Paper – 2

UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR NAMIBIA'S EXPERIENCE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The Seventeenth Annual TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Convention was held at the Westin Hotel Convention Center in Toronto, Canada, from 15 through to 20 March 1983. Over 4100 TESOLers from forty-five countries gathered there to participate in it. I was one of them. I had gone there representing the United Nations Institute for Namibia. My colleagues, Aminata Diallo and Derek Thomson had also been part of our delegation.

On 17 March, I presented a paper at the convention titled, '*United Nations Institute for Namibia's Experience in the Teaching of English'***.** With some modifications, the same paper was read on 21 October 1983, at an international seminar held, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat, at the University of Zambia campus. Quite unexpectedly, Comrade Hage Gottlieb Geingob, the Director of the Institute entered a disclaimer questioning my *bona fides,* moments after the paper was presented. I was taken aback, for earlier the paper had been officially approved for presentation at the TESOL Convention. Four months later, i.e. end of February 1984, I was 'separated from service', as they euphemistically put it. I appealed to the Senate against this decision, but I was not prepared to retract what I said in the paper. They dithered. I had to leave the Institute under a cloud. **I have given below the text of that paper:**

"The United Nations Institute for Namibia, Lusaka, welds together a multi-lingual student population of varying ages and achievement levels. The premature casualties of the apartheid system that they are, these Namibians have had little exposure to the outside world. Needless to say, the South African-imposed educational system had sold the Namibians short. It is against this background that the lack of linguistic and extra-linguistic capacity that these students are presently disadvantaged with should be viewed. Most of them come from schools, where teaching of English, for the most part by unqualified and incompetent teachers, is only an apology for one. In fact, hardly any student at the Institute has had schooling long enough to gain threshold competence in any language, to cope with the projected needs of the target group at the Institute. The general picture that emerges is that of a group of students who, despite their eagerness to learn, are woefully ill equipped for the challenges of an academic curriculum. Relative to the standards stipulated for new entrants elsewhere, there is a paucity of students at the requisite levels of competence in the various programmes of the Institute. Using a comparative frame of reference is an ingrained habit of mind, but if one seeks favourable comparisons between the levels of the prospective students at the Institute and those of similar institutions elsewhere, one is bound to be disappointed. That, however, should not deter one from trying to analyze the problems and to look for answers.

That a common medium of instruction is needed for an institution with a common purpose and common goal is not in dispute. Ideally, the choice should fall on the first language of the learners, but the multi-lingual picture that the Institute presents precludes such a possibility. Since Afrikaans is effectively the lingua franca of Namibia at present and since its influence is not likely to wear off any time soon, even after independence, logic might have dictated Afrikaans as the next most viable choice. Politically, however, such a choice would be unthinkable. In the circumstances, SWAPO's decision to opt for English as the official language of an independent Namibia offered the institute a *fait accompli* that effectively forestalled any enquiry into the choice of a medium.

By virtue of this decision, English has created for itself a need, which may not have arisen under different conditions. From the outset, this need has had a negative impact on the 'purposive domain' of the students. A register of English that confounds them is apt to overwhelm them. More often than not, it hinders their self-expression and is at odds with their critical faculties. A poor grasp of the language of learning thus makes for vagueness of perceptions. This affects not only the students but also the teachers; the students fall back on rote learning on the one hand and, on the other, the teachers modify their teaching strategies to align with evaluation procedures that test not so much the intelligent application of knowledge as the mere regurgitation of inert 'knowledge' that has not been assimilated. This, then, is the problem and English is the crux of that problem.

Of the ongoing training programmes at the Institute, the most important is a three-year diploma course in Management and Development Studies for middle-level trainee-administrators. The students spend the first two years of this course following an academic curriculum. It necessitates an ongoing ELT service programme, as an adjunct to it.

This paper shall attempt to deal with the specifics of this programme with a view to focusing on teacher-learner constraints, both pedagogical and linguistic. Whether the problems arising from this rather ad-hoc exposure to English and the short-term measures taken to counteract them would have any future lessons for the logical progression of teaching English in a formal school system that has yet to be evolved in Namibia is open to question.

