now, both at home and abroad, in a world that has never stood in greater need of communication in the English language.²

This research is mainly concerned with the theoretical foundations that may be screened through the **traditional** structure of

college English programs, wherever these programs may be identified today. Our chief aim is to find out to what extent the problem of malachievement, or underachievement in the development of general proficiency in English as a language may be accounted for in terms of inadequate theoretical formulations of the **language-literature integer**. If any reference is made to teaching approaches, it should be considered only incidental, and perhaps called for by the need to clarify a point or two in the theoretical framework, with reference to application in the instructional process. We propose to try and account for a presumed diffusion of the language focus in the college English program, through the identification of a number of misconceptions and false assumptions underlying the time-honored practices, some of which seem to defy common sense. As we go along, we will recommend the forms of change deemed necessary to rectify such diffusion, and hopefully remedy some of the deficiencies.

Even though it so happens that, in constitution, the traditional programs of both Native and Nonnative college English display more or less the same features suspected to be responsible for the presumed diffusion of the language focus, we will not be complacent about such academic mimicry. For instance, one flagrant manifestation of it is the relative exclusion of speech training in Nonnative English departments, where students stand in dire need of it, and where there are no speech departments in the vicinity to offer complementary courses. One can easily imagine the total desperation of these students, graduating with neither insights into speech dynamics, nor adequate practice in the interactive process of actual speech communication situations. Therefore, wherever such defects call for a special mention, however brief, we will make it part of our discussion as we pursue our scheme of presentation. We need hardly emphasize that the valid distinction between Native and Nonnative English would be expected to have its practical implications. It would be up to those responsible for application to keep an eye on the points at issue in this respect.

Our working hypothesis may thus be briefly stated in the following set of propositions, which provide the broad guidelines for this investigation.

First, while the issue of **language proficiency** may be recognized as one of the chief aims or purposes of English instruction in a liberal arts college, it does not seem to be adequately accomplished, judging by signs of dissatisfaction observable in both Native and Nonnative English quarters. Misdirected efforts may be tentatively accounted for in terms of false assumptions suspected to underlie the structure of operation within the limits of the typical, traditional English curriculum.

Second, a **diffused focus** on training for language proficiency, betrayed by the traditional structure of college English instruction, may be rectified through the adoption of a **communication theory** approach to curriculum development.

Third, within the framework of a proposed model of language use, suggested by such an approach, a natural **integrative scheme** of language and literature may be effected to substitute the polarity and anithesis between them, which may be found at the root of the language proficiency problem.

Fourth, thus, it appears that the systematic development of the college English curriculum, to meet the desired objectives, should be attempted through a broader definition of literature and a powerful theory of language, most comprehensive in coverage.

If we ask how the study of college English within the traditional setup is expected to cater to the development of language proficiency, which, as we have tentatively suggested, is a degree of efficiency in **language use**, this is about all the help we can get. In the first place, the college English curriculum seems to be built on the assumption that training in the use of English as a language and the study of English as a literature belong to two stages of instructional service in the process of learning. Once a student has gained admission into college, he is theoretically ready for a shift in English instruction from the focus on language use to another focus on **literary study**. A liberal arts college is a place for **humanistic training**, not for language instruction, designed to sustain the development of verbal skills for communicative use at higher levels. In other words, it is erroneously supposed that the average highschool graduate, has, in a fashion, mastered his verbal communicative skills, which, after all, are purely **mechanical**, and therefore need no further training at college! Thus, new objectives are identified and catered to at this level. In the interests of humanistic training, the overall orientation of English instruction is centered on the aesthetic study of literary works, no matter whether or not the student is ready and fit for it. At a liberal arts college, the student is expected to study, observe, acquire knowledge and insights, get refined, etc. But he is somehow expected to be able to communicate his thoughts and feelings with clarity, precision, economy, and sufficient articulation. It is his own responsibility! ³.

Whatever may be said about the availability of class discussions, and of writing assignments such as book reports, research papers and the like, many of us are aware that, as far as the student is concerned, the balance always tips over in favour of one type of activity, namely **silent reading** for comprehension. In a class of 20/25, the average student does not have much of a chance to express himself and

