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Notes and Comments

Notes on the 1980 CETA Seminar-Convention

RENATO L. PUENTEVELLA, S.J.

The College English Teachers Association of the Philippines (CETA) held its first national conference in 1950, the year it was founded by Dr. Grace Stuart Nutley, Smith-Mundt Exchange Professor of English, and Dr. Alfredo T. Morales of the University of the Philippines. After the Third National Conference in 1952, nothing more was heard of the CETA until 1967 when it was resuscitated by Dr. Edilberto K. Tiempo, regional Vice-President for Dumaguete. Except for 1977, when the peace-and-order situation in Marawi, Lanao discouraged the holding of a convention, annual conferences took place from 1967 to 1978 in Dumaguete (twice), Cagayan de Oro, Cebu (three times), Bacolod, Davao (twice), Tacloban and Iloilo. However, with the election of U.P.'s Dr. Damiana L. Eugenio as President in 1978, CETA returned to the land of its birth. After twenty-nine years, Manila was again the site of the convention; this year it was Baguio.

CONVENTION THEME

The theme of the CETA Seminar-Convention held at Teachers' Camp, Baguio City, 21-23 October 1980, was "College English Teaching: Approaches and Strategies." Despite the inconvenient schedule — many had just finished their semestral exams — a surprisingly large delegation showed up: 341 delegates from 31 schools, quite a number of them from the South. Housing accommodations at Teachers' Camp were generally adequate, except for the fact that the stragglers who arrived in the evening, after the

camp personnel's office hours, had to be "directed" to their quarters by their fellow-delegates: a case of the blind leading the blind. Meals were efficiently served, and this, even though other conventions were simultaneously going on; but again, the absence of camp personnel imposed an added burden on the CETA officials who had to do the collecting.

Because of the venue and for reasons of economy, the steering committee acted as its own secretariat, working late into the night. Despite the number of delegates, the sessions generally started on time and the program strictly followed. Occasional brown-outs forced certain improvisations like moving up the audience as cozily-close to the speakers as possible. It was unfortunate that the speeches had been mimeographed and distributed to the delegates at registration because it turned the talks into mere reading exercises — except for a few speakers who had enough common sense to just touch on the highlights or, who, as in the cases of Dr. Abad and Dr. Manlapaz, were so familiarized with their texts that they could deliver them "live." Pre-distribution could have been restricted to the facilitators who needed them to prepare for their group discussions; otherwise the papers should have been handed out only after the speakers' delivery.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Dr. Dionisia A. Rola, Chancellor of UP in the Visayas, delivered the keynote address. Once a College English teacher herself, Dr. Rola reminded the delegates of the "beguiling sense" of their power. Every year they teach more than a hundred thousand freshmen. These freshmen enrol for an English subject for two semesters, take one or two more during their sophomore year. A number of them, as undergraduate majors, and later, a select few, as graduate students, will try to master several more English subjects. No other group of college specialists wields such potential power, such influence over the quality of the "professional communicative performance" of every college graduate or the levels of proficiency at which teaching is to be done elsewhere.

Important indeed is the college English teachers' role in the national scheme of things. But Dr. Rola prodded CETA to give substance to this affirmation, to translate conference recommendations into a long-range coherent plan capable of nationwide

implementation. She suggested, for example, that in teaching Freshman English the teacher utilize the students' written work in other subjects, and urged that this be adopted as a pilot project by some college and a progress report given during CETA's next annual conference.

Dr. Rola challenged CETA to share "discovered approaches and techniques of effective teaching" with college English teachers in the rural areas and to assist provincial schools in redesigning their programs of studies and in preparing instructional materials. Finally she appealed to the delegates to be concerned with how our present students use the English language outside the English classroom, and how some of them who are "beyond our urban or elite walls, fare in their mission as teachers of English in all its dimensions."

SOCIOLINGUISTICS: THE NAME OF THE GAME

One strategy highlighted during the conference is sociolinguistics, first mentioned by Dr. Corazon G. Escalaban (Ministry of Education and Culture BHE) in her survey lecture, "Approaches to the Teaching of English in the Philippines." Language behavior feeds back upon the social reality that it reflects and helps to reinforce it. Dr. Rosario E. Maminta (UP) stressed the assessment of the learners' needs and the formulation of a terminal language learning objective in terms of behavior. Dr. Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista (De La Salle University) put it concisely when she spoke not only of teaching the language (i.e. language as curriculum content) but also of the language of teaching (i.e. language as learning environment). Our goal as language teachers is "communicative competence," a notion richer than just "linguistic competence" since it includes as components grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The ethnography of speaking describes communication in face-to-face interaction. The structure of interaction in the classroom right now is a control communication system with the teacher talking first, last, and most, which results in alienation of the students. She recommended more small-group and student-directed activities, occasional periods of silence, and the need to become our own ethnographers.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

While the other speakers stressed communicative competence as the students' ability to articulate their ideas orally before various types of audiences, Dr. Concepcion D. Daduflaza discussed it in connection with reading proficiency and the written text. On the premise that the written text is an on-going process of communicating, by means of the "psycholinguistic reading model" the various items of language in use are learned by reading them as they occur in texts, and especially ". . . in their contexts from which their use and their proper fit in use are. . . inferred, recognized, and understood." Whereas in speech, both verbal and non-verbal signals bring about communicative interaction, language used in writing, because it lacks these supports, has to exploit all its possible resources to get the meanings across in written text.