Prospective students take qualifying tests in English, Social sciences and Maths. Only very rarely do these tests exclude more than a token number of students. Rather, the test results serve notice of what lies ahead for the teacher with each intake.

This test is presumed to determine whether the prospective student has the linguistic **potential** (which is not to be taken as being synonymous with '**threshold competence**') to cope with the work at the Institute, given the assistance they will receive from the ELT programme. Hardly anyone is denied a place merely on the score of being weak in English, and this for an eminently sensible reason: as matters stand, not many students

would find places at the Institute if a level of competence commensurate with the needs of a higher institution of learning is insisted upon.

How valid is the English test itself in predicting student potential? Of the nine items that comprise the paper, the first seven are of the objective type and carry 75 per cent of the total marks. This is intended to ensure the marker validity of the paper. The first of these items tests the candidate's ability to see logico-semantic relationships and to draw analogies. The second item is a test of passive vocabulary. The third and the fourth examine the candidate's ability to choose the correct grammatical and structural options in communicative situations of various kinds. The fifth item expects the candidate to match two different surface transforms of the same conceptual structure from a choice of structures offered. These five items are purely recognition exercises.

The sixth item tests the candidate's knowledge of syntax and the seventh, their knowledge of prepositions and particles. The eighth and ninth items are free response tests of writing. While a small number achieve a modicum of success with the objective-type questions, hardly any show a capacity for sustained writing. Again, many seem to lack examination sophistication even to be able to read let alone understand the rubric of the paper. Within the rather limited scope of this question paper (copies of which are available for scrutiny), how well can we ascertain the 'linguistic potential' of students, given their inadequacies?

We have not been able to ascertain the empirical validity of this paper with a target group before its actual administration to the candidates. The macro-tasks of teaching a full timetable and producing materials as we go along have not given us sufficient respite to do this. Even if we did have the time for such an exercise, it would suffer the drawback of uncontrolled variables with a large and disparate sample that obtains in refugee camps. The disparity of levels among them also makes it difficult to maintain a careful balance between, for instance, tense forms, structures, lexical items etc. to be tested. Besides, the students come from different areas, urban as well as rural, often far apart. Consequently, the test has to avoid area-specific references. This lack of specificity creates the need to draw a distinction between the mastery of skills *per se* and the areas of knowledge that the candidates might or might not have been exposed to. Therefore, a certain degree of subjectivity is inevitable in drawing up a paper to help predict student potential.

Linguistic potential also encompasses aural-oral skills as well as extra-linguistic ability. Ideally, a reading test, a listening comprehension test, as also an interview would enhance the content validity of the measuring instrument. That is, given the other variables, these latter tests would help identify the more articulate and the more promising of the candidates. Since, however, our students are so heterogeneous in their attainments, such test can have only invidious implications. In any case, what with the distant locations of camps and the logistical problems that they entail, both for the examiners and the examinees, such an all-inclusive test is impractical.

As has been stated, in addition to English, the candidate is tested in Social Science and Elementary Maths as well. Any candidate passing two of the three tests finds a place in the Diploma course. Therefore, it is seldom that we get a significant number of students whose linguistic equipment can be equal to the demands of the content courses.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the students cannot keep in step with one another and move apace to reach their academic goals. To remedy this situation even before the projected academic programme begins, special language classes can be organized. And to run such classes, it is imperative that the potential common needs and the common interests that cut across the curriculum are identified. In general, students need to develop skills, both receptive and productive, with particular reference to:

Survival English
Study Skills
Subject-specific Materials.

Developing oral communicative ability is also absolutely essential. But with a large target group and the wide differences in levels, a lockstep approach in which all are taught the same materials at the same pace would be counter-productive. This would therefore argue a case for graded courses of varying duration. They would dovetail initial teaching and remedial teaching, two related but separate tasks. The ratio of initial teaching to remedial teaching in any one course would be inversely proportional to the starting levels of competence in that course. Extended periods of pre-sessional English would also give teachers time to identify the errors that call for remedial attention.

