

*Linguistics and the Teacher*. Edited by R. Carter. Pp. xiii, 197. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. £5.95.

This is a title that has long been in search of a book. Linguistics and teachers in this country have, for the past fifteen years, made several attempts to construct a bridge which will join their respective domains. The foundations of the bridge on both banks will be much clearer, as a result of this book. But the bridge is still a long way off meeting in the middle.

I can understand the motivation for this book. It is usually a fruitful exercise to ask 'Where have we got to?' In the present case, the answer seems to be 'not very far'. The book contains a large amount of statement (more usually re-statement) of linguists' positions, focusing on the need for teachers to be properly equipped in techniques for

analysing language. The case is argued for language as a central element in the pre- and in-service education of teachers. It is the sort of thing which was routinely heard on the lecturing circuits in the early 1970s, and which led to a flood of articles and books before, during and after the period of the Bullock Committee's ruminations. There is a lot of *déjà vu* about this book: indeed, a first version of one of the chapters originally appeared in 1973, and most of the other chapters have appeared in various places since. I cannot see any principle governing the selection of previously published pieces, or of new items for inclusion. The list of areas excluded for reasons of 'space' include the teaching of reading, language acquisition, language handicap, bilingualism and several other topics which have just as much right to be represented in a book with the above title as any of those which are included. I would have welcomed some justification for this way of proceeding. As it is, we have here a curious mixture of old and new, and a range of styles and presentations which cry out for further editing, to avoid overlaps and infelicities. As an example, take this kind of remark, which turns up in the paper by Michael Halliday, which opens the collection: 'I needn't expand on this [sc. language acquisition] because it's a major theme for this whole conference' (13) – that is, the conference in Australia in the late 70s to which this paper originally contributed.

The book has an editorial introduction and ten chapters, each with its own summary. Carter's introduction reviews briefly what he sees to be the principal questions asked about linguistics: to do with the place of linguistics courses in education, the abstractness and formalism of linguistics, the diversity of linguists' views, and the pedagogical relevance of linguistic material. He points out that there are many misconceptions about linguistics and its claimed relevance in teacher training and practice. The aim of the book is accordingly to clarify matters, to enable fruitful dialogue between linguists and teachers to proceed, etc. etc. Halliday opens the batting with 'Linguistics in teacher education' – a brief, informal, personal account of relevant basic issues aimed at a general audience, and published in 1979. John Sinclair's 'Linguistics and the teacher' is a heavy revision of a 1973 paper, stressing the need for teachers to have a systematic linguistics course in their training. It has an appendix giving a detailed syllabus of aims. Mike Riddle's 'Linguistics for education' reviews the domain of linguistics-based in-service courses, and linguistics as a school subject in Britain. He also gives an account of recent developments by professional bodies to Get Things Done. One of the things which has been Got Done is described in the chapter by Arthur Brookes and Richard Hudson – originally two seminar papers, now produced as a single account, called 'Do linguists have anything to say to teachers?' Hudson reprints here his account of the (83) points relevant to teachers which (47) British linguists have agreed upon. Brookes carried out a similar exercise, summarising the main questions he has found teachers to ask about language.

Gillian Brown's 'The spoken language' is a 1980 paper on the functions of speech, in which she distinguishes listener- and message-oriented functions, and concentrates on how to teach the latter. Peter Gannon's 'Responding to children's writing' seems to have been written for the book: it is an exercise in the genre of applying a linguistic model (in terms of levels of structure, etc.) to the errors in a piece of child writing (13 years) and to the associated teacher corrections. Two papers by Katherine Perera ('The assessment of linguistic difficulty in reading material' and 'The language demands of school learning'), both 1980 publications, would constitute a reason for getting this book, if you have not read them before. It is an odd editorial decision to have a fifth of a short book devoted to the work of one person – but few will quarrel with it, given the fine balance of perspective, illustration and commentary which characterises both papers. Michael Stubbs' 'What is English? Modern English language in the curriculum' is another Australian conference paper (1979). He comments generally on an English

language syllabus for secondary schools and higher – a syllabus based on English in use in the world, and one which avoids the over-narrow focus found in syllabuses dealing with the history of the language, language and literature, or formal linguistics. Last man in is Ronald Carter, with a paper written for the volume on 'Sociolinguistics and the integrated English lesson', which is on vocabulary organisation in literature and ordinary language, analysed in terms of lexical collocations and the associated theoretical paraphernalia, and concluding with an outline syllabus aimed at integrating the domains of literature and language. The book concludes with a very short glossary of 25 items not otherwise 'contextualised' in the articles, a general bibliography, and a select bibliography of items chosen by the contributors as the most useful introduction to language studies in education, from a specifically linguistic point of view.

