

Teaching the nature of language variety through a literary text

John Douthwaite
University of Torino

1. Introduction

1.1. Departure point and justification. The main inspiration for this article came from the edition I produced of G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* for Cideb (1995). Shaw's main topic in this play is language – its forms, its use and its value. Such terms immediately betray modern sociolinguistic concerns with language: "form" calls up the code-communication dilemma (Stern 1983, Douthwaite 1991), while "use" and "value" evoke anthropological and sociological studies of the relationship of language to its concrete, situational uses (Firth 1957, Gumperz 1972, 1982, Hymes 1971, 1972, Labov 1969, Leach 1976, and Malinowski 1923) and the broader framework of the patterns of culture which fashion use (Benedict 1946, Levi-Strauss 1968, Mead 1930), which in turn leads into the questions of linguistic and cultural relativity and determinism (Boas 1911-12, Sapir 1921, Whorf 1956).

Indeed, a strong case may be made out for dubbing *Pygmalion* a 'drame à these', since Shaw quite deliberately deals with the whole spectrum of the dimensions constituting language in order to prove that 'language makes the man'. Hence the play may fruitfully be exploited as a 'stand-alone' to illustrate the nature of language and communication, in a course where the discriminating factor in the choice of approach is the intensive study of a single text. Discrimination, in turn, may be based on one or more parallel objectives, such as the acquisition of the sub-skills required in close reading (linguistic objective) or in the study of the Shavian theatre (literary objective).

A second approach is to 'network' *Pygmalion* up to a set of other works exemplifying the dimensions of communication scrutinised in the target play. Various options are open here. First, texts with parallel concerns may be studied in their entirety. Second, excerpts from selected texts dealing with one or more specific aspects of communication are paired up with pertinent parts in the target text. Two alternatives are possible here. The close reading of a single work (*Pygmalion*) is flanked by an examination of extracts from other texts, or a thematic pathway is selected and excerpts from a variety of texts are presented to illustrate the theoretical points concerning the nature of language.

Turning to the justification of such a paper, it may confidently be asserted that a knowledge of the nature and functions of language as communication, and of the vital role played in our daily lives by language variety (the principal topic

of the pathway, as will be explained shortly), is crucial to a modern citizen of what we hope will be a united Europe, for a plethora of reasons.

Language variety is a universal phenomenon. This factor in itself attests its importance. Moreover, a variety embodies individual and group identity. It thus exerts a crucial influence over the attitudes, values and conduct of those who speak it, both in their intra- and inter-group relationships. Indeed its pervasiveness gives rise to deep-seated emotional, social and political reactions and consequences. The perceptual salience of a variety enhances its potential for giving rise to or channelling misunderstandings and discrimination, tension and conflict. In a world which is moving towards ever-increasing intergroup contacts (migration, economic integration) while for the same reason producing opposite risks such as ethnic cleansing, and religious and economic wars, the comprehension of language variety, as of culture, is an urgent and critical requirement if we wish to foster the development of a democratic and peaceful society in which differences form an accepted part of a harmonious whole.

From the didactic standpoint, tracing a pedagogic pathway which expounds some of the major theoretical points concerning language varieties and illustrating these points from diverse sources offers three important advantages: i) motivation through variety, ii) the employment of the comparative method to facilitate comprehension, iii) a cross-section of works illustrating the universality of the principles to be 'learnt by discovery' as well as inducing us to realise their fundamental importance in our lives.

1.2. Arrival point. Of the various options open in constructing a pathway, the solution that was originally decided on was a thematic pathway with illustrative extracts selected from a variety of texts, but with *Pygmalion* occupying pride of place. A complete pathway was then developed. However, the original editorial allocation of space has had to be significantly reduced. I have retained the introduction and the methodological explanation (with minor modifications) in order to provide the theoretical background to the procedures. In contrast, space has permitted the inclusion of only two of the fifteen sub-stages in the original pathway. Choice has fallen on two sub-sections which attempt to highlight a) the translation of the pedagogic principles into classroom practice in developing the materials, and b) aspects of the thematic content to provide a more solid grasp of the linguistic objectives at the heart of the course. References are to the original layout to provide a glimpse of the scope of the work, which I hope will be published in its entirety at some future date.

1.3. Theme and pedagogic objective. Given the complexity and multifacetedness of communication, this paper concentrates on one fundamental

theme in language use – the nature of **language variety**. The objective is to sensitise students in their final two years at school or their first two years at university to those aspects of communicative competence that lie at the heart of variable competence and appropriacy to context, thereby uncovering the links such concepts necessarily imply between language, society and identity.

