An Interview with Henry G. Widdowson

Pasaa :

What is your definition of ESP?

Prof. Widdowson :

I think I would define it as the design of language teaching programmes to suit or to prepare students to take on a particular role in the professional community or vocational community which has its own conventions of communication which the learner has to learn. It happens incidentally that these conventions are expressed through English. So I would want to stress that ESP is a kind of initiation into ways of thinking or behaving which are appropriate to a particular group of people and the student is seeking membership of that group. One of the entry conditions for membership is the knowledge of English for those purposes.

Passa :

Can you give examples of a particular purpose?

Prof. Widdowson :

If you are a member of a community, the purpose of which is to conduct scientific enquiry, we call this community the scientific community. These are scientists. If you are teaching ESP for science, what you're in effect doing is preparing students to enter into the community of scientists. It just happens by historical accident that one of the entry conditions is that they shoud know the English as it's customarily used in that community. So you're initiating students into a kind of culture, if you like, which happens to require English.

Pasaa :

Could you elaborate on the current issues in ESP?

Prof. Widdowson :

What I want to do is explore the implications of defining ESP as I've just done. People have talked about English for Specific Purposes sometimes as being a specific kind of English, so that you can

describe the English of Science or the English of Technology or the English of Business, for example. I think to look at it that way is to look at the kind of texts that people produce in theses professional groups. As soon as you ask questions about the kind of communication that goes on within these groups then it becomes very clear that you can't dissociate the notion of communication from the notion of a community. Communication is always purposeful. All language is specific. Whenever we use language we have a specific purpose for using it, and that purpose is to express something relating to the community in which we live, a small community or a large community. So you can't dissociate communication from community, and once you think in those terms then you ask questions like, " Well, if we're thinking of English as an international language, the communities we're talking about in ESP are international communities." You can use English for business, if you're a Thai or a Japanese or a German. You then move the language away from native speaker communities whose first languages may be very different. I think one of the points about ESP is that it is providing people with the ability, through the knowledge of English, to join a community which is, of its nature, international. So you can't talk about ESP without talking about EIL, English as an International Language. That is essentially what it is.

Pasaa :

So when you say that language is specific, are you implying that there is no general language or general English?

Prof. Widdowson :

Yes, I'm saying that when you talk about general English, what you mean is English which is defined as used by a very wide community. I think there is a real problem and there has always been a real problem in the teaching of general English and, that is, what is the

normal behaviour that you're trying to set up for the learners? Whose community, whose communication are they trying to learn? And that means which community are you preparing them to interact with? Then of course there's a problem because you don't know. You're teaching students in Thailand English. Who are they going to use English with? You don't know with a general English course. With ESP, you do have an idea and that's the whole point. You know what the community is that they are bidding to join. Therefore, you can gear your course accordingly and generally you have an idea. And that's the problem because what it means is that the possibility of communicative language teaching is really quite restrictive. Communicative language teaching is actually derived from ESP. If you deal with ESP, you can see back to the late 60's early 70's where people became aware that the kind of courses taught in general secondary schools very often did not prepare students to deal with English for their specialist subjects at university level. So courses were set up to prepare people to follow courses in specialist subjects, in physics, engineering and medicine in the universities. Now when you do that you have to be communicative. There is no choice because you know what the students need the language for. The course is bound to be accountable. You are claiming to provide the students with the ability to communicate in the particular area, to enter into a particular community, a discourse community, so it has to be communicative. There is no way out.

Pasaa :

If ESP and English as an International Language are interrelated, what is the role of the varieties of English then?