communicate in **speech** or **writing** and the fewer opportunities he has for language use upon stimulation, the more incapable of self-expression and communication he is rendered, and so forth in a vicious circle. Erroneously again, it is somehow taken for granted that the student's general proficiency in the use of the English language for communication purposes is an automatic byproduct of his exposure to literary studies, with the more recent meagerly addition of linguistic studies. To put it differently, the acts of using English in response to real life situations and the academic tasks involved in the analysis and criticism of literary works of recognized aesthetic quality, or in the observation and description of general linguistic phenomena, are correlated in terms of some vague causal relationship, where the efficiency of the **speech act** is considered a natural outcome of the **preceptive task** attempted by a patient student of language and literature. Accordingly, no specific course of training is really needed to help the student accomplish the speech act with efficiency. The whole area of speech training is not represented in the English curriculum, except perhaps in rare cases, where the English Department is named the Department of English and Speech! Nor indeed is writing adequately represented in the form of a well graded and integrated program, covering the four-year span of undergraduate work. In most cases, Freshman composition at the bottom of the ladder is recommended for all students, while Creative Writing at the top is, understandably, done justice to only by the selected few. It is clear from all this that while the **productive** side of the language training equation in particular is shamefully neglected, there is confusion between English for the natural and practical purposes of general communication and English for purposes of imaginative composition and art appreciation.⁴

Then, there is the additional confusion created between courses in **English as a language**, and courses in **theoretical English linguistics**. Among those innocently responsible for the reduction or elimination of the former type of courses are colleagues who doggedly assume that any college English course in language, such as Scientific English, or Conversational English, is to be automatically dismissed as a course in linguistics, and if linguistics is 'said to be' dry, knotty abstract, and perhaps way above the level of undergraduate achievement, then the English language course in question is bound to be dry, knotty, abstract and scary. They never stop to think of the difference between using the English language at various levels of interaction, and talking about English in the context of human communication. If such 'talk' may be reserved for the initiate in graduate school, training in the actual use of English is indeed for everybody at all levels, and should never be curtailed.

In brief, within the traditional orientation of humanistic studies in a liberal arts college, English is treated as a subject of art: art composition and art appreciation; it is the special domain occupied by authors and works of imaginative literature, presented to the average student for critical study and observation, in the light of philosophical and aesthetic discussions. Because there is usually more than enough to do, by way of elucidating the quality and value of a distinguished literary product, to enhance its appreciation by the average student, the characteristic linguistic features of that product are rarely scrutinized within a consistent structural or functional framework, that could be utilized for the development of the student's performing ability. No specific language focus may be readily identified, or consistently maintained. No specific language theory may be subscribed to or challenged. At best, linguistic reference is rhetorically stylistic, without supportive analytic evidence based on broad theoretic foundations.⁵ It is very often incidental and sporadic in nature, bound to be ineffective in the process of language acquisition and maturation.

Even in the more progressive English departments, where a certain number of odd courses in general and applied English linguistics are offered to supplement the greater bulk of offerings in literature, the language focus is no less diffused. When linguistic analysis is added to literary analysis, the focus on preceptive skills remains stronger than that on productive skills, and as a result of the **imbalance**, the all-round development of language proficiency stays below the mark. Grown-up Johnny may still find it no easy task to listen or read and understand, once he finds himself in unfamiliar surroundings, with respect to topic, communication situation, or otherwise. Naturally, his difficulties would be compounded, when he attempts to speak or write in the hope of being clearly understood; for these are circumstances calling for the efficient operation of two **neglected skills**. By the same token, the average student of Nonnative English, whose orientation in college English instruction happens to be the same or similar, finds himself even more handicapped. If we need proof of this state of affairs from English-speaking countries, the evidence is indeed overwhelming; and if such is the case among native speakers of English, one can easily imagine the state of college English, as a medium of communication, in Nonnative English quarters.⁶

The question now arises as to whether the traditional view of the humanities is responsible for this muddle. From the foregoing observations about the typical scheme of the English program at a liberal arts college, one is tempted to assume that, wherever this state of affairs may still exist, the academic view of the humanities must have developed its own blind spots, some of which have resulted in the relative absence of specific training in the acquisition of language

proficiency. Understandably, the Renaissance distinction between the secular letters of the revived Latin and Greek authors and the theological letters of Medieval schoolmen afforded the study of language and literature, including oratory, a central position among other scholarly pursuits as the core of the humanities. It looks as though, with the passing of time, the notion of **humanism** has, through a growing excessiveness of reactionary tendencies to scientific developments, acquired certain **purist** restrictions, which have threatened to stifle its basic concern with human life and human values, and thereby held its normal progress in check.⁷ To make a long story short, some **taboos** have been identified in the sphere of human knowledge, and avoided like plague across the broad spectrum of disciplines in Academe. Scientism and elegant experimentation, all fields of application to the practical needs of human society, statistics and the use of computers, any reference to cybernetics, or even to animal communication — all these and similar taboos have been rated by some humanists as **trivial, ahuman, if not dehumanizing.**