1.4. Thematic extensions. The theme of language variety offers enormous scope for extension to other related themes. A first set of related variables comprise age, class, ethnicity, gender, period. Such 'contextual variables' do not, however, exhaust the opportunities for thematic extensions offered by language variation. Topics such as emotion, value systems, language learning, diachronic variations (social functions of a specific language variety characterising particular societies, e.g. the rise of the Standard Variety in a nation is a classic case in point, and of special relevance to Italians; French as a marker of status in seventeenth century English and nineteenth century Russian societies) may also be fruitfully exploited. Indeed, the material may be re-organised around any of these themes, if the course objectives differ from those set out in this paper.

1.5. Selection of texts. No attempt has been made to select texts on the basis of their 'linguistic difficulty' for obvious reasons. Student level may be adjusted to by operating on standard modes of presentation and exploitation, examples of which are provided below. Instead, the main criteria guiding selection have been universality and the richness of the material in relation to the objective (and possible extensions). While the choice cannot claim to be exhaustive, nevertheless the aim is to furnish a fairly broad range over time, (1814-1985), over space, (three continents), over nationality, (Nigerian, American, British, including Irish and Scottish in addition to English, though perhaps specifications such as Nottingham, Dorset, and Yorkshire would be more appropriate to the theme), as well as over cultures. The inclusion of powerful extracts from the work of writers of the 'New Literatures' in English on themes of fundamental importance to human life (war, exploitation, racism, education and socialisation, and so forth) bears, I believe, eloquent testimony to the universality of the subject treated. The non-inclusion of works not written in English is dictated by limits of space and by the nature of the population the material is targeted for.

2. Methodology

2.1. Progressive, thematic pathway. A thematic pathway is traced providing a skeletal outline regarding objective, exercises, methodology and possible extensions. Teachers will adapt the outline to learners' needs. Consequently, they will devise exercises falling into two broad categories, those aimed at the main

objective (suggestions for which are provided in this article), and those aimed at subordinate objectives (including the comprehension of surface linguistic structure where necessary). The pathway is divided into eight main sections, each section corresponding to a major theoretical point regarding the nature of language variety.

The pathway aims at gradual, linear development, with the 'simpler' stages preceding and preparing for the more conceptually and linguistically complex stages. The movement tends to reflect three global dimensions: from code to communication, from linguistic information to social information, from surface structure to deep structure.

2.2. Comparative method. The comparative method is adopted intra-textually, inter-textually and interlingually, over cultures and over time, for two main reasons. In addition to proving the universality of the themes treated, the comparative method facilitates comprehension. Recognising similarities and differences is generally a simpler cognitive task than that of identifying a concept in isolation. This is one way of overcoming the quandaries set by rich texts employing complex surface forms, indirect language, and difficult and alien concepts. To illustrate the latter point, it is unlikely students will have received thorough training in recognising certain behaviours as being dictated by the establishment and maintenance of group identity, a vital dimension treated in the course. The text selected to instantiate this precept (Waterhouse 1957) sets child behaviour off against adult behaviour. Readers may thus infer from the differing actions of the two age groups that many an act (both linguistic and non-linguistic) is executed neither to obtain information, nor to gain pleasure by doing it, but because in carrying out that act the person proves his/her allegiance to the group s/he is a member of, whether s/he be adult or child, male or female, Muslim or Christian.

2.3. Induction. Two basic approaches exist in education – deduction and induction. Deduction characterises a method such as grammar translation in language learning, where first the general rule is explained and illustrated, and then students are given (translation) exercises to do in which they are required to apply the rule. In contrast, the natural method of language acquisition employs an inductive method of learning. Students are exposed to language. No explanations are furnished. The rules (i.e. regularities) must be gleaned from the concrete instantiations of language by the students themselves. Thus deduction moves from the general to the particular, while induction proceeds in the opposite direction, from particular to general.

Psychological investigations have demonstrated that an inductive approach is to be preferred to a deductive approach since it tends to produce greater involvement and higher levels of motivation and concentration. Not only are results more effective, they are also more permanent. Nevertheless, the wholesale use of induction can be overtaxing. Hence, variety and the surmounting of difficulty (textual, conceptual, operational; student level and concentration) call for an opportune blending of the two methods. The way the questions are formulated are crucial in this domain. (For an explication of the points in this section, see Douthwaite 1991, 1996. On the forms of logic, see Copi and Cohen 1994)

2.4. Recycling. Pre-teaching and re-cycling correspond to precise learning objectives in psychological theory. Learning is not a once and for all process. Comprehension is gradual. Furthermore, covert or unconscious exposure to points which will be dealt with formally at a later stage has formidable pedigrees, including Sweet and Palmer (Douthwaite 1991). It has been shown to facilitate gradualism in learning.