Note: *What is of importance to future Namibian education is that English/local language contrastive analyses should be carried out to predict the areas of difficulty for Namibian students. Although the common errors are more intra-lingual than based on first language interference, a contrastive analysis does have a role to play in error analysis. To undertake such research, a language resource centre would be necessary.*

The reality of our situation is somewhat different. Constraints, both administrative and logistical, have inhibited the running of courses for varying needs. And unless the academic programme were flexible enough to allow induction of students on a staggered basis, such courses would not be cost effective. Given the rigidity of our academic programme, or lack of flexibility if you like, one alternative that suggests itself is a full year of orientation to which English language teaching would be central, before the start of the academic programme. But the Institute is pressed for time and the decision makers' immediate concern, therefore, is to implement not so much what is pedagogically desirable as what is expedient in the short-term.

A more appealing alternative would be distance teaching with tutorial help. The Namibian Extension Unit is already doing this at the elementary levels. It may not be difficult for the NEU to extend their services to higher levels as well. Depending on the attainment levels of the students, the NEU could design various courses, after having determined the duration of each course. The Institute could then make the entrance test in

English selective in its aim and also raise the cut-off point for a pass commensurately. For those who fail to make the grade, there will be another opportunity as they continue to be exposed to distance teaching.

Note*: In this regard, the experience of the Academy of Tertiary Education in Windhoek, since its inception in 1981, is illuminating. Here is a quote from a letter I received not long ago from the Rector of the academy. "In our first year, 1981, we 'achieved' a 100 per cent failure rate in our Practical English course, then the ordinary University of South Africa Syllabus and their examination. We had about 35 students in the course. I had been agitating, along with others, for a full "preliminary year" to include remedial language, and had already prepared the language syllabus. After the 1981 disaster, we were allowed to implement the remedial course in 1982, holding back about 60 first-year students from Practical English. We met a lot of opposition from colleagues. ...The course was abandoned for this year (1983). ... However, ... we have noticed great improvement this year in many of the students who took the 1982 remedial course – students who could not write (literally!) a line without one or more errors, are now writing 10 to 15 lines of fairly simple, but error-free prose. We have no doubt that many of them are the better for the remedial course – **it allowed them to come to grips with their language problems before being dumped into academic content.** (Emphasis added) We still have a few students from the 1981 disaster, now in their third year of Practical English, and looking like failing again, because they have been continually immersed in academic content without being given the chance to swim."*

On three occasions in the past we were able to run short fixed-duration courses, comprising basic grammar, listening and reading, common to all students. These were run parallel with Maths modules.   The English modules were not particularly beneficial to the bulk of the students, who would have stood to gain the most from them had they been not only longer but also unencumbered by other demands made on the students. There are several factors beyond our control, which work against conducting even such limited-objective courses. As a rule, therefore, what should by pedagogical norms be part of a pre-sessional course becomes the first part of our regular In-sessional Programme.

Regardless of the disparity of student levels, there were certain factors of sound inter-personal relationships, which augured well for the students. The degree of solidarity that existed between them helped in creating a well-knit group. It was hoped it would lend itself to inter-teaching, which it did to some extent. This however did not produce the hoped-for benefit, since the linguistic knowledge of the 'better-equipped' student was at too gross a level to help the weaker student make up leeway. Besides, the mixed-ability grouping caused difficulties in opting for an over-all pedagogy, without having to gravitate too quickly from one method to another.

This led to the practice of streaming the students into groups of more or less uniform attainment. But, again, streaming is not easy. Even with the use of the most sophisticated instruments of testing, it is impossible to attain in the same group total homogeneity that would lend itself to a lockstep progression in teaching as well as learning for all the

students in that group. However, by reviewing student performance in English and by re-streaming them every three months, a certain degree of flexibility is maintained. A small but significant number moves up or down, finding their levels over the first year. This facilitates teaching the various groups the same skills at the appropriate levels. That is to say, the same materials are used for all the students but the behavioural objectives are adapted to accommodate the differences in levels. The term 'behavioural objectives' should not be construed to pre-suppose a solely behavioural pedagogy, however. The specification of an objective in whatever terms does not force any specific methodology on the teacher. (See "Waystage English" Van Ek, Alexander and Fitzpatrick, Pergamon Press Pp 2/3.)