Prof. Widdowson :

There are varieties of the English language which develop to serve what we might call primary communities, communities of people living in India or the Caribbean, who use the language for general social purposes, where language is part of their communal life, part of their primary culture. So that if you go to Jamaica you'll be using English. It is their language and they are using it for normal everyday communication. You might get an interaction between friends to socialise and so on. You might meet, then, a dialectal variety in that sense. It serves the primary culture. ESP is not concerned with that. ESP is concerned with the varieties which are institutional varieties. They are varieties which serve communities

which are professional or vocational communities over and above the primary ones. Through upbringing I enter a certain group of people and socialise into a certain category of behaviour and I use language to socialise, to be socialised in this particular mode of social behaviour. That's my primary socialisation. I then go to school and I learn the conventions of communication of other groups of people, for instance physics or historians or whatever, professions, vocations, ways in which they operate as different cultures, different communities and ESP. This is what I mean by institutional varieties. There are varieties which are not part of the primary culture but the secondary culture of education, and the reason why English is used for those is because these professional uses spread across the world and they appear in Thailand, India, and Jamaica and so they're, in some sense, superposed varieties. They are varieties of use which serve particular professional communities, institutionalised communities and that's where ESP is concerned, but the only reason for learning English for a specific purpose is for a specific international purpose.

Pasaa :

Does ESP include both language and content?

Prof. Widdowson :

All language use includes language and content. Whenever I say anything I am using language to express an intention to talk about something and it is the relationship between the language and content, the use of the language and content, the use of the language to express an intention which makes it into a discourse of one sort or another. So in that sense, yes, in ESP you're bound to be using ESP to talk about something in a particular way for a particular purpose, but that's what the communication means. But those purposes and those conventions belong to a particular community and you have to learn what they are. It's an entrance condition into that community and that's why we need ESP.

Pasaa :

It has been said that it's quite difficult for a language teacher to teach ESP because of its specific content. What is your opinion?

Prof. Widdowson :

It is true that the language teacher has in some way to develop in students an awareness of what the conventions of this communication are, and that is what ESP means. How do scientists use English to talk to

each other? How do scientists use English to express their particular way of conceiving the world? That's what ESP means. So somehow the language teacher has to develop that awareness and that ability to handle these conventions. If they don't know them, it would be a good idea to find out. But it doesn't mean that they have to have an expert knowledge of all of the content. They have, I think, to have a knowledge of what the general conventions are which define this particular discourse community because that is what they are teaching ESP for. Now, there are two sources of assistance. One is they can of course consult their colleagues. Imagine that at Chulalongkorn there are people teaching physics or engineering who don't know very much English; they are teachers of engineering. And there are teachers of English who may not know much about engineering. But in this case it would be a good idea to consult with each other because essentially what it means is that the Thai colleague knows the discourse of engineering but not the way it is textualised in English. While you know how the discourse is textualised in English, but you are going to be a little shaky about the discourse. So it seems to me that it makes sense for English teachers to consult with colleagues who are members of the community that you are hoping to get your students to join. So that's one source of information that the teachers can use. The other is the students themselves. The students know, to some extent, the subject. You know the language. ESP is a relationship of the language and the subject. So presumably you can count on the students being able to assist you in informing you about the subject and in return you inform them about the language. Now I know that this is going to be problematic because often the teachers feel that unless they can claim to know everything they lose face; therefore, they must know everything and they must not allow any possibility that the students know something that the teacher does not. That doesn't actually work in ESP. It seems to me that you have to acknowledge that the students will know more about certain things than you can do and you can exploit that fact.

Pasaa :

In your opinion, is discourse different for different purposes?

Prof. Widdowson :

Yes. A discourse is a way of conceiving of reality and a way of communicating it to other people, so that groups of individuals develop ways of talking to each other, shared ways of seeing the world, so that groups (and that is what I think social groups always do; this is a basic sociological fact) will define reality in their own terms and will learn particular ways of talking to each other which will not be the same with another group. If you want to be a member of the group, you've got to learn the way they think and the way they communicate with each other and that is what ESP means, a discourse of business, banking, technology or whatever.

Pasaa :

So it goes beyond the lexis?