Recycling is thus another fundamental tool because of the many functions it serves. First, storage requires 'significant' use over time (i.e. with regard to both the quality and quantity of the learning experience) – not just practice with a single example of a phenomenon. Second, efficacious permanent storage also presupposes prompt and pertinent recall and contextually appropriate re-deployment of a newly-learned item. There is no use putting something in memory if you cannot get it out when you need it. Third, creating the expectation in learners that they will be required to re-utilise freshly-acquired knowledge at some future stage will not only encourage deeper concentration during acquisition, but will also promote greater effort at storage and recall. The previous two points correspond to the learning aims standardly classified as reinforcement, consolidation and transfer of learning. From the point of view of comprehension, the potential and application of complex concepts (*viz.* group identity determining behaviour) will require multiple exposure to material illustrating the objective, with links being made between the various materials to highlight the fact that the objective is at work in different shapes and forms over time and space. Hence, some exercises sketched out below anticipate future points, while others make links with previously-employed texts in a continuously back and forth movement to provide adequate coverage for all the stages of the learning process. The fact that the texts allow this technique to be employed, it may be added, also reveals the richness of the passages selected.

2.5. Multifunctionality. Exercises are multifunctional. Given the richness of the texts and the complexity of communication, it is implausible that a text will exemplify one sole aspect of the main objective. Questions exploiting the main objective should be flanked by additional questions concentrating on sub-objectives decided upon in course planning.

Sub-objectives are essential since the main objective is a high-level one, requiring division into its component parts as well as the acquisition or re-activation of the sub-skills required to grasp the target sociolinguistic concepts. Two main areas of sub-objectives that will have to be developed thus consist of the sub-skills of reading and the sub-skills required for critical thinking (Baron and Stenberg 1986; Douthwaite 1996).

The exercises are also multifunctional in the sphere of learning theory, as was seen in the previous point, since an exercise may present and store one point as its main objective while simultaneously introducing or re-cycling another point.

2.6. Variety and contextualisation. Variety in exercise types and objectives is necessary to ensure motivation is kept high and concentration does not flag. This reason also underlies the multifunctionality of exercises. Full contextualisation is required to ensure comprehension may be achieved.

2.7. Exercise types. Variety of exercise formats is required not only to ensure motivation and concentration are achieved, but also to adapt the pathway to student level, to an inductive approach and to the conceptual difficulty of the objectives. Whether the question format is wh-, true/false or multiple choice, the staple facilitating techniques may be employed to bring an exercise within the competence level of the target population. Such techniques include: blatantly wrong answers and simple distracters in multiple choice questions; scanning questions seeking information explicitly stated in the text; questions centring on simple concepts; dual purpose questions, where the explicit goal is (relatively) straightforward but which guides students to the discovery of a prominent implicit goal, one which may be attained through, for instance, a (facilitating) discussion with the teacher.

2.8. Level of exploitation. With more advanced students (university level), exploitation will penetrate more deeply into the text, will range over all the dimensions of communication, will deal with the relevant theoretical works expounding the target concepts in formal terms and will employ the pertinent metalanguage. This constitutes a further means of adjusting to student level.

3. The Pathway

3.1. Outline of The Pathway

The pathway begins by establishing the concept of language variety and the related notions of standard and non-standard varieties (stage 1). On the basis of this distinction the components of code (graphology, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis) are singled out so that students are in a position to identify variants employing scientific criteria (stage 2).

The social concomitants of language use constitute the next step in the pathway (stage 3). The extracts are intended to illustrate how language features (identified in the previous stage) may be carriers of social as well as ideational information. Learners discover that by looking at the language forms a speaker employs, they may induce pertinent features of a participant's social identity, such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, occupational role, interactional role relationship.

Uncovering the fact that an utterance may simultaneously provide different types of information (conceptual and social) as well as perform more than one communicative function (or illocutionary act) leads to the discovery of the phenomenon of indirectness. Hence learners are introduced to the code-communication distinction.

Stage four brings together the various strands treated so far – language variety, social information, indirectness – to induce a new set of precepts. Appropriacy to context is obviously one of the principle dimensions receiving attention. The close link between the directness-indirectness distinction and the formal-informal sliding scale is one correlation that is stressed.

The fact that a speaker is cognisant with more than one variety and that s/he adapts his/her language to context leads naturally into the concepts of multiple competence and code switching

The picture that is built up is a complex one. Given that speakers have variable competence, and since context does not rigidly impose that a single variant be used in a given situation, but, rather, leaves participants in the speech event a set of options to choose from, each with differing appropriacy (hence with a different perlocutionary force), it must be concluded that other factors also influence the actual linguistic selection the speaker makes.

The investigation of these other factors constitutes the basis of the high level of generalisation which is the theme of stage five – language as behaviour. Language as behaviour is regulated by the same social norms that govern all forms of behaviour in society. This generalisation follows on logically from the precept of appropriacy to context, a sub-section of language as code. To highlight the point, the first extract in stage five illustrates a double-headed concept – an utterance may express a value-judgement and values are the products

of social groups. The illustration is highly cogent in that the illustrative extract contrasts two antithetical value systems, that of the British working class and of the middle class.

