ARNE ZETTERSTEN: AN APPEAL FOR ERROR ANALYSIS IN LSP

In the 1970's several research projects on error analysis have come into existence in all the Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, two series of publications from Gothenburg are of immediate interest to us in connection with error analysis and English Language teaching. One is called MUP, meaning "Mål, Undervisning, Prov" (= Aim, Teaching, Testing). The name of the other is SPRENG, meaning "Språkfärdighet i engelska" (= Proficiency in English). Both series presented the results of projects connected with the Department of English and the Department of Educational Research at Gothenburg University. See, for example, Stendahl, 1970, 1972, and 1973. One of Stendahl's studies (1972) investigated the Swedish and English proficiency of Swedish university students of English. One result gained by Stendahl was that she showed that native language ability is an important factor in the foreign language learning situation.

The SECS (= Swedish-English Contrastive Studies) project started in 1972. The studies began with an analysis of errors based on 8,000 translations produced at the English department in Lund between 1961 and 1972. The aim of the error analysis was a) to establish the areas of English grammar, lexis, and phonology which cause difficulty to Swedish students of English; b) to explain why these errors occur; and c) to suggest ways of improving the situation. The first report of the project (Svartvik, et al. 1973) contained a typology of grammatical errors which could serve as a starting-point for further studies.

In Finland two major projects dealing with error analysis should be mentioned, one at Jyväskylä and one at Åbo. The Finnish-English Contrastive Project was started at the University of Jyväskylä in 1974. This project aims at a comprehensive two-way contrastive analysis of Finnish and English. A comprehensive bibliography of Contrastive Analysis including Error Analysis, was published in 1975 (Sajavaara-Lehtonen).

The English project at Åbo Akademi has studied the differences between Finns and Swedish-speaking Finns learning English. The results were published in Ringbom-Palmberg 1976.

In Norway, Stig Johansson of the English Department, Oslo University, is the scholar who has worked the most extensively on error analysis, although most of his research was done in England and Sweden. Amongst other things he has developed a methodology for the study of the degree of irritation of learners' errors. See Johansson 1973.

In Copenhagen, the PIF project, meaning Project in Error Analysis, Inter-language Studies and Contrastive Linguistics, has existed since 1976. The aim of this project is to study the interlanguage of Danish learners of English on various levels from the sixth form up to university level. See articles by Faerch and Zettersten in Hyldgaard-Jensen and Zettersten 1977.

When presenting all these English-based projects in error analysis one is struck by the feeling that LSP aspects have somehow been kept totally in the background or put forward into the distant future. In fact there has been as yet no clear connection between EA and LSP in the Scandinavian countries. Some might perhaps argue that one could extend the traditional concept of EA by using the term for studies of some of the special forms of language used by native speakers, such as those recorded by projects like "Talsyntax", "Talbanken", and "Eterspråk" in Lund. There are studies of ill-constructed and well-constructed sentences by, for example, Loman 1972, Saari 1975, etc. The primary aim of such studies is to describe the sentence structure used by native speakers and this is not the traditional domain of EA.

However, there is a tremendous need for a close connection between EA and LSP in, e.g., the interlanguage used by politicians when meeting foreign colleagues, TV-reporters interviewing foreign visitors, speakers at international congresses, immigrant doctors, to mention just a few examples where the methodology and results of all the above mentioned projects have a necessary starting-point. The reason why I mention immigrant doctor is that a project in Lancaster has investigated the English spoken by immigrant doctors.
with the purpose of producing English language learning materials for overseas doctors. See Candlin, et. al. 1974). At Lancaster, testing models with reference to English for Specialist Purposes have been designed by Pauline M. Rea (1976). This is only one example of how research can be directed towards a closer merging of EA and LSP, which I have advocated in this article.

By proposing that the projects in Scandinavia which I have mentioned above could be taken as a starting-point for any serious study of EA in LSP, I should like to make an appeal for more information on EA in LSP from all parts of the world to this Newsletter. In short, if members working on new projects in this branch of applied linguistics gave us information on their experiences, new methods of working on EA in LSP might be more easily discussed, spread and developed.

References