The in-sessional English programme is a skills-based course designed to develop student competence in the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the first year, emphasis is placed on the development of study and communicative skills, but in the second year there is a shift of bias to applied skills in order to increase student ability in the use of written and spoken English for vocational purposes. Over these two years, there are five contact hours a week. Three or four of these are taken up by the corporate classroom approach with its scope for teacher-student and student-student interaction. Students spend at least one hour in the language lab for communication practice. This serves as an adjunct to what has been learned in the classroom. If the vagaries of the timetable permit a second hour in the lab, it is used for listening practice. Needless to say, the time available is inadequate. It is instructive to remember that even in an Anglophone school situation, it takes no fewer than eight to ten hours of English, both as a subject and as a medium, to prepare the students for tertiary education.

Our first year programme comprises the units of Basic Grammar, Reading for Information, Listening Comprehension and Communicating in Speech. The terminology used does not indicate the methods used. The methods range from the more traditional rule-generalization strategy to teaching based on repetition, analogy function and extrapolation, without necessarily making the various methods mutually exclusive.

Whatever the method used, the approach is of necessity direct, as the teachers engaged in the task are not Namibians. Whether the efficacy of the direct approach is axiomatic is an ongoing debate. Transformational Generative Grammar in a return to tradition admits of the existence of linguistic universals and analogies between languages at the level of deep structure; so, mother-tongue teaching as an initiation into the general problems of language and as a preparation for foreign language learning is gaining greater acceptance. Rather than being seen, as the structuralists did, as an annoying source of interference to be neutralized, mother tongue is seen by many as a valuable and useful aid in ELT methodology. For instance, the Council of Europe makes the point that one should base the learning of grammar of a second language on the general knowledge of the grammar acquired through the teaching of the mother tongue. (See pp 49/50 of "Linguistic Theory, Linguistic Description and Language Teaching" by Eddy Roulet, Longman 1976.)

The communication skills practice takes up two out of the five hours allotted in the first year, thus reflecting the emphasis we lay on the semantic content of the language and on the use of language. The skills are introduced first in the classroom and then practised in the language lab for reinforcement and consolidation. To satisfy the criterion of contextual appropriateness in the use of language, situations that usually occur both at the institute and at the hostels are drawn on to develop models for communication. The language involved has two dimensions, one functional and the other situational. (See C. Black and W. Butzkamm's "Classroom Language: Materials for Communicative Language Teaching" ELT Journal Vol. XXXI No. 4 July '78.) These two dimensions interact to create genuine dialogues. Such functions as giving/relaying information, expressing scales of certainty, requesting, apologizing, questioning and so forth can be handled through such notions of student needs as classroom organization, use of library, food, accommodation, academic tasks, social norms, finding one's bearings and so on.

Various dialogue options for each language function are introduced and then practised; first by imitation and then by repetition and later by pair-work, which lends itself to role-playing in the language lab. Some of the dialogues inevitably look beyond the classroom and the Institute. If the ultimate goal of language learning is to prepare the students for applying it in real life –in daily speech and in reading and writing in their offices and perhaps even for pleasure- then this can be anticipated in the classroom. There may be an element of make-believe in such classroom practice, but a transfer from this to authentic communicative situations should be possible. A teacher can hardly ignore this aspect of learning.

The language lab mode has not been without its problems. What with having to 'monitor' up to 20 students, at any given time the teachers have no option but to allow most of the students to 'try their wings' with scarcely any guidance. No doubt, they enjoy being left to their own devices and often work spontaneously but this is not necessarily an unmixed blessing. Although sometimes the teachers can randomly pitch upon a correct response or an acceptable dialogue in a student's role playing activity and offer immediate reinforcement, it is not possible for a single teacher to monitor all the students all the time. This lack of guidance makes room for unintended errors and the reinforcement of such errors. It also induces the students to mimic certain forms and constructions without knowing their functions. This happens when they cannot handle the basic problem of any dialogue: not realizing that a dialogue far from being a string of unrelated utterances, is a reciprocal nexus with its components of question and answer. Even if they understood the question, they would not see the need for grammatical relations between the question and the answer and the meanings that different grammatical forms are meant to convey. If a question like "May I have an exercise book, please?" is offered as a cue, they may not have much problem answering that either negatively or positively. However, if a response is given as a cue, many students have problems with making a mental backtrack to formulate the structure that prompted that response as also with guessing what might come next. For instance, if something like "I'm afraid I don't have enough files for the whole class. Some of you will have to wait" is offered as a cue, they cannot easily figure out the 'before and after' contextual extension of the dialogue. This raises a question: Does the so-called communicative