Prof. Widdowson :

Yes, because to the extent that these different professional or vocational communities are international, if you say well whatever your primary socialisation is, whatever your primary culture is, whether you come from a village in Lopburi or a kampong in Penang, or a village in France, through the educational system of these different countries you will have a secondary initiation into ways of thinking which are not those that you were brought up with. That's what education means. You are initiated into the way of thinking you do not have in your first upbringing. Now, if there are international patterns of thought, and international conventions of communication such that you can say: "OK, you from your kampong in Penang have come up and you've gone through the University of Science in Malaysia and you've got a Ph. D in Physics and someone else has come up from a village in Lopburi and gone to Chulalongkorn University and got a Ph.D in Physics, you have joined the community of physicists and it is international. You go to international conferences and you read international papers in Physics, which I don't understand, but the physicist does understand and that is in the discourse of physics." It happens that this discourse is very commonly textualized in English. It could be textualised in another language such as in French. There are alternative textualisations of the same discourse.

Pasaa :

But would you say that their organisational pattern is the same?

Prof. Widdowson :

The texts are different; the discourse is the same. So that if I look at a paper in physics in Thai, it's in Thai. If I look at it in English, it's in English. The texts are different. Now there are some features of the text

which are not the same. They probably have the same formulae, the same mathematics and the same diagrams maybe and those other features. The non-linguistic features indicate that it's one discourse. They appear in all the different languages or versions. And that is what indicates the international nature of the discourse. The discourse services the community of physicists, whatever their first language might be. Now it happens that a great deal of this discourse is textualised in English and the reason you have an ESP course is precisely for that reason. But it's important to recognise that when you're teaching ESP, what's specific about the English is not the particular lexical items and structures but the fact that these lexical items and structures are textualised in a particular discourse which is the property of that community. So inevitably, what you're doing is intiating your students into a particular discourse community. It just happens that the entry condition for this, because this discourse is so widely textualised in English, is a knowledge of English as it services that particular usage.

Pasaa :

Does an ultimate method exist in teaching ESP?

Prof. Widdowson :

No, in fact it did not and for the very obvious reason that there are problems about saying that there are international discourses. It seems clear to me that, although you can talk about the discourse of science (and you have to, because otherwise, someone doing science in Malaysia or Thailand would not be able to talk to someone doing science in the U.S., so there must be a common discourse basis; otherwise, there's no international understanding), there must also be some variation. Maybe, the way you do science in Thailand, to some degree, or the way you do business in Thailand, to some degree, might be different. All right: so the actual target behavior. Having said that, in general terms, one is trying to initiate people into the conventions of a typical discourse community, that discourse community may, to some extent, vary in different parts of the world. But a more important point, I think, is that even if you make the assumption that the goal-the target behavior-is fairly well defined, (you know what it is that students have to do in order to behave as engineers using English), even if you know that in your needs analysis, they are going to start from very different points. If you think of the whole course of ESP or any other course, for that matter, as being a process between two points, there is the beginning boundary and the end boundary and the end of the

course where you hope you will achieve your objectives, however you define it. There is the beginning of the course where the students are and where they come from, and there is where the students are going to. Now, even if you establish what the destination is, you don't know where the starting point is. So if there were one way of teaching ESP, there would have to be not only a specified destination, but also a specified starting point, and there isn't. It's rather like using a map if someone says: My teaching course is designed to get you from point A to point B. That's where you want to go. We agree that that's the destination." The reply might be: "Yes, but I'm not coming from there. I'm coming from down here or over there." If the first person then says: "Well, that's the route, I've defined it. Follow it!" You can't do that, clearly. So, if you're going to talk about specific purposes, you've also got to think about what is specific to the actual route that you take, not just what is specific about the destination. I think that one thing that we have tended to do in the past is to talk about the specifics of the destination. This is what our students have to do, or have done at the end of the course: this specific goal - the destination. But pedagogically speaking, it makes no sense to talk about destinations unless you know what the starting point is. And people are coming from different primary cultures. This is what I mentioned before. They are members of the community already, in their kampong, in their village or wherever. They have their own reality. They arrive to do a course, any educational course, and the whole purpose of that course is to take them from that starting point to their destination. However, depending on where they start, the route is going to be different, and it can be all over the place. I mean, that's the destintion, I'm starting there. I don't even necessarily take a straight route. I might go all over the place, depending on who my students are. So the route has to be determined by local circumstances. Where do the students come from? Not just where they're going to. So there can never be any common methodology for the teaching of ESP, it seems to me, because it actually accommodates their terms. What is specific in a particular ESP course is the relationship between the starting point and the destination. And that is going to differ from place to place.