The next step (exercise 9, included below) is to extend this extra-linguistic precept to the linguistic domain, demonstrating that values and the norms of behaviour they give rise to cover language and not just morality and conventional acts, as the layman might believe. Here too, differences emerge in attitudes between social groups (old vs young, rich vs poor). Indeed, that such attitudes invest the entire ideological system of the groups in question is brought to light by linking the target novels to the socio-historical conditions they are set in. Hence, the central point of the final sub-stage in this fifth stage is that social groups differ in their world view, a consequence of the fact that groups are social entities with differing locations in socio-economic structure. Language is a reflection, an externalisation of these differences.

This high level generalisation is now analysed into more specific phenomena, at a social and an individual level (stage six). At a social level, language variety marks social status. The stigmatisation of the non-standard variety in contrast to the high status accorded Standard English demonstrates clearly that language reflects social values. The correlation ('good') language and (high) status underlies manifestations of power. Exercise 12 (included below) again contrasts rich and poor. The difference in power, unambiguously perceptible in decision-making and in the global effects of the decisions taken by the powerful, is again underscored by a difference in language variety employed by the two groups.

Utterior confirmation of the language-status-power link comes from the fact that those aspiring to social mobility realise that the adoption of the standard variety is an obligatory concomitant. This precept constitutes the next sub-stage in the pathway.

The enormous importance of the language-power connection is also borne out at a psychological level by the even virulent emotions the characters express on the subject of which variety a speaker deploys in the extracts examined.

The theme of stage seven is visibility. Language varieties are highly prominent and immediately perceptible. Identifying the social group a person belongs to during interaction is thus an almost instantaneous affair.

The consequences that such identification inevitably produces are equally rapid and are the concern of the final stage in the pathway. On the one hand, a significant number of our acts are carried out as assertions of identity, to manifestly prove we belong to and are faithful to a given group. On the other hand, the act of identification places the actor in a socially and historically predetermined relationship to the other actors in the speech event. If the groups the actors are members of have positive relations, then all is well. Sadly, this is

often far from being the case. The result is that contact leads to conflict. What is worse, we see the 'other' and often shoot first and ask questions later. The visibility of language enhances its power as a vehicle for arousing and conveying feelings of antagonism, with disastrous results.

One cause of conflict is the competition over scarce means. This is an objective situation of life, and one that social institutions attempt to regulate, though dissatisfyingly so.

A second cause of conflict is misunderstanding, often due to ignorance. This ignorance is, in part, built into the social system for it enables those who detain power to continue doing so. Furthermore, it is unconscious. We fail to realise the mechanisms underlying communication and racism. The aim of education, and of a pathway such as this, is to bring the mechanisms, their function and their origin into the open, so that all may realise what is happening and so correct the situation. Uncovering unconscious mechanisms may also help bring into the open the more structural causes of conflict and thus lay the foundations for democratic discussion of the real underlying problems. Religious wars, to take just one case, are generally covers for economic conflicts.

The pathway thus ends on a note of anxiety over conflict in modern society, questioning both the role of language and education – two areas which are central to the lives of the readers of this article, as well as to the students the materials have been designed for.

3.2. Stage 5 – Sub-Stage 2

Objective: to Identify Language as a Subcategory of Behaviour

Background to the texts – for the teacher.

Both the novels the extracts are taken from in this section, *Little Dorrit* and *Mansfield Park*, are set in 'high society' (bourgeois and noble). Both may be said to have as one of their main themes the sham of life, the false facade society forces each individual to consciously or unconsciously build for him/herself with which to live out life in conformity with the social regulations society has created. The positions of the two authors are, of course, quite diverse. Dickens is venomously critical of the structure of Victorian society, but expresses a deep pessimism as to any possible amelioration. While Austen too is critical of the hypocrisy of the society of her time, she nevertheless adopts the moderate stance of a reforming conservative.

Hence the Marshalsea prison in *Little Dorrit* is a metaphor for the prison of social hypocrisy and individual self-deception life forces onto those people (i.e. the vast majority) who accept the "surface" of reality, who refuse to see beyond it and free themselves from the social identity society has forced them to construct. *Little Dorrit* herself expresses the point in the crucial chapter the

extract is taken from (Book 2, Chapter 5) in referring to her father's bowing down to etiquette and socially-defined roles in asking Mrs General to impart the 'proper education' to his daughter: "[Little Dorrit] felt that, in what [her father] had just now said to her and in his whole bearing towards her, there was the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall". Indeed, the desire of father and 'governess' is "the formation of a demeanour" stated twice), "the formation of a surface". And it is significant that one of the tools adopted by society in shaping the surface of behaviour is language, which Dickens' gentle though fierce sarcasm castigates in the extract selected.