(notional/functional) approach generate creative use of language in new situations any more than does the audio-lingual habit method? Again, by using a notional-functional approach, can a teacher help his students' rather disjoint bits of language come together into a logical whole, without recourse to a pedagogically appropriate grammar? It would seem that communication *per se* is a vague amorphous target that the students cannot home in on.

As he is still learning to manipulate a new tool, perhaps the more traditional rule-generalisation (cognitive) method should precede exercises of this nature; that is, if the constraints of the timetable can be overcome. Before the students get to the sentence and the dialogue, should they not be familiar with word formation (elements of morphology) and the rules for ordering and connecting words in a sentence? Wilkins argues for a basis to be built first before the notional approach. He reiterates that a finite set of grammatical rules is capable of producing an infinity of sentences. This, then, calls for learning grammar. But what kind of grammar would be complementary to communication skills practice? Linguists have yet to come up with an answer. Will it suffice pedagogically to provide ad-hoc grammatical descriptions as need arises? But this might militate against a systematic, book-based grammatical progression that a teacher new to the profession feels safe with.

We at the Institute do have a basic grammar component running concurrently with communication skills practice. Within a broad framework, our teachers have sufficient latitude to add to or adapt the materials and use a variety of methods so that a teacher's individual teaching style is not dictated to by any specific theory. We have had no time to accumulate and classify any empirical evidence to show whether this rather eclectic approach (to use a cliché) aids in bridging the various levels of language in communication skills practice.

If the timetable permits, we also use the language lab to sharpen the learner's listening skills. Alternatively, it is practised during classroom contact hours. This is a cognitive skill essential for the lecture situation. Students are shown how to take notes when they are listening to their content lectures on the core subjects of the course. The skill needed for this includes the ability primarily to understand speech at different speeds and in various accents. Listening practice is intended to develop such micro-skills as auditory discrimination, recognition of primary and secondary ideas and the avoidance of inessentials. Ideally, their task would be made easier if the lectures are well prepared and coherent. In practice, however, often the students have to learn to deal with unstructured lectures. In the process, they ought to learn how to cut down on redundancies, reduce structures and develop a system of abbreviation, enumeration and tabulation. At the initial stages of note-taking practice, verbal cues are provided by supplying headings and sub-headings either in the workbook or on a transparency with the help of the overhead projector. And, as such guidance is gradually withdrawn, the teacher relies progressively on group discussion to gauge student progress.

What are the problems of teaching this component? The choice of relevant materials for practice has to be based on the perceived needs of the various academic disciplines and the expectations that the lecturers have of students in their content courses. Yet, the levels of abstraction at which the students are expected to operate have been beyond the ken of many a student. If the English teacher makes allowances for this and simplifies the practice materials, that may help the weaker student to cope with the work in the English classroom but that will not help them cope with the involved language medium that is customarily obtaining in the plenary lectures.

Another important component of English teaching at the Institute is what is labeled as Reading for Information and, like other components, this is covered by a series of graded booklets and workbooks. One of these booklets gives the students an orientation in library and reference skills. Another introduces the elements of **note making**. Some of the micro skills involved in making notes from source materials in the library are not dissimilar to **note-taking** skills. If the notes are well made, they can understand what they have read more readily than if they were re-reading the long passages, often of unimportant detail, found in many source books. The other booklets in the series have a reading comprehension bias. At the early stages, students learn to look for specific facts and also to tell fact from opinion. Comprehension questions aim to help the students to 'read the lines'. Later on questions are made more probing in order to help develop the interpretive and inferential ability of students to, as it were, 'read between the lines'. They also become familiar with inter-sentential and intra-sentential relations through the use of cohesive devices such as discourse markers as also of pro-forms.