Pasaa :

Let's say, in Thailand, in the subject of EFL lawyers want to learn how to write a contract, for example. There's a common destination. Their educa-

tional background is similar, graduating with a B.A. in law, for instance.

Prof. Widdowson :

O.K. Assuming that a B.A in law here is the same as a B.A in law in the United States.

Pasaa :

After studying law for 4 years at the university, you get the law degree. And your English background is basically the same. So, in a sense, you have a common background.

Prof. Widdowson :

To the extent that you've got a common background, then you can design a course which assumes that everyone's going to learn in much the same way, of course. I mean, ultimately, we know that people learn in different ways. That every individual has idiosyncratic ways of learning. Any language course has to make assumptions about commonalities, has to make assumptions that you're dealing with a collectivity of people all in some ways the same or similar. And obviously, if you have a fairly unified group of people with a similar background, similar language experience, similar experience of the law, they are, to that extent, the same community to start with. Then, of course, if you get the starting community that's fairly unified, it's relatively easy to specify the route from the starting point. When you asked if there is a wrong way of teaching in this, I said no, because you can't guarantee that the starting community would be unified. If you can, then of course, that's a great advantage, but you can't. The students may well come from a very different background and have different assumptions, have different dispositions, have different knowledge of language, and to that extent, of course the course will be different. Their starting points are different. That's what I mean. There's bound to be a paradox in talking about global approaches to ESP. Because if it's global, how can it be specific? You can talk about general principles, things you have to take into account, even general parameters of teaching, but how these parameters are set must be a matter of local decision.

Pasaa :

What's your opinion about the eclectic approach?

Prof. Widdowson :

Well, it depends on how you define eclectic. If you mean by eclectic a kind of random haphazard selection of things without you quite knowing why

you're doing it, I don't see any point in being eclectic. But I think that eclecticism can be an informed selection. If, by eclectic, you mean that you understand what the possibilities are and you have evaluated these in relation to their relevance to your particular teaching and have made an informed decision that you'll go for this rather than that, that's a very different matter. So principled eclecticism seems to me to be what, inevitably, we're involved in pedagogy. That's what pedagogy means. It means considering options, possibilities and then deciding which options and possibilities are actually relevant and why for your particular situation. This is what makes pedagogy language teaching approaches appropriate to a particular set of situations. But that's very different from saying: "Well, I don't know. I think I'll try this. I don't know why...hold on I'll try that...hold it, I'll try something else now." That doesn't seem to me to be worthy of the name professional activity. So you have to be eclectic because you have to interpret ideas in relation to your own situation. But that's not unusual. This is what we do all the time. Whenever you encounter any ideas in print or in what people say, you always refer them to your own situation. That's the way we live. You make things a reality by relating them to your world. And if you can, they are reality. If you can't, they're not. So the whole process of human life is eclectic in that sense. You're constantly adapting or relating things from outside to things from inside. It's what we call learning, isn't it? If I say something to you which comes from my background, which presupposes a set of beliefs and ideas and assumptions, which are part of my discourse community, and if you take them on board, without relating them to your own set of values in your discourse community, you've not learned anything; you've simply added to your unnecessary baggage. The only way in which what I say is going to be real to you is for you to interpret what I say in relation to your reality. So, your intake is always going to be different from my input. There's a gap.

Pasaa :

There's no way to fill the gap?

Prof. Widdowson :

There's no way, it seems to me, of insuring that what I intend to mean and what you interpret me to mean are the same thing. We arrive at a general approximation. You have a rough idea that we are--we've arrived--at a level of understanding sufficient for our purpose. This is what I mean about language, that all languages are specific for specific purposes. There's no sense in

which I can make fully explicit what I mean. There's no way in which I can be absolutely precise. We simply approximate to a meaning which will satisfy our purposes for this moment. All communication is a matter of approximation to meaning. Verbal communication is in many ways a very inexact process--the only process we've got so it's as well to cultivate it, but you shouldn't, I think, make the mistake of assuming that we can be precise about what we mean.