If the Dickens passage talks specifically about language as a form of behaviour and as a means of moulding character, the Austen extract deals with socialisation and behaviour in more general terms. The passage comes from the opening chapter. The reader is introduced to Lord Bertram and his family, thereby establishing the high social status of Mansfield Park. The youngest of Lord Bertram's sisters-in-law has made a disastrous marriage and is in dire financial straits. It is thus decided that ten-year-old Fanny will be taken from her poor mother and brought up and educated at Mansfield Park both to give her a start in life and to remove some of the economic burden from her mother's shoulders. One of the principal themes of the novel is the social integration of the poor girl into the rich household. Fanny is expected to adopt the culture, attitudes, values and behaviour models of the group she is about to become a member of. Conformity in all spheres of behaviour is thus the battle cry in both passages.

Note that a secondary aim of the questions on the two extracts is try to bring out the diversity both of ideological position and writing technique of the two authors. It is significant that the more conservative writer is more openly and harshly critical compared to the more benign surface attitude expressed by the more disillusioned author, an impression which derives from the adoption of a comic tone. As implied earlier, extending the lengths of the selected passages would yield illuminating corroborative instantiations of the concepts uncovered.

EXERCISE 9. Read the next two extracts and answer the questions which follow.

- 1) Both texts contain a reference to vulgarity. Vulgarity here means more than simply improper language. What does vulgarity refer to in these extracts and what link is established between language and impropriety in its wider sense? Identify key words and expressions which convey this idea.
- 2) Both passages also talk about learning in some way. What is it that is learnt? How is learning believed to come about? What results are expected?
- 3a) What tone do the two passages convey? Choose from the following: tragic, comic, lyrical, serious, melodramatic.
- 3b) How is the tone connected to the author's position?

- 4a) The language in the Austen passage is more critical than in the extract from Dickens. List the expressions which demonstrate this point and say what effect such words have.
- 4b) Which of the following semantic fields appear in the items you have identified? What effect does the use of words belonging to such semantic fields have?

history religion politics work sport criminality health emotions transport
morality education

Text 12 Dickens "Little Dorrit"

'Amy,' said Mr Dorrit, 'you have just now been in the subject of some conversation between myself and Mrs General. We agree that you scarcely seem at home here. Ha – how is this?'

A pause.

'I think, father, I require a little time.'

'Papa is a preferable mode of address,' observed Mrs General. 'Father is rather vulgar, my dear. The word Papa, besides, gives a pretty form to the lips. Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism are all very good words for the lips: especially prunes and prism. You will find it serviceable, in a formation of a demeanour, if you sometimes say to yourself in company – on entering a room, for instance – Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism.'

'Pray, my child,' said Mr Dorrit, 'attend to the – hum – precepts of Mrs General.'

Text 13 Austen "Mansfield Park"

(CONTEXTUALISATION: Sir Thomas is about to grant extended hospitality to his poor, ten-year-old niece, Fanny Price.)

'Should her disposition be really bad,' said Sir Thomas, 'we must not, for our own children's sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to expect so great an evil. We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults – nor, I trust, can they be dangerous for her associates. Had my daughters been younger than herself, I should have considered the introduction of such a companion, as a matter of very serious moment; but as it is, I hope there can be nothing to fear for them, and every thing to hope for her, from the association.'

COMMENT: The main objective of this sub-stage is to demonstrate the fact that language is a form of behaviour, and like all forms of behaviour is regulated by social norms. Recalling Hymes' (1971) "rules of use" introduced in text 10,

when "improper" language provided the clue to discovering this concept, will enable reinforcement and extension to take place. Instructing students to identify key expressions (such as "form", "demeanour" and "manner") which demonstrate that language is an integral part of one's behaviour, reflecting one's personal and social identity, obliges students to furnish evidence of the concept they have uncovered.

Question 2 introduces the weighty question of learning. The question on what is learnt ties up neatly with previous themes – the code-communication dilemma and appropriacy to context. The question on how learning comes about is an extension, though attention may be concentrated on acquisition from models (Mrs General and Sir Thomas' nuclear family being the models), and hence on the theme of learning (including language learning) as the acquisition of social behaviour.

Two relevant points ensue from treating learning as a means of socialisation. First, acquiescent learning is one method of consciously or unconsciously demonstrating conformity to group behaviour. Second, the ability and opportunity to learn constitute a means to social mobility, a central thesis in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and one which will be taken up in the next stage. Confirmation of these two hypotheses is provided by opposite conduct, rebelliousness of the type portrayed in Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy*. The theme of learning clearly provides ample scope for extension.