The better-equipped student, with his relative ability to skim and scan with speed, finds the reading component a particularly rewarding one. Besides, his extra-linguistic abilities are allowed full play here. To the weaker students, however, this component poses problems. A general inability to read silently and speedily at any great length is one of their main obstacles. They regard silent reading as labour. They tend to consider a text, word by word without much regard to comprehension. To them, language learning is primarily a word-listing task. In any oral discussion in the class, however elementary the topic may be, such students take the line of least resistance and wait impassively for the answers to emerge or the conclusions to be drawn. Even if group work is attempted to encourage greater student participation in solving problems, it is again your better student who would 'hold the floor'.

Complementing the reading component is another one called "Graphics". The main purpose of this is to show how graphic information can be interpreted and then converted to verbal information, making particular use of the language of comparison. This component also exposes the students to mathematical terms in English.

In the second year, teaching of English assumes an ESP bias. Students are introduced to official correspondence like writing letters, memos, minutes, telegrams and so forth. Later in the year, report writing is introduced. As the first step to writing reports, students are prompted to gather information on familiar situations like dining-room facilities or

library services and present it in a report format. They are also guided to draw inferences and make recommendations. Whereas in the first two terms, writing letters or reports is attempted as discrete exercises, in the third term various forms of official correspondence are dovetailed into a chronological progression of tasks, holding the principal theme constant. The themes are chosen from situations that are likely to arise in the civil service. Since such situations can only be constructed vicariously at this point and, furthermore, since each task involved entails a change of the correspondent's identity, this stage of writing has proved to be a bugbear to many a student. Unless exhaustive notes, sequentially arranged, are provided, many students fail to grasp the developing situation. Our dilemma is that if we give them guidance to that extent, it makes their performance quasi-mechanical. They are deprived of the chance to think things through as in an authentic civil service situation.

Another second year component is 'Applied Speaking'. This introduces the students to the basics of speaking in public. Speaking from notes, participating in seminars, conducting group discussions are all simulated in the classroom. Given the constraints of time and the priority that practising other skills demand, the opportunity that the students get in public speaking is limited. This seems strange if we consider their lack of confidence in expressing themselves in English, which not only distorts their flow of speech (and also of writing) but also obscures its meaning.

From what has been said so far, it is clear that, within the time that is available, the four basic skills are broken down into certain functional sub-skills and their target levels defined in terms of role-relationships, functions and notions. In this sort of specific purpose situation, which is biased towards skills and functions alone, the form of language or its linguistic content has not been done full justice to. This has given rise to errors, phonological as well as morphological. Pressure of work has led to tardiness on our part with instituting an investigative strategy to attempt a systematic error analysis in order to predict, categorize and compensate for errors in the pedagogy.

Be that as it may, a random selection of phonological and morphological errors from student speech and writing has been attempted. This has only scratched the surface, but it might prove to be of some use to the prospective teacher of English in Namibia. Phonological problems shall be looked at first and then certain verb phrase features that trouble the students.

What are the phonological problems? To start with, the student has difficulties with vowel sounds. This is because the phonological structure of his own language with fewer vowel sounds creates difficulties with 'hearing' phonemic contrast in English and, therefore, with recognizing the much more numerous English vowel sounds. The result is that he has to deal with what is called '*homophony*'. For instance, words like 'cat' 'cut' 'cart', or 'matter' 'mutter' 'martyr', are to him *identical sounding words with different meanings*. His task is not made any easier when his senses are constantly assaulted by such headlines in the print media as 'Cancellations Buffle Wonani' or 'Air Crush Kills'. In addition to pronunciation problems, this also leads to *'homophonous'* mis-spellings

like 'ruffle' for 'raffle' or 'drunk' for 'drank'. (Is this latter an error of spelling or of grammar?) Again, the fact that Namibian languages are written in the Roman alphabet poses further difficulties in learning to read and write in English. Whereas his language reflects a phoneme-grapheme correspondence, English reflects many divergences. He sees commonplace letters used to represent less commonplace sounds, which understandably leads to confusion. The sound 'i' is another case in point. The student does not discriminate between differences in vowel length in such words as 'ship' and 'sheep'. 'hit' and 'heat'. 'sit' and 'seat', 'bit' and 'beat', 'skim' and 'scheme' and so forth. Often, the tendency to annex the short sound to the longer sound or vice versa creates a sort of 'recoil effect' when a word like 'sheet' is used in the classroom, only to send titters round the class. No doubt, the problem affords a teaching opportunity, but it takes a long time before differences are internalized even for passive recognition. Certain vowel combinations or diphthongs create problems, too. For instance, they pronounce words like 'laid' 'may' and 'raid' phonetically so that they sound like 'lied', 'my' and 'ride'.