Consequently, the **study** of language, as an **adjunct** and handmaid to the study of literature, of the artistic, creative variety, has in most cases been cribbed and confined within the limits of **traditional rhetoric**, as may be exemplified by the styles of the masters of English and American literature. Attempts to modernize and democratize such rhetoric along **descriptive** lines have, quite often, been resisted, most probably because they smack of the **scientism** of modern linguistics, with its broad-spectrum sampling practice, its reliance on statistics, culminating in its current use of the computer. As for the development of English as a complex of language-skills, which is the central issue of our investigation, it has been treated as one of those trivia that should be kept outside college. According to the purist outlook in the humanities at college, there is but the study of language as a humanistic study, only fit for scholars and philosophers, who refuse to see its identity established outside the sphere of artistic composition. Hence, training in the acquisition of language-skills belongs elsewhere. It is the concern of schoolmasters in grade-school workshops, whose job is to devise mechanical drills to hammer in basic language patterns up to the sentence level at the highest. For guidance, those schoolmasters could take courses with linguists in the applied field of linguistic science. Therefore, as the purist argument goes, language training in the sense usually endorsed by linguistic scientists, whether general theoretical or applied, is really out of place in a liberal arts college devoted to humanistic studies.

Now, setting aside **all** the work done in **all** schools of descriptive linguistics by those responsible for the development of the **science** of language and its various applications to language instruction, we propose to turn to philosophy, one of the great pillars of the

humanities, for a more enlightened outlook. It so happens that, during the past five decades or so, a silent upheaval in the philosophy of language has been going virtually unnoticed by such 'purist' humanists. Having in mind the contributions of language philosophers like Cassirer, Ogden and Richards, Carnap, Stern, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Susanne Langer, among others, one could easily demonstrate how philosophy has maintained and developed its close interest in language at large, partly through the work of such analytic philosophers, and partly through its offspring collaboration with descriptive linguistics in the fields of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and anthropological or cultural linguistics. In other words, the progressive mobility of philosophy has kept the doors wide open for disciplinary expansion and development through differentiation into the social and behavioral sciences, as we know them today, and thence, for collaboration among the disciplines with respect to vital phenomena such as language. This is a remarkable disposition worthy of imitation within English as a discipline. If humanists of the purist order still insist on treating language acquisition and the development of human communicative skills as mechanical trivia, it is their privilege; but they should be able to disown philosophy and its offspring as humanistic pursuits. They might as well disregard the social and behavioral sciences at large, just because they happen to be **sciences, social and behavioral**.⁸

Ironically, however, the recommended Communication Theory Approach to the development of the English Program is itself a social science contribution of no small magnitude. It has two major components; a Communication Orientation to determine power/influence relationships in verbal interaction, and a Language Model consonant with this orientation, on which to base the English Program Design. Following from the assumption that the forces at work in college English instruction do not seem to be properly set for the development of language proficiency with the average English department student, it is suggested that we adopt a new setup, whereby the different types of teaching and learning activities may coalesce into a unified plan of action to score our specific objectives. This new setup is a re-orientation of all English studies and practices, according to pertinent implications of the process of human communication. As we have just hinted, these implications would be applicable to the dual task to be subsequently dealt with: 1. the selection of an appropriate language model amenable to a sharpened focus on **function**, and 2. the construction of a program characterized by the **integration** of language as system and language as behavior; and simultaneously of language as behavior and literature as the designed manifestation of such behavior in communication, or **discourse**, both **oral** and **written**.

The following are some of the referred to implications of com-

munication theory,. First, if the normal use of language is purposive, and if all purposes of language use culminate in human interaction, then our major objective in English language instruction at all levels, and particularly at college, should not be self-expression, as it is normally assumed, but **self-expression** adapted to the requirements of adequate **communication**. This would involve sensitivity to personal differences, situational variability, and cultural diversity. Obviously all issues pertaining to this fine adjustability for the establishment of rapport with fellow human beings mark higher levels of sophistication in English language instruction at the college level. Second, if language in communicative action is unified, we should capitalize on the natural **connections**: 1. between speech and listening comprehension as components of one and the same process; between writing and reading comprehension as constituents of another encoding/decoding process; and 2. among all four skills in unison, for maximum efficiency in the language training program.⁹ Third, a process view of language-in-action offers the obvious implication that listening and reading are important skills that should receive due attention in training students to speak and write better. And yet, the value of **production** in verbal communication should never be underestimated. Every attempt made by an individual to say something involves a process of thought clarification, and even self-evaluation. Given the chance, he would very soon discover that he cannot be understood or accepted by others, unless he understands and accepts himself. The combined process of genuine self-expression and adequate communication would be expected to reflect favorably on the individual's personal integrity and self-confidence.

Fourth, in view of the fact that the concept of language is inconceivable outside the human communication process, it would be essential to stress the issue of **message fidelity** in the representation and comprehension of meaning. Hence, the significance and urgency of correlating semantic representation with verbal organization; of observing and practicing semantic cuing at all levels of the verbalized output, and of determining the extent to which this output may be considered a more or less exact fit within the total context of a particular communication situation. In Nonnative English quarters, a special focus on the cultural aspect of meaning, and how it may be implicitly coded would be quite worthwhile.