The questions on tone and authorial position are aimed at minor objectives – the sub-skills of reading and text analysis. But they also perform the secondary function of paving the way for question 4 (gradual progression). Since both passages are critical, this question aims to uncover how such criticism is conveyed linguistically, what the texts are critical of, and how the critical attitude expressed reflects values of a given group in a given historical period. The historical perspective is vital since it underscores the universality of the theoretical principles the pathway intends to illustrate.

Mansfield Park was first published in 1814. In that same year, Colquhoun (quoted in Kayman 1992) estimated that fifteen percent of the British population belonged to the "dangerous classes", an expression which referred to the unemployed and unemployable, the old, the sick, the criminal and the quasi-criminal. Society was undergoing the transformation from an agricultural structure to an urban industrial structure with its concomitant emphasis on private property. Thus, previously tolerated modes of behaviour (e.g. petty theft to supplement starvation wages, smuggling) were branded as criminal. The old punitive establishments (prisons, workhouses) and charitable institutions (the hospital provided aid to the needy as well as medical care) could no longer cope with the dire consequences of industrialisation (poverty, slums, bad sanitation,

concentration of the problems). As the term itself suggests, the "dangerous classes" were considered an acute threat to the stability of society. The desire to control the situation on the part of a centralised state, the emergence of an entrepreneurial, rational and scientific management ideology (Benthamite utilitarianism) together with the rise of specialised legal, medical, psychological and welfare professions claiming expertise in the handling of the new social problems led to the criminalisation and medicalisation of the lower classes. Under the impetus of philosophical positivism and biological Darwinism, crime, insanity, poverty, drunkenness were branded as deviant phenomena stemming from a common biological heredity. Indeed, this common physiological inheritance was held to determine all aspects of human life, including character, intelligence and sexuality. Deviant behaviour had, of course, to be modified, or eliminated (for instance, through segregation) where modification was not possible. This biological heredity could be located in the lower classes.

Such attitudes transpire quite clearly from the lexis adopted in text 13. Question 4 brings students' attention to this aspect. Items such as "disposition" and "incurable" point to the hypothesised biologically innate inferiority of the lower classes; the unacceptable immorality attached to their behaviour by the deployment of lexemes such as "bad" and "evil"; the social obnoxiousness ascribed to their behaviour patterns is signalled by phrases such as "gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner"; the 'unhealthy' nature of the condition through the use of "incurable"; the criminal stigmata through words such as "dangerous" and "association". (The latter term should spark off significant connotations for Italian speakers.) That such behaviour will characterise a ten-year-old child whom Sir Thomas has not yet set eyes on, though implicit, is beyond doubt. That such behaviour must be altered is explicitly stated by Sir Thomas. Should such alteration fail to come about, then, it is implied, Fanny will be banished from his family – segregation ("we must not ... continue her in the family"). The reader is left in no doubt as to Fanny being reputed to be the carrier of some contagious disease.

One of the most cogent links that may be established in this domain is with Pygmalion, where Doolittle's championing of the "undeserving poor" represents the antithesis to Sir Thomas' position. *Mansfield Park* has enabled us to introduce the historical dimension and has simultaneously set the stage for the explicit treatment of values as an expression of group identity.

We might further note that Sir Thomas and Mrs General employ the same type of indirectness (respectively "continue" and "suggestion") and to the same 'genteel' social ends.

3.3. Stage 6 – Sub-Stage 2

Objective: To Identify The Link Between Language, Status and Power

Background to the text – for the teacher.

Sozaboy is a magnificent novel of the Nigerian civil war. Sozaboy ('soldier boy') is a young native recruit, a simple boy from a poor country village. Like many of his age and origin, he sees glamour and social and economic advancement is to be obtained from becoming a soldier. During the war he escapes death miraculously. At the end of the war he returns to his village to find ruin and despoliation, cholera ravaging the population, and his mother and wife dead. Realisation comes of the futility and horror of war.

Like all wars, the Nigerian civil war has economic causes. It is an internecine struggle between tribes to obtain dominance over the country. The extract selected (from Chapter 5) deals with the arrival in the village of a top official drumming up support for the war and looking for volunteers. The social contrast between the powerful official, whose status is marked by his car, his fine clothes and his refined communicative competence contrasts starkly with the rags and illiteracy of the poor boys who will unwittingly and unwillingly be press-ganged into a war they neither understand nor want. The ability proficient language use bestows to the powerful to manipulate the poor and ignorant is cogently highlighted.

EXERCISE 12.

- 1) In text 18, who do you imagine "the man in the fine shirt" and "all those who can fight" are? How is their different social identity linked to different languages?
- 2) The preceding two texts also talked about power relationships, though in a less explicit manner. What are the sources of power in those two texts, and what relationship emerges between language and power?