A fundamental part of English speech is the nuclear stress on the element that requires to be emphasized. Any departure from the normal might have a negative effect on intelligibility. In teaching situations, the whole direction of the pupils' thinking can be guided by it. The student has serious problems with stress in general and nuclear stress in particular. He is not mentally set to hear the stress and therefore cannot produce it. He often cannot distinguish between weak and strong syllables. In his language there is almost equal stress on all the syllables, which offers an explanation for his difficulty.

Generally, in Bantu languages no syllable ends in a consonant. As a result the student of English tends to insert a vowel sound between two successive consonants or after a final consonant. Here are some examples of the intrusive vowel sounds, chosen at random:

'Headmaster'   may be pronounced as   'headimaster' (three syllables)

'Practice'   -do-   /prakatis/   (three syllables)

'Ourselves'   -do-   /aurselevz/   (three syllables)

'Made to'   -do-   /meidi tu:/   (three syllables)

'Land reform'   -do-   /landi rifo:m/   (four syllables)

'Clothes'   -do-   /klothes/   (two syllables)

Recently, a student was overheard in the lab saying "Isi smoking goodu for your helethi?" Sometimes, however, vowel sounds in syllables are elided or not clearly pronounced. Thus for example:

'President'   may be pronounced as   /prezdent/ or even /plezdent/

'Coincided'   -do-   /konsaided/

'Satisfied'   -do-   /sesfaid/

The student has problems with consonants as well as some consonant clusters. Some students seem not to be able to distinguish between 'voiceless' and 'voiced' consonants like p,b; t,d; k,g and f,v. Among the problems caused, the one that affects intelligibility most is the /sh/ sound.   Thus for example:

'Shop'   may be pronounced as   /sop/

'Ship'   -do-   /sip/ or /seep/

'Should'   -do-   /sud/

The word 'Sugar' is pronounced by the students without the /sh/ sound, but as spelt.

The student has difficulties with /r/ and /l/ as he cannot tell them apart. As a result, these two sounds are frequently interchanged.   The confusion arises because of the close proximity of the tongue position in producing these sounds. It is not so much the spelling as the pronunciation that causes the problem. Thus even with the visual crutches that the text affords, a student may be heard to say/read things like 'rearn Engrish', 'lite leport', 'swim a liver', 'bollow money', 'fragrant viorations of human lights' or 'Will we have lice for runch today?' Another problem is that he neglects the 'liaison' or the carrying on of a final consonant sound to the next word that begins with a vowel. This results in jerky articulation. Thus for example he would be heard to say 'My fathe(r) andi mothe(r) are …'

One could go on in this desultory fashion and list further mistakes. Again, the student can hardly understand how an inflection morpheme may have a number of different phonetic variations.   For instance, the bound morpheme /-ed/ that forms the past tense of regular verbs is pronounced by our students almost invariably as a distinct syllable without regard to its phonetic variations i.e. [id], [d] and [t]. (This morpheme also causes a morphological problem to the student when he inflects irregular verbs by false analogy with regular verbs.)   There are other inflectional suffixes such as the noun plural morpheme, the possessive morpheme and the third person singular present tense

morpheme that pose problems. Then there is the whole field of supra-segmental features of English as length, stress and intonation that is a gray area as earlier mentioned in passing. This paper can refer to only a few of the vast array of problems. A more thorough investigation and the subsequent application of its findings to pedagogy would be the task of the applied linguist.