Fifth, the multiplicity of language uses in a life of give-and-take among humans makes it mandatory that we broaden the **span** of observation and action in dealing with language as communicative verbal behavior. Thanks to art and artistic composition in language, we have at our disposal as many fictitious worlds to explore as there are original authors. We are thus able to get out of our individual shells,

and share the happiness and misery of others, which is the essence of being human. Thanks to science, we are able to establish other ties with fellow humans, through a language characterized by explicitness, stark simplicity, maximum clarity and directness. The ultimate aim of conducting, reporting and applying scientific investigations is to reveal an increasing measure of the 'universality' that should bind us together in rationality, and perhaps delay the foreseeable planetary explosion. Between the artistic and the factual uses of language, there are hosts of practical, everyday and business patterns of speech and writing that partake of the artistic and the scientific modes of expression and communication in varying measures. These forms of usage usually fall between two stools; they are neither artistic enough to be considered literary, nor scientific enough to be considered technical; they are normally left out to shift for themselves on a trust-to-chance basis. A comprehensive, well-rounded language training program would be expected to have as many of these varieties of English usage represented as is possible within the assigned time span.¹⁰

Sixth, if we learn to communicate verbally by actually using a particular code with adequate **frequency** and relative accuracy, then we cannot afford to use up most of our time observing how others communicate with relative accuracy. Nor would it be enough to balance productive with perceptive activities, as we have already suggested. Frequency as a factor in training, applicable to both types of activities, is what we are emphasizing here. Unless the particular task is practiced frequently enough, without erratic lapses of relatively long durations; unless it is repeated a sufficient number of times, with minor contextual modifications to allow for flexibility, it is generally assumed that smoothness of operation would be hard to come by.

Within this orientation, we are proposing an integrative language Model, capable of rendering the sides of cherished artificial dichotomies collapsible at will, in the service of English instruction at large. Thus, once the focus is sharpened on the functional aspect of verbal behavior, the dynamics of speech communication, and of both literary and non-literary composition are experienced, not only through study and observation, but also and more importantly, through actual participation and practice. Meanwhile, without diffusing such a focus, any reference to the structural aspect of language would acquire the meaningfulness of context, which is normally sacrificed in formal linguistic analysis. And with barriers between language and literature coming down in the interest of context, the two sides of another artificial dichotomy would be rendered collapsible. In other words, the proposed **Model of Language Use** has the power of sharpening the language focus, not through artificial separation and divorce, as may be suggested by a vested interest interpretation, but through natural and systematic integration; by design and concerted

action, based on the simple fundamental assumption that language could never be experienced theoretically or practically in a vacuum; nor could literature be understood or practiced without a systematized knowledge of the medium. Exceptional cases do not have the potency to nullify the rule.

We just have room for a few broad strokes that would hopefully reveal the main features of the recommended model of language use. In the first place, it is **operational**. It treats language as a form of human behavior, a number of inter-related psycho-physical operations, geared in action to the fulfillment of various purposes. It is realized that systemic language models are valid and indispensable, as concise descriptive accounts of an ideal language user's competence. As a matter of fact, such models are exploited in providing the school grammars normally taught prior to college. Yet, once a student has mastered the basics in language instruction, he should be allowed the freedom of outlook afforded by an operational language model. Given the chance, he would be able to realize that English as a language is not simply the abstract code or system that modern English linguistics has been preoccupied with since de Saussure; but more importantly, it consists in the multiplicity of forms of verbal behavior, or 'styles' of verbal action, which members of the English speech community are capable of producing or understanding. He would be able to distinguish between a relatively static set of symbols and rules of combination of such symbols, for a specific code, bearing the name of the English Language, and a **dynamic process** of human communication, utilizing that code in action; a process with the power to account for **variability, creativity** and all modes of vibration set off by a verbal exchange among users of that language.