Pasaa :

So we need to follow the cooperative principles?

Prof. Widdowson :

You need the cooperative principles precisely because language is imprecise. If language were precise, you'd need no cooperation. If I could encode precisely what I mean and transmit it to you, and you decode it, so that you're decoding equals my encoding there'd be no need for cooperation. The problem about any pragmatic meaning is that it has to be inferred, it is not signalled in the language. That's the difference between sematics and meaning signalled in the language, and the pragmatics, which is meaning that people achieve by use of the language. But as soon as you let people achieve things, it will be imprecise because people are. There is this sort of paradox that language is, generally speaking, the only thing we've got. Well, it's the most efficient thing we've got for communicating, but it is, in itself, a little inefficient and we have to come to terms with that. And that is, I think, an important thing that one has to learn in all language education. This is not an unusual point of view. There is the philosopher of science called Karl Popper who has interesting things to say about so-called precision. He points out that although scientists like to make claims, they are being absolutely precise in their use of language, in fact they're not. It's always precise for a purpose, and you never push precision beyond that purpose. There is the purpose of the communication that determines how precise you are. If you're more precise than the purpose requires, then the communication breaks down. So communication can break down by trying to be too precise just as it can break down by not being precise enough. You have to regulate the degree of relevance.

Pasaa :

It is a very difficult task in teaching Thais English. Even communicating in our own language is very difficult.

Prof. Widdowson :

Well that's right. But that is the starting point. One of the points that one might make in relation to that is that once people know or understand more clearly what the limitations of human communication are-any linguistic communication, then I think they're less likely to misunderstand their tasks when they're in English. But it seems to me that often we require students to do things in a foreign language which in fact, they wouldn't be able to do on their own. Because we are asking them to do things which is unnatural for them to do. Some years ago, I gave an English comprehension test. You know these tests, where you have a reading passage and questions, and I gave this test to native speakers and of course they failed dismally in this test. They just didn't do it very well. Because I was asking them, pushing them to degree of precision in their reading that they normally would not apply to their reading. So, we're asking to do things which native speakers wouldn't do. Now there may be good pedagogic reasons for doing that, but at the same time, I think that it's quite important for teachers and students to know something about the nature of linguistic communication. And that I think can be done by allowing students to make reference to the experience of their own language. I myself feel that there is a case for use of Thai in Thailand--the use of translation. I think it makes a lot of very good pedagogic sense. I mean you've clearly got to work out what the rationale for the use of translation is, but it seems to me that when you mention this, in many parts of the world people throw up their hands in horror and say, "My god, we must not allow them to use their own language. We must concentrate exclusively on English." But actually that, in many ways, is an unrealistic requirement. And I'd like to see the argument against the discriminating use of Thai in the teaching of English. It seems to me that there are on the face of it more reasons for using Thai than not.

Pasaa :

To what extent can the native language or L1 be used in the teaching of English?

Prof. Widdowson :

I don't know. This is a matter for people to work out for themselves, to consider what the arguments for and against the use of L1 might be. I think that in the past we tended to simply say, as a matter of absolute fixed principle, "do not use L1." I'd be interested to know why not. In actual fact, it is used and we know it

is used. In effect, you don't stop L1 being used; you don't recognise it. It happens; we all know that. It would be very unusual if Thai students did not actually related what they read or heard in English to what they know in Thai. You naturally refer somebody else's reality to your own so, of course, there is translation. It happens all the time. It's simply that you don't recognise this; you pretend it doesn't happen. So it is something learners do to learn, but teachers refuse to acknowledge. But why? There may be reasons for it, so let's know what they are. What is the case against translation? I think one of the reasons why translation is never mentioned by people who write textbooks and who discuss language teaching methodology is because most of them come from native speaker contexts of teaching where they can't use translation because they are teaching groups of students all over the world in their language schools where they don't share the language with their students, so how can they use translation? Native speakers of English can't use translation because they are native speakers only of English and not of any other language. English teachers know very little about teaching a second language and very little about learning it. They themselves have not learnt a second language but they come around and tell you how to teach a second language. However, if you have another language, then why not use it. Why do you deny youself and your students a resource which is available. And it is a resource a native speaker cannot use because they haven't got it. So it is not surprising you don't get translation recommended in the current methodology because how can you recommend something you can't use?