Text 18 Saro-Wiwa "Sozaboy"

The man with fine shirt stood up. And begin to talk in English. Fine fine English. Big big words. Grammar. 'Fantastic. Overwhelming. Generally. In particular and in general.' Haba, god no go vex. But he did not stop there. The big grammar continued. 'Odious. Destruction. Fighting' I understand that one. 'Henceforth. General mobilisation. All citizens. Able-bodied. Join the military. His Excellency. Powers conferred on us. Volunteers. Conscription.' Big big words. Long long grammar. 'Ten hens. Vandals. Enemy.' Everybody was silent. Everywhere was silent like a burial ground. Then they begin to interpret all that long grammar plus big big words in Kana. In short

what that man is saying is that all those who can fight will join the army.

COMMENT: The Saro-Wiwa text is a powerful literary illustration of the language-power link, with its implicit discourse on poverty and ignorance and on the manipulation of the "powerless" through language (O'Barr and Atkins 1980, Cortese 1992).

Text analysis would be extremely productive even at lower levels, since interpretation can be arrived at by the application of straightforward criteria such as sentence length, complexity of construction, range of structures, lexical range and etymology. A few statistical facts will bear the point out. There are 35 sentences in the extract. 27 are grammatically incomplete, 13 consist of 1 word only, 4 are made up of 2 words, 6 of 3 words and 3 of 4 words. A breakdown by phrase structure shows that of the 13 sentences consisting of 2 to 4 words, 8 are realised by a single phrase (though of varying function in the clause). There are very few instances of rankshift. Not surprisingly, only one of these appears in the 27 incomplete sentences. Structural range is limited (ellipsis accounting for the elimination of some of the more complex constructions). Words are generally short (one syllable) and they are of preponderantly Anglo-Saxon origin. In conclusion, the language consists of short, ungrammatical sentences, of restricted range and complexity.

The general picture that emerges of the narrator from an analysis of the language he employs ("rotten English", as Saro-Wiwa dubs it) is that of a person of low social and educational status, with limited experience of the world (conveyed by a variety of conceptual features as well as by code; for instance, by his idiosyncratic classificatory system, as in "man with fine shirt" and "fine fine English"), if not limited mental horizons. His scant comprehension and production of language leave him and his kind at the mercy of the powerful who are, on the contrary, artful in the deployment of what may be discerned as very refined SE indeed (see below). The powerless are quite literally cannon fodder, in this particular novel.

The analysis may now be pushed a stage further by inviting students to identify those sentences in the extract whose features of code do not correspond precisely to the standards defining "rotten English" established above (gradual, linear progression). The aim is to induce students to identify those parts in direct speech as divergent.

There are, in fact, four blocks of direct speech interspersed in the extract. While all of the sentences in direct speech retain a surface grammatical simplicity, the nature of the lexis employed gives the lie to this simplicity. The words are generally longer (more than one syllable), many are of Latin or Old French origin (17 against 6 items of Anglo-Saxon origin), they indicate an extremely formal style, and are virtually all content words as opposed to function

words. If the ellipsis were to be removed and the full sentences reconstructed, then their prolixity and their structural and ideational complexity would emerge with great force.

What would also emerge is their nature as political-persuasive discourse, together with a progression of ideas. The first set may be seen as praise of the speaker's own 'nation', and hence an implicit positive value judgement of his camp. It is completed by padding (prolixity, redundancy, lack of ideational content), a recurrent characteristic of such discourse. The second set represents an attack on the enemy party. An implicit negative value judgement regarding the horrors of war is linked to an unstated placing of the blame for the war squarely at the enemy's door. The third step is the "logical" one of his side's forced reaction to enemy aggression, namely mobilisation. The final step renews the attack on the enemy through denigration. No arguments or facts are offered, no explanations, no discussions of causes, no evidence. The rhetoric of war stands supreme.

At this point students may be invited to retrace their steps and compare the 'fine man's' English to that of the narrator. Although the latter's English corresponds to the canons of "rotten English", where the fine man's corresponds to formal SE, there are a series of ironic brush strokes. The irony adds extra meaning to the class distinction signalled through the use of different language varieties. In order to deal with these ironies, students will be induced to further note that the four sets of direct speech uttered by the fine man are quite deliberately paralleled by four sets of narratorial comment. Ironically, the utterances of the lower status narrator are all longer than those of the 'fine man'. The irony is doubled by the fact that half of these utterances are grammatically complete as well as grammatically acceptable. In contrast, the other half consist of a single phrase. In other words, the remaining language features correspond to "rotten English" and thus confirm the narrator's low status. The four sets taken together are characterised by a high degree of pure, child-like repetition ("fine", "big", "long", "grammar"), and repetition through lexical cohesion (words belonging to the same semantic field) coupled with redundancy ("did not stop-continue"). Ideational content is simple, and there is no conceptual development. (Reconstruction of ellipsed parts would fail to increase complexity either of construction or of thought, in contrast to the fine man's sentences.) In fact, the four sets convey the single idea that the fine man spoke complex SE. This underlines the basic concept that the fine man's language was so 'difficult' that the narrator understood only one word every so often. A second irony emerges here: the words the narrator catches are all 'difficult'! This irony is highlighted by the sentence "I understand that one". The basic implicature is that no matter how complex and alien the variety spoken by the other, the receiver is in no doubt as

to who will 'pay' for this war. Through close reading we identify the fundamental irony running through the entire novel.