Second, since an operational language model is goal-oriented, it may be described as a model of **language use**: both in the sense of the act of employing language, and of one way or another of employing language. Basically, to use language is to be able to operate adequately, using the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; or just the first two skills. In so doing, the individual performs different behavioral tasks in order to communicate verbally with himself, or with others. Some of these tasks pertain to his response to certain personal and situational factors characteristic of the speech act. It is in accordance with this response that he is able to determine the selection of certain language uses in terms of appropriateness.¹¹ Such uses have been collectively named styles, varieties, registers, etc., and categorically differentiated as formal, informal, serious, humorous, ironical, literary, scientific, colloquial, slang, vulgar, etc, according to particular parameters. Obviously, these categories of language usage can be differentiated still further in response to increasing constraints and specificity requirements, until we reach the

level of individual instances of unique utterances. Accordingly, the implementation of such a model of language use would be intended to score two aims in the main by way of program planning and / or instructional approach. The first is to give every student the benefit of actually **using** or employing **all** the English language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, thereby developing his general linguistic competence. The second is to go simultaneously beyond linguistic competence to achieve the development of **verbal communicative competence**, through sensitising the same student to the malleability and relativity of verbal behavior, as may be demonstrated by a language user's attempts to adjust to the specific factors he perceives as operant in a particular communication situation. This is where he has to select one form of English usage rather than another. Hence, a model of language use, aimed at the development of both linguistic and communicative abilities adds the most important dimension of utterance **appropriateness** to considerations of **grammaticality** or **acceptability**. Naturally, this is a level of achievement which may be considered consonant with the degree of language proficiency to be hopefully attained by every graduate of the English department.

Third, being communication-oriented, our language model takes cognizance of both **implicit** and **explicit** signals; language behavior is both covert and overt. If available language models are predominantly systemic, and either derived from, or superimposed on linguistic data characterized by explicitness, then the way to rectify such a skew is to **offer a model that recognizes the significance of implicitness as well**, and looks for **system in operation**, instead of confining it to the level of abstract formulation.¹² In other words, our model provides some sort of corrective to the prevalent systemic models, which treat language as a calculus, with self-sufficient rules of syntax and phonology, more recently extended to semantics in componential analysis. Through the addition of implicit contextual information, shared by both source and receiver in a communication situation, the explicit verbal product, or verbalized message in exchange, can no longer be narrowly treated as the total message. It is no longer possible to analyze verbalizations out of context, and give that the dignified name of **context-free** analysis. Language as behavior must be treated as capable of verbal manifestation in discourse, that is also rich in implicit, un-verbalized cues, to say nothing of gestural signals in speech. Depending on a language user's consciousness of the degree of fitness characteristic of his utterance, to secure with a receiver some reaction that is consonant with his intention, he would normally draw more or less heavily on such implicit information, to supplement the surface meaning of his explicit behavior when he speaks or writes. For instance, consider an utterance like: "Then, I must hold you responsible for her leaving the

party so early.' Without plenty of information implicitly shared by speaker and listener as 'good friends', to provide the general tenor of pleasant conversation, permitting something like this 'jokingly said,' the stark verbalization as quoted could be classified out of context as fit to start a quarrel! Obviously, nothing is farther from the truth.

Fourth, unlike systemic models as hitherto presented, our language model is not confined within sentence limits. The added interest and significance of what goes on beyond the sentence has persuaded us to appreciate the power of **discourse** in its fullness as a unified whole, both in terms of production and of comprehension. To put it differently, in our considered opinion, there is much more to gain by a language model that has enough explanatory power both within and beyond the sentence. After all, while the sentence is an artificial construct, the utterance is natural, and so is total discourse. In view of our overall objectives, and of our specific interest in language use, it would be reasonable to endorse a language model that is sensitive to the reality of communicative speech, particularly with respect to its totality and unified effectiveness.

Fifth, our model of Language Use reconciles the two sides of the language / literature dichotomy, by calling attention to its artificiality, once the concept of language as behavior manifested in discourse is viewed in proper perspective. Under the circumstances, the concept of literature would be viewed in the same perspective, not as **great art** in superb language, to be distinguished from artless reporting in cheap journalese or bland scientific jargon; not as poetic, aesthetic creation as distinct from prosaic, nonaesthetic composition; but as **human discourse**, prompted by a variety of purposes, and characterized by features considered appropriate for the communication of such purposes. Accordingly, a Shakespearean sonnet belongs to one form of literature; a legal document to another; a political speech to another; a newspaper article to another; a progress report to another; a short story to another, etc. Even though the grouping of such discourse varieties may startle some and shock others; they all share one common denominator. They are all samples of discourse projected in response to the urge for human communication, and adapted to the service of various purposes in various ways. However, if some of our colleagues, who may have been disturbed by this strange mix of items under the name of literature would allow us to offer some help, may we suggest re-grouping under the two titles of **Factual Literature** and **Imaginative Literature**? **Distinguished** writing **designs** of the former type do exist.¹³ A real problem of detrimental consequences in language training has been the **exclusion** of Factual Literature, and something should be done about it.

To sum up, the course we have charted for this investigation may

be considered rather singular. While it is chiefly concerned with the interconnections among certain theoretical stances affecting the status of English as a language at the college level of instruction, it is basic to both curriculum and teaching methodology developments in one of the most delicate and challenging academic areas in liberal arts.