Pasaa :

I'm sure that, here in Thailand, Thai language teachers use Thai in their class.

Prof. Widdowson :

Well, if they use it is some kind of negative way as a last resort: "I'm desperate what can I do? I can't follow this wonderful advice I have received on teaching English. I'm lapsing into Thai." It's a lapse. They feel shame faced about it: it's a last resort. But my point is there's no need to look at Thai negatively in this way. There may very well be a positive pedagogic reason for using Thai. Let's try and see what this case for using Thai might be. Then, it would be a matter not of the teacher saying: "Oh, my god! Well, I'd better use Thai." But of saying: "OK, I'm going to use Thai as part of my strategy for teaching, and I know why." If a

farang comes along and says: "Look, you can't us Thai." You can say: "Well, can't I use Thai because you can't use Thai? You are the expert in language teaching: you are not an expert in Thai so your methodology is actually somewhat reduced in possibilities because you can't use the language which represents the reality of my students." Furthermore, you not only share the language of your students, you share the culture of your students. You have the same values, dispositions and beliefs shared with your students. So then, in a way, your students are yourself. You cast yourself in the students image: you see yourself through them, going through the same process as you were. You know what it's like to learn English because you've done it. A native speaker hasn't. There are many sources of experience that a native speaker cannot claim to have and which the Thai teacher can claim to have. It seems to me that very often there's an undue deference paid to the native speaker. When you think about it, the native speaker is, in some ways, disadvantaged and the local teacher, who shares the language and the culture of the students, is, in many ways, advantaged.

Pasaa :

For some, using L1 in class is acceptable; for example, to clarify the instructions or directions in giving a task or activity, giving the meaning of some vocabulary that you can't explain specifically in English. But for some, using L1 just to translate a text to tell the meaning of every word is not acceptable.

Prof. Widdowson :

A very good point. If you've got good pedagogic reasons, fine. It depends what you mean by 'interpret'. What I said earlier is that all interpretation involves recasting what somebody says into your own reality: that's what interpretation means. If I can't make your reality mine then I haven't interpreted you. Now one way of doing that is recasting what you have said in my own language. So you say something to me in English I will interpret you in my terms. Now, if you speak English to me, then the terms I use will be alternative terms in English. I will say to summarise, she means this and I reformulate what you say in my terms, but if I have another language it is perfectly conceivable that I might reformulate what you say in other terms and reformulate them back again. I don't see that there is anything particularly abhorrent or objectionable, in principle, about the use of another language. You are, after all, in the business of developing bilinguals. That's what learning another language means: you are

learning to be a bilingual, i.e., to have two languages and to know how they are related. I'm not saying: "OK, we'll have the translation approach. We must all go for translation: a new idea." I don't mean that at all. What I mean is that one thinks in terms of the importance of somehow affecting the transition from the community which the students are coming from to the community which they are going towards. The community they have come from: that discourse is enacted in their own first language. The discourse they are going to is enacted in another language. The whole pedagogic process has to do with how you affect the transition from one to the other or how you have the two communities co-existing because by learning to use the language behaviour of another community you don't throw out the old behaviour: they co-exist. You can be a Thai but a doctor, and you can be an international figure in science and technology, but you still are a Thai. You co-exist in different realities. And if that is the case, then Thai is going to be with them all the time, so why not recognise the fact and try and exploit it? So if you change the perspective on what we do, I think that practises which were previously simply banned for some reason or other which no one was quite clear about... Well, I think one can be clear about them. They had to be because this business about the rejection of translation actually, I think, dates back to the view of language teaching which involved people learning the meaning as intrinsic to the language itself; a transmission view of communication. Now, a transmission view of communication is to say: I encode meaning and I transmit it to you and you decode it, and the meaning is in the language. Then, if you introduce translation, there is the danger that people are not learning with the only means of communication in the other language (that is to say, translation). But if you change the concept of communication and accept that it is a matter of negotiated meanings, of making somebody else's reality yours and vice versa, then I think the case for using the other language as well as English is different. It's worth reconsidering. Of course, in a place like Chulalongkorn this is precisely the sort of issue that you are very well placed to consider. This is not something that is going to appear as a significant research project at UCLA or the University of London because it isn't an issue there: it is an issue here.