Comprehension questions, then, should demand some amount of inferring. Vocabulary items should be taught as parts of meaningful contexts or in lexical groupings that call for the exercise of cognitive processes in the learner. Vocabulary exercises should be made to reflect the variety of ways in which words can indeed be manipulated to yield all their potentially realizable meanings in communicative use. Comprehension questions should be learning tasks that direct the students' attention to the way the language operates as a carrier of meaning. These reading skills are reinforced by extending the comprehension tasks into writing assignments such as paraphrasing, precis-writing, outlining and research-paper writing. Interspersed between these modes of textual re-statement and abridgement, brief writing exercises of paragraph length might be introduced on topics suggested by the selected readings.

STRATEGIES

A strategy suggested to improve the students' quality of writing is Sentence-Combining. As explained by Dr. Lydia G. Ledesma (University of the Philippines in the Visayas), it is a systematic process of putting together kernel sentences into more complex structures. It has a teaching plan built around writing and group discussions, hence each session involves reading, speaking, listening and writing. The students are thus allocated interaction turns

among themselves; they collectively own the interaction and individually negotiate the twists and turns of the discussion.

According to Dr. Edna Z. Manlapaz (Ateneo de Manila University), one way of arresting the rapid deterioration of English language skills among Filipino students is to experiment with the use of popular culture. It is where the students are at. More extensive and more imaginative use should be made of newspapers and comics, radio and television, posters and billboards. Use pop songs, both foreign and Filipino, to teach poetry. Listen to your students sing or play tapes of their favorite songs. Encourage them to examine the lyrics, to ask themselves why this or the other line appeals to them. Give them the opportunity to recognize for themselves the features that make poetry what it is. Use pop culture as topics for composition. Advertisements and commercials are good illustrations of denotation and connotation, of language manipulation.

Use film to help teach literature better, urged Dr. Isagani R. Cruz (UP). When we see a film we look basically for these things: technical excellence, literary value, and cinematic sense. Even from third-rate films we can get, at the very least, some literary qualities like motivation, structure, meaning. The technique of using a good film is different from that of using a bad one. When we discuss a bad film in class, we spend only a few minutes on it, shifting immediately to a literary work whose merits stand out in clearer relief because of the faults of the bad film. When we discuss a good film in class, we can spend a whole class on it, devoting much time to the literary qualities, maybe even the cinematic qualities, of the film.

TRADITIONAL TRIAD

Lectures on the teaching of poetry, fiction and drama rounded up the roster. Dr. Gemino H. Abad (UP) discussed the conceptual framework for the analysis and appreciation of poems *as poems* – vibrant with ideas or experiences, to get at which the reader should have a mastery of and sensitivity to the poet's language. This idea of studying the text rather than the glossalia received strong support from Pacita G. Fernandez (UP). For her the short story and the novel should first be read and read thoroughly to the point of intellectual pleasure. The teacher's role is crucial:

he is a human seismograph "able to feel each little vibration of interest, each little tremor of tension, doubt, confusion, misunderstanding, shock or disbelief, as well as each little wavering or declining of interest in his students." He transmits to them the novelist's *weltanschauung* and, without even his being aware of it, his own as well. Dr. Piedad G. Rosales (University of Sto. Tomas) stressed the three-dimensional nature of drama, to which the teacher should adapt his methodology, utilizing whatever resources are available to him.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The delegates were divided into nine discussion groups, each with a facilitator. The groups organized themselves at the end of opening day, after only half of the lectures had been delivered. Discussion was scheduled for the first two hours of the following morning's session — a bad arrangement, psychologically, it was later found out, because human nature being what it is, the delegates took their time coming — a problem solved on the third day when the Grolier people announced their raffle as the first activity on the morning's agenda.

Assigned as facilitator to Group VIII, "The English Teacher and the Arts," I was faced with a quandary: not only had the talk not yet been given, the text had not even been submitted. Using the Academic Connection, I requested Prof. Fernandez, a former teacher, to give pointers to my group. Fortunately, her ideas later coincided with those of Prof. Felipe Padilla de Leon, Jr., the guest lecturer on that topic.

Considering the size of the convention, the groups were unwieldy. The physical arrangements inside the auditorium were so cramped that some groups spilled onto the grounds. Yet the group meetings afforded an outlet for a free exchange of ideas, especially from those whose voices were never heard on the floor. The results of these discussions were later reported to the general assembly but, with the power failure and the harried atmosphere — it was one of the closing activities — I am afraid not much of an impact was made.

CETA'S FUTURE

After the Board of Directors had been elected by the delegates,

they in turn elected among themselves the CETA officers for 1980-1982. Not wishing to lose the momentum gained by the return of CETA to Luzon, the Directors chose Dr. Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista of De La Salle University as President. For the sake of better coordination, all the other officers were drawn from Luzon.

Indication "that CETA can do more than meet annually and have its proceedings printed for membership distribution," came recently with the new President's maiden circular letter. For summer 1981 the different regions will hold their own regional seminars. CETA Manila will assist the organizers of these regional seminars by providing "prototype" programs of activities for 2-day and 3-day regional seminars: Fr. Joseph A. Galdon of the Ateneo de Manila University for a seminar on Freshman English for general education colleges; Dr. Casilda Luzares and Dr. Lourdes S. Bautista of De La Salle University for a seminar on English for Special Purposes for technical colleges; and Dr. Ophelia A. Dimalanta of the University of Santo Tomas for a seminar on the teaching of literature.

Another indication is the effort now being made to coordinate with other national organizations engaged in updating English teaching, like the Linguistic Society of the Philippines and the Ateneo-PNC-DLSU Consortium for a Ph. D. in Linguistics.

With President Marcos' recent encouraging words about the vital importance of English in our schools, the climate has dramatically changed. Now, more than ever, CETA is faced with the challenge to "crystallize the leadership role that [it] wishes to assume in relation to the over-all directions and quality of college English teaching in this country."