Hopefully, we have been able to substantiate the dual assumption: 1. that the problem of underachievement in English language proficiency is the natural outcome of the diffused focus on English as a language in the traditional English department setup; and 2. that it would be unrealistic to expect a solution to that problem under the prevailing circumstances. Wherever English studies are, by and large, pursued as **aesthetic, verbal art** studies, there is no room for organized training in the use of English as a Medium of Communication (EMC). Nor should it, in all fairness, be the obligation of a traditional English department, wherever it may be found today, to assume responsibility for it. Nor is there any sense in accepting such a responsibility 'half-heartedly', keeping the door slightly open for **alien** contributions by language **scientists**, in the form of one odd course here, another there. There is no hope of ever achieving any progress in raising the level of English language proficiency with large captive **audiences**, of linguistically insecure students, on whom verbal art studies are wasted, or made a mockery of. Unless we are prepared to face the realities of human life around us, things will keep going from bad to worse.

We have suggested a way out of this impasse. Something could still be done in collaboration between the two disciplines of **language** and **literature**, to serve the EMC training issue. We need a new outlook, a new orientation, a new theoretical framework to be drawn up in view of clearly envisaged aims and objectives. Close scrutiny has revealed two pivotal points: 1. that the observable skew of a traditional college English program is not really in favor of literature at the expense of language training, but rather in favor of **literature-as-verbal-art**; 2. that the suspicious attitude maintained by traditionalists towards language studies was prompted about half a century ago by the out-moded mechanist view of language as a calculus, held by austere structuralists in linguistics. Accordingly, the solution to this problem must be two-fold: 1. the acceptance of a **broader definition** of literature,¹⁴ that would encompass works in both fact and fiction, spoken as well as written; and 2. the adoption of a **functionally - oriented** language theory, and luckily, this is the current trend in linguistics today. Should this new arrangement be implemented, the focus on English as a language would be automatically sharpened, and a specific area for EMC training could be charted along three main dimensions; one in **speech and listening comprehension**: another in

writing and reading comprehension; and a third in English language theory, a **theory of language use**. This would be the net result of treating language as behavior, and literature as the designed oral and written manifestation of such behavior, in all its diversity and richness.¹⁵

As for the study of literature as verbal art, it will remain, as it has always been, the privilege of those who have a special aptitude for it; those who choose it in full confidence of their ability to maintain their language proficiency on their own, at a relatively high level, suited to the understanding and appreciation of literary bents of expression and artistic language deviations. This is one issue that stands on its own merits. It is not to be confused with the teaching and learning of EMC. We simply cannot close our eyes to pertinent findings in the language sciences, both theoretical and applied, and continue to claim or assume that the study of English literature, as a subject in verbal aesthetics, constitutes an English language teaching approach, or that it is a way of developing a student's communicative competence in the English medium. It is high time we reviewed our aims, recast our program designs, and modified or revamped our offerings in line with our scientific approaches. We are under no obligation to continue beating the trodden track in college English instruction, whether Native or Nonnative.

FOOTNOTES

1. Burt and Dulay (1978) p. 178: "Language proficiency refers to the degree to which an individual exhibits control over the use of the rules of a language for one, some, or all of its numerous and diverse aspects. These include the phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic systems, and discourse and stylistic rules for oral and written communication, for different varieties of a given language in various domains and social circumstances." As a matter of fact, nothing less than a special research paper would do justice to the elucidation of the concept of language proficiency. For our purpose, however, the above capsule definition would provide a nucleus to start with, which would be gradually developed in the course of our investigation.
2. Quick (1974) p. 78: "The decline of Latin in our education system has not therefore reduced the need for a linguistic discipline: it has merely added to the responsibilities of the English teacher, as the linguistic discipline comes more and more to have English both as its vehicle and as its object. Moreover, the vastly expanded educational program of our time means that we must train a far higher proportion of our population than hitherto to make sophisticated use of English in their communication with each other in the higher levels of study, in the arts and sciences alike. Similarly, the emergence of the underdeveloped countries, both within and without the Commonwealth, has meant not a decrease in the use and teaching of English, but a phenomenal increase, as these countries seek to maintain or establish contact with more advanced areas through the use of the world's chief international language."