Pasaa :

What direction is language teaching headed?

Prof. Widdowson :

Well I think that probably the major challenge will be to know how to make relevant to pedagogy developments in electronics. I'm thinking of computers. There is now the possibility of doing massive analysis of language corpus with computers and finding out about the facts of actual usage. There are also increasing uses of computers for instruction. So computers are being used for the description of language on a very large scale; dictionaries are based on corpus descriptions and so on. And there's also increasingly the use of the computer for instruction, for actual pedagogigal purposes. What I think we need to do is to look very carefully at the significance of these developments (not to assume that they necessarily tell us the truth of things or that computer assisted learning is necessarily going to be effective or beneficial to students) and look at very carefully the implications of new technology. Already technology is far outreaching the wisdom of the people who are supposed to be using it and technology is more abused than it is beneficially used for the advantage of people, it seems to me. There is a real danger that we should be driven by technology rather than us driving it. We should do what technology enables us to do rather than do things we want to do by using technology. That is, I think, the big problem not just for language teaching but for everything else for that matter. We have the technology to build motor cars so we build motor cars. We build more, more cars and our economy depends on motor cars. Then you get traffic jams in Bangkok and you get pollution of the atmosphere and you get the ruination of the planet and no-one stops to ask: "Is this what we really want?" Children get computer games. They sit like zombies watching this computer game and they buy more computer games. There are more people now looking at screens than ever before. Most people spend most of their time looking at screens. They have a screen at work, they have a screen in the home. They go to work-- a computer: the screen. Go home--a television: the screen. You go into a bar: the screen. Karaoke: the screen. Everything is a screen. Everyone's eyes are going square. So the question is not whether or not to get rid of screens, but is this what we really want? And what are the advantages of the screen and the disadvantages of the screen? Let me give you one example: computer assisted learning. With the screen you can get immediate feedback--I get the right answer straight

away. You could argue that's good because you don't leave the student in an agony of insecure unknowing. You give immediate motivating feedback. OK, that, you may say, is the positive side. Negative side: When are they going to think? If you've got a problem and you ponder about it because it's too difficult to find the answer (you've got to look in the back of the book, or it's not there at all), then there is time then when you are obliged to use your mind to work out possible solutions. There is thinking time built in into the material, but if there is an immediate answer there is no thinking time. That idea might be quite important, for people to be uncertain might be quite important. A period of uncertainty might be a very important learning process. If you've got immediate feedback, you haven't got any thinking time. So, there are positive sides to the screen; there are negative sides to the screen. When I compile I write now on a computer screen. A hundred years ago I would write with a pen and a piece of paper. The writing process is bound to be different because if I'm going to write on a piece of paper, it's going to take an

effort to write. The paper might be expensive. I've got to dip my pen into the ink so I'm going to think a bit before I start writing. Again that reflection might be a very important part of the ability to compose. If I'm on a screen, I can write the same thing twenty times. I can finish my paper and go back and change and shift around. So I'm going to do things. I'm going to get it all down then go back and fiddle it around: text based writing. You can't do that if you are actually writing. Now, this is not to say that composition on the screen is bad and on paper is good, that we should go back to the reed pen. I'm not saying that. What I am saying is that we should think a bit about what we gain and what we lose. And with advanced technology this is bound to raise all kinds of questions as to what this affect has on pedagogy. How we use it. (I'm describing manuals and teaching methods.) That's inevitably going to be the issue of the future. I have anxieties about this I must say. I find that we don't stop to reflect upon what is the purpose of doing all this, why are we doing it and where it is taking us.