Some of the limitations of the book do not emerge from such a paraphrase of its content. Neither the title nor the blurb makes it clear that the book deals almost exclusively with language in the context of the secondary school. (A pity, in my view. A child at 11 is not a blank linguistic slate, but carries with him a range of abilities and handicaps that have been inculcated in his primary school training. How was he taught about language previously? What does he know about language? How can one decide where a secondary curriculum starts, if one does not discuss where a primary curriculum finishes – or even, what a primary curriculum should be?) Secondly, the book is exclusively concerned with British thinking and practice, largely arising out of the experience of local seminars and conferences, the post-Bullock era, and professional developments in the 1970s (as illustrated by the acronymic character of p. 32). (A pity, in my view. When one recalls the enormous amount of publication stemming from the U.S.A. on language in education, beside which the British output is tiny, one would expect some cognisance to be taken of its content, especially when so many of the conclusions of the present volume are so similar.)

Thirdly, despite its good intentions, I cannot imagine that teachers will find this anything other than a most frustrating book. It will certainly give them a more complete perspective on what linguists are doing in this country than anything else currently available, and I am sure that teacher trainers will put the book on their reading lists. I will. But it is also a book which, by accident or design, does not discuss at all the massive problems involved in the crucial switch from theory to practice. The book has a strongly theoretical bias, as the editor admits. It aims to explain the current situation, and to establish guidelines for future developments. It has a great deal to say on the *what* and *why* of language – what should be in a syllabus, and why things should be that way – but the book has next to nothing to say on the *how* – how the teacher turns theory into practice. The teacher is told about the importance of varieties, syntax, and so on, but the issue of how to inform one's teaching through the use of these notions, and specifically which descriptive frameworks to use, is ignored. But this, in my experience, is precisely where teachers need most help. In the end, the teacher has to identify and classify specific features of linguistic strengths and weaknesses, whether in a textbook, in a child, or in himself – for which he needs a detailed metalanguage, not just general guidelines. But there is no hint, in this book, of how to go about the task of deciding on which descriptive framework to use. Hudson is silent about this, in his points on which linguists can agree, and for good reason: it is a highly controversial issue. Stubbs, in an appendix note (154), at least mentions the issue:

I have discussed in the body of this paper the possibility of describing samples of real language in use and of contrastive text analysis. This clearly needs some framework for describing texts, but I have not discussed this at all.

Nor does anyone else in this book. Stubbs goes on:

This is partly because it does not really matter which framework is used, as long as it obeys various criteria. It must be non-prescriptive and fairly comprehensive: able to describe what actually occurs. If teachers are familiar with, for example, tagmemic grammar, systemic grammar or various other descriptive frameworks, then these could serve.

He opts himself for the approach of Quirk, *et al.*, which is certainly quite widely used in this country, though not without criticism from some theoreticians who dislike its eclectic theoretical framework. Or again, I can think of many linguists who would dispute the use of the kind of functional grammar which seems to be at the back of many of the contributors' minds. Nor is this just an academic matter. I have been involved in workshops where both teachers and linguists have been involved in 'debate' [i.e. furious row] over the number and types of clauses in English grammar, over whether one should talk about 'nominal groups' or 'noun phrases', and so on. It is not enough to gloss over these differences, as do some of the contributors, by referring to the 'rich and varied' nature of linguistic theory (45), or to minimise the problem posed by contradictory linguistic theories by referring to the different 'emphases', 'tradition', etc. in the subject. Teachers also need a list of points on which linguists disagree, along with an evaluation of the seriousness of the differences (from the merely terminological to the fundamental conceptual). They need to be given appropriately detailed advice about how to handle the descriptive questions they face day by day. Perera comes closest to it, in this book, and her forthcoming textbook goes much further (1983), in tackling the thorny question of choice of descriptive framework. For without such a framework, whose strengths and weaknesses are fully appreciated, how is a teacher to proceed, in handling the essentially *comparative* questions of language development – comparing individual children at different times, or different children in different classes, subject areas, schools . . . ? And above all, teachers must be taught the distinction between what can be done, in our present state of knowledge, and what cannot be done. This book does not face up to the embarrassment that is a consequence of a linguistics which lacks a coherent semantic theory, or an adequate theory of performance (apart from Brown's characterisation of the latter as 'educated guesswork' (86)). Indeed, there is very little feeling of the difficulty and problems involved in doing linguistics, in this book. The subject is being offered on a plate to the teacher; the blurb claims that the book will provide teachers with 'all the material they need' to judge the field, and in this it is less than honest. As it stands, the book does not live up to the promise of its title. It is a set of good intentions which, let it be recalled, the road to hell is paved with.

#### References

- Perera, K. 1983. *Analysing classroom language*. London: Andre Deutsch.  
 Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. 1972. *A grammar of contemporary English*. London: Longman.

DAVID CRYSTAL

*Directors of Education*. By Tony Bush and Maurice Kogan. Pp. 216. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982. Paperback £4.95, Hardback £12.50.

Local government reorganisation in 1974 brought about many changes. One side effect was that the proportion of Chief Education Officers (CEOs) called Directors of