4. Conclusions

The simple progression in questions in the previous exercise allows an inductive approach to be employed with all levels of students. The foregoing analysis gives an inkling of the complexity lying behind the surface of the language by recycling and extending previously taught methodological tools (for example, the simple statistical counts constitute a formal treatment of the levels of code introduced in stage 2 and enables students to determine the parameters of "rotten English").

Directness and indirectness may be gone into more thoroughly by dealing with other extracts in this light. Extensions across time, group (class, race, gender, age), geographical location, type of society which the comparison will bring out will establish the pervasiveness of the link between language, education and power, thereby underscoring universality.

The comments in the preceding two paragraphs were originally designed as a conclusion to the previous exercise. However, the nature of those observations also make them a fitting conclusion to the paper as a whole for they hint at the breadth and depth of the concepts and methods the original article attempts to cover.

Bibliography

- Austen J., 1814-1970, *Mansfield Park*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Baron J.A., Stenberg R.J., 1986, *Teaching Thinking Skills*, W.H. Freeman and Company, New York.
- Behan B., 1958, *Borstal Boy*, Hutchinson and Co, London.
- Benedict R., 1946, *Patterns of Culture*, Penguin Books, New York.
- Berruto G., 1995, *Fondamenti di Sociolinguistica*, Laterza, Bari.
- Boas F. (ed.), 1911-1912, *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.
- Brady M., Dodds J., Taylor C., 1984, *Four Fits of Anger: Essays on The Angry Young Men*, Campanotto, Udine.
- Copi I.M., Cohen C., 1994, *Introduction to Logic*, Macmillan, New York.
- Cortese G. (ed.), 1992, *Her/his speechways: gender perspectives in English*, Edizioni Cortina, Torino.
- Dickens C., 1857-1967, *Little Dorrit*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

- Douthwaite J., 1991, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language: an Introduction to the Communicative Approach*, SEI, Torino.
- Douthwaite J., 1996, "Developing Thinking Skills through the Use of Detective Stories", in C. Taylor (ed.), *Aspects of English 2. Miscellaneous Papers for English Teachers and Specialists*, Campanotto, Udine, pp. 57-88.
- Firth J.R., 1957, *Papers in Linguistics 1934-51*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Gal S., 1988, "The Political Economy of Code Choice", in M. Heller (ed.), *Codeswitching*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Gumperz J.J. (ed.), 1982, *Language and Social Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gumperz J.J. and Hymes D., (eds), 1972-1986, *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Hymes D., 1971, "On Communicative Competence", in J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Kayman M.A., 1992, *From Bow Street to Baker Street. Mystery, Detection and Narrative*, Macmillan, Houndmills.
- Labov W., 1969, "The Logic of Nonstandard English", in P.P. Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.
- Leach E., 1976, *Culture and Communication: The logic by which symbols are connected*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Levi-Strauss C., 1968, *Structural Anthropology*, Allen Lane, London.
- Malinowski B., 1923, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages", in C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (eds), *The Meaning of Meaning*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Mead M., 1930-1965, *Growing Up in New Guinea*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Mitchell-Kernan C., 1972-1986, "Signifying and Marking: Two Afro-American Speech Acts", in J.J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds), 1972-1986.
- O'Barr W.O, Atkins K., 1980, "'Women's language' or 'powerless language?'". Reprinted in G. Cortese (ed.), *Her/his speechways: gender perspectives in English*, Edizioni Cortina, Torino, 1992.
- Romaine S., 1994, *Language in Society. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Sapir E., 1921, *Language*, Harcourt Brace, New York.
- Saro-Wiwa K., 1985, *Sozaboy*, Saros International Publishers, Port Harcourt.
- Scherer K.R., Giles H. (ed.), 1979, *Social markers in speech*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shaw G.B., 1913-1995, *Pygmalion*, ed. by J. Douthwaite, Cideb, Rapallo.

- Sillitoe A., 1959, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, W.H. Allen and Co, London.
- Stern H.H., 1983, *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Waterhouse K., 1957, *There is a Happy Land*, Longman, London.
- Whorf B.L., 1956, *Language, Thought and Reality, selected writings edited by J.B. Carroll*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.