3. Carroll (1953) p. 157: "Language arts have such a far reaching significance in the educational program that as the child matures he has increasing need of guidance as to how he can best develop his linguistic potentialities."
4. Pratt (1977) pp. 3-37: "Poetic Language Fallacy" Our remark about English varieties in this context should not be construed as another way of reinforcing the above mentioned fallacy. As will be clearly demonstrated later in this research, the so-called 'Literary Language' is not inherently a class of special English usage, but rather a particular form of usage, geared in movement to the fulfillment of the aesthetic experience, suspended between a source of communication and its recipient.
5. Leech (1969) pp. 2:3: "A Descriptive Rhetoric" The distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' rhetorics is well brought out in parallel by the difference between traditional and modern linguistics. While traditional rhetoric is described as normative and 'prescriptive', modern rhetoric seeks to be analytic and 'descriptive'. As aptly expressed by the author, however, the substitution of modern for traditional rhetoric has not been a common practice in English departments. If it were, many language training problems would have been solved. Instead, more often than otherwise, ever since traditional rhetoric fell into disrepute, there has been a 'void' in English departments.
6. COHE (Jan., 1977) p. 3: "The Teaching of Writing: No Longer a 'Stepchild'" By Ellen K. Coughlin, New York "Concern over students' inability to write, falling registrations in literature courses bring new respectability for teachers of composition and soaring enrollments in their classes. . . . The demand for writing teachers and the interest in teaching writing have been brought on by two developments: — Enrollments have been falling in traditional literature courses and rising in writing courses. — The widespread outcry over the reported inability of students to write coherently has forced English departments to give greater attention to courses in composition. . . . Many faculty members report that students seem to realize their need for training in writing and other communication skills. . . . Because of this upsurge of interest in writing among students and the public at large, many colleges and universities are organizing writing programs or adding new courses. Cornell University, in fact, has recently created a new deanship exclusively devoted to student writing. . . . The profession as a whole deserves some blame for failing to provide graduate students in English with adequate preparation for teaching writing, says Jasper P. Neel, director of English programs for the M.L.A." This article is well documented by statements made by S.P. Miller, Professor of English at Ohio State University and writing division chairman, M.L.A. ; R. Lloyd-Jones, chairman of the English department at the University of Iowa; and by writing program directors across the country.
7. COHE (Sept., 1976) p. 32: "The Anti-Humanist Humanists" "They still reject community with our supreme intellectual adventure: Science." By Martin Green, Professor, Tufts University. "There is an obvious weakening effect in having two cultures (one for humanists and one for scientists). There must be only one, if it is to do its job — not that divisions can be obliterated, but that a powerful sense of unity should be generated. . . . But how does one prepare oneself to do such a thing? It has occurred to me recently that one established mechanism lies at hand in 'Scientific and Technical English'. . . . In my experience, there is usually a demand for such a course from students, administrators and professors in science departments; the limitation on growth derives from English professors; no one wants to teach these courses. But many have to, even so, and there was an overflowing crowd at the last M.L.A. meeting by Joan Baun of the City University of New York.
8. CEFS Report of the Harvard Committee (1954) p. 49: "It would be wrong to construe the scientific outlook as inimical to human values. Even if it were true that science is

concerned with means only, it would not follow that science ignores the intrinsic worth of man. For values of human life cannot be achieved within a physical vacuum; they require for their fulfillment the existence of material conditions. To the extent that classical civilisation failed to mitigate the evils of poverty, disease, squalor, and generally low level of living among the masses, to that extent, it failed to liberate man. Conversely, to the extent that science, especially in its medical and technological applications, has succeeded in dealing with evils, it has contributed to the realization of human values. Thus science has implemented the humanism which classicism and Christianity have proclaimed."

9. Carroll (1953) p. 143: "During the last few years, a revolution has been occurring in the field of speech education; speech educators are rejecting the old routines of rhetoric and oratory and are insisting not only that integrated training must be given in all four communication skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) but also that this training should be directed toward increasing the student's total personal adjustment."
10. Patterson and Longworth (1966) p.297: In outline, the 'mission' of the 'Language Division' is: "to promote understanding of the variety of languages developed as instruments of human communication and as tools of artistic and intellectual achievement." As for the 'scope', which is assumed to encompass usage varieties, under discussion at this point, it extends in coverage to include: 1. "the primarily formal structures (calculi of the mathematician and logician)"; 2. "the empirical communications of the natural and social sciences"; 3. "the informal uses in everyday life"; and 4. "the artistic uses". I do not think that any order of priorities can be unequivocally determined, or even suggested with respect to this variety of language uses. But the significant conclusion to be drawn is the stipulated breadth of scope of language usage, which would definitely have its impact on the development of general proficiency with learners.
11. Doughty, Pearce and Thornton (1972) p. 115: "The most important factor in exercising command of a language is the degree to which use of language depends upon the speaker's intuitive assessment of the situation in which he has to use it, whether in speech or in writing. ...The delicate process of matching a particular pattern of language to a particular context has become so much a part of (teachers') total experience of using language that they easily forget how prolonged a period of learning was involved before they reached this degree of fluency."
12. Pratt (1977) pp. 39 & 73: "In his first book, THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF ENGLISH IN NEW YORK CITY (1966), Labov showed that phonological variation in the speech of New Yorkers could not be systematically specified independently of the social pressures acting on the speakers in the given speech situation. This was an important realisation for linguistics since it provided support for building information about social context into the grammar." "Labov's analysis, in other words, is context - dependent, anchored in the circumstances surrounding the utterance."
13. Hill (1958), His paper on the subject reveals the complexity of the issue of defining literature. However, it calls attention to a number of factors, two of which support our argument at this point. First, if literature may be defined by comparison between given works and the 'institutionalized great books,' and if these books have an immense coverage of fact and fiction in learning, it would not be difficult to see what is missing when literature is limited to the aesthetic studies of artistic or imaginative works. Second, the identification of certain formal characteristics to determine the fitness of a given discourse for literary study seems to underscore the notion of 'design', which we have stipulated as a major literary qualification. As for the 'permanence' criterion, it is duly described by the author as lacking in validity through accidents of history.