Some problems have been touched upon already. Of all the problems that the student faces, there is nothing more serious than that of the verb phrase structures, in terms of acceptability. He has difficulties with the forms of the auxiliaries and the inflectional morphemes of the verb forms. One result is that he flouts rules of grammatical concord. This problem is exacerbated by the student's inability to see the relationship between the form of the English verb he uses and its number, tense and aspect. The concept of the verb phrase is not a familiar one to the Namibian student in general. From the little we have gleaned of the conjugation of verbs in Oshivambo, we have surmised that verb forms that express tense and also aspect are simple tense forms in contrast to the compound verbs of English such as are used in the progressive and the perfect tenses. Therefore, the forms and uses of the primary auxiliaries 'be' and 'have' along with the requisite forms of the main verb participles to express progressive and perfective aspects and the forms of the periphrastic 'do' along with the bare infinitive of the main verb to express negation and interrogation in the simple tenses are alien concepts to him. It is the same with modal auxiliaries. The result is that he creates ungrammatical verbs arbitrarily and sometimes even uses the participles by themselves in place of finite verbs. What follows is a list of such forms chosen at random from student work both in speech and in writing.

The neighbouring countries	is consist of…
The country	is depend on …
This	was happened…
Verwoerd	has died in 1966.
He	is act as adviser…
I	am intend to talk…
I	am request you to sent…
I	done all what you request…
He	beaten his young wife…
Okonkwo	was believed in tradition…
This book	is discussed Obi Okonkwo…
It	does not related to what it say…
Soil	has loses its nutrients…
Sheep farming	has contribute to…
I	would like to indicated…
We	must can do it to stopped the hunger…
There	is three different kinds of group…
The local language	are spoken in different region…
The main causes	is rats, rodents and insects…
They	use to vaccinate…(Used to indicate present habit)
I	determined to see him… (False analogy with a tense form)

He   will engaged…

We have made a list other examples, but the sample chosen is indicative of the areas of difficulty.

The total problem that emerges from the above analysis is a serious one, but not an insurmountable one if we conduct pre-sessional courses and insist on the students achieving a fair degree of competence even before they start their academic courses. To make these courses yield optimum results, a prior determination of the common problems encountered by the Namibian students would be needed. Contrastive and error analyses ought to be undertaken to understand, classify and remedy the errors. There is also need for basic research in studying the structures of texts that the Institute uses for teaching English. At present, the teachers of English at the Institute are engaged in revising the teaching materials in the light of their own classroom experience. The exercise is largely intuitive, with each teacher drawing on his internalized store of language and pedagogy. If they have at their disposal the results of the type of research referred to above, their task of producing materials, adopting strategies and evaluating the programmes would be so much more effective.

How do we assess student performance? There are several major objectives in the teaching of English and these involve various language learning activities, for each of which periodic assessments are made. This is to allow the teacher to monitor the progress of the students regularly. Continuous assessment assumes more than one of the following forms:

Periodic exercises done by students in the classroom;
Homework assignments;
Spot tests (The element of surprise checks student readiness.)
Formal tests;
Group discussions, and
Prepared speeches.

We have sometimes felt despondent about the apparent lack of progress of our weaker students, judged solely by the low scores that they obtain. In graphical terms, the students may slightly climb a gradient of learning and then move along a plateau without further ascent. This is accounted for by the fact that the graded skills that they are to acquire become increasingly difficult to achieve, given the time constraints of the timetable. In other words, the lower order skills are not fully assimilated before they grapple with higher skills. Besides, at rapidly increasing levels of abstraction in the work that they are doing they can hardly be expected to show sharp increases in their scores.

Be that as it may, judging by how our students fare after they have left the Institute, we venture to say that the effort they made learning English has not been in vain, either for them or for us. Our graduates have proved to be more than equal to the challenges they face after leaving the Institute. Some of them have come back to join the administrative staff of the Institute. Some represent SWAPO in various capitals of the world with great

aplomb. There are several in various institutions of learning, reading for degrees, in places like the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Yugoslavia, Zambia and India. Yet others are doing good work serving as teachers in the camps, teaching young and old alike. Some have re-joined the Institute as students in a teacher-training programme or in a course for training magistrates. It is also a source of great pride to us that some of our women graduates are doing sterling service among Namibians in exile, in the filed of nutrition, childcare and family planning. The prospects for a future independent Namibia are indeed encouraging.

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