14. CEFS Report of the Harvard Committee (1945) p.208: "It is evident that there are now offered at Harvard several different kinds of courses on literature, some designed for the specialist, some for general education. ... In addition to literature courses offered by single departments, we believe it highly desirable to have courses on literature, which fall within no single department; courses which in some fashion cross over the national boundaries ... and offer opportunities for the study of types and styles of literature on a broadly comparative and philosophic basis."
15. Carroll (1953) p. 159: "If a sufficiently high standard of instruction could be maintained, there would be every reason to recommend that the teaching of those basic language skills which must be taught at the college level be placed in a combined department of written and spoken English. This has, in fact, already happened in several institutions of higher learning."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burt, M. and Dulay, H. "Some Guidelines for the Assessment of Oral Proficiency and Dominance," **Tesol Quarterly** (1978: Vol. 12 No. 2).

Burks, D.M., ed. **Rhetoric, Philosophy and Literature: An exploration.** W. Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1979.

Carroll, John B. **The Study of Language.** Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966.

Champan, R. **Linguistics and Literature.** London: Edward Arnold, 1973.

Chatman, S.B. and Levin, S.R., eds. **Essays on the Language of Literature.** Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1967.

Conant, James Bryant, ed. **General education in a Free Society. Report of the Harvard Committee.** Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945.

The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington D.C. (Sept.1976: Vol. 13, No.3).

The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington, D.C. (Jan. 1977: Vol. 13, No. 20)

Cluysenaar, A. **Introduction to literary stylistics.** London: Batsford, 1976.

Doughty, P., Pearce, J and Thornton, G. **Exploring Language.** . London: Edward Arnold, 1972.

Fisher, B.A. **Perspectives on Human Communication.** New York: Macmillan, 1978.

Fowler, R., ed. **Essays on Style and Language.** . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

Fowler, R., ed. **The Languages of Literature.** . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.

Fowler, R. **Style and Structure in Literature.** Oxford: Blackwell, 1975.

- Freeman, D.C., ed. **Linguistics and Literary Style.** New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
- Halliday, M.A.K. **Explorations in the Functions of Language.** Edward Arnold, 1974.
- Kachru, B.B. and Stahlke, F.W., eds. **Current Trends in Stylistics.** Edmonton, Alberta: Linguistic Research, Inc., 1972.
- Kennedy, G.A. **Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times.** Chapel Hill, N. Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.
- Labov, William **The Social Stratification of (English in New York City.** Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966.
- Lazarus, A. and Knudson, **Selected Objectives for the English Language Arts.** Boston, Mass.: Houghton-Mifflin, 1967.
- Leech, G.N. **A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry.** London: Longman, 1969.
- Loban, W., Ryan, M. and Squire, J.R. **Teaching Language and Literature.** New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961.
- Marckwardt, Albert H., **Linguistics and the Teaching of English.** Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966.
- Myers, G.E. **The Dynamics of Human Communication.** New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.
- National Council of Teachers of English **The Basic Issue in the teaching of English.** Supplement of **College English.** (1959: Vol. 48).
- Patterson, F. and Longworth, C.R. **The Making of a College.** Hampshire College Working Paper Number One. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966.
- Pooley, R.C., ed. **Perspectives on English.** New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960.
- Pratt, M.L. **Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse.** Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977.
- Quirk, R. **The Linguist and the English Language.** London: Edward Arnold, 1974.
- Richard, I.A., **The Philosophy of Rhetoric.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1936.
- Sadock, Jerrold M. **Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts.** New York: Academic Press, 1974.
- Sebeok, T., ed. **Style in Language.** Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960.
- Slobin, D.I., **Psycholinguistics.** New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979.
- Tubs, Steward L. and Moss, S. **Human Communication.** New York: Random House, 1980.
- Turner, G.W. **Sylistics.** Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- Uitti, Karl D., **Linguistics and Literary Theory.** Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969.