

THE FALL AND RISE OF GRAMMAR IN THE AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH CURRICULUM: FACTORS IN A CONTINUUM OF CHANGE

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1. Introduction

In Australia, the UK, and generally throughout the English-speaking world, grammar in schools had suffered a distinct decline by the late 1960's, the effects of which extended into the 1990s. This paper explores to what extent two factors contributed to this decline; firstly, the understanding that teachers brought to 'subject English' curriculum documents, and secondly, the content, tenor and quality of the documents themselves. It will be shown through exemplars over this century, from Victoria and to a lesser extent, NSW, that the two factors are inextricably linked. The study is timely in view of the spate of English curriculum documents appearing throughout Australia in response to the 1994 National English Curriculum Framework. Significantly, all of these manifest a renewed focus on language study.

2. Background

A national English curriculum framework for Australian schools, Years 1-10, was launched in 1994. States and Territories are still attempting to adapt the general precepts of the framework statement to their design needs. The content document holds that explicit teaching of knowledge about language should underpin the language modes that students need to encounter (Australian Education Council 1994:3). This knowledge is found to include grammar, discourse analysis, and language variation. From a linguistic perspective, both here, and in the UK, where the 'new' direction in national curriculum development is chronologically ahead of Australia, it is not immediately apparent that this manifesto would be a matter of contention.

Neither grammar nor other knowledge about language has featured prominently in the English curriculums of Australia for almost three decades. This withdrawal from explicit and systemised language teaching is sometimes referred to as the grammar revolution (Walshe 1980, 1981; Halliday 1982). It is usual to apportion much of the responsibility for the demise of grammar to the non-contextual methods by which traditional grammar was taught, to its Latinate origins, and to the prescriptive nature of school grammar itself. A significant factor also lies in the generally uncontested acceptance of an argument put forward by a number of researchers, namely, that the study of grammar did not improve writing ability. Founded on sometimes outdated, sometimes flawed, and sometimes misinterpreted or misreported research (Kolln 1981; Tomlinson 1994), the myth endures (cf.. Wilkinson 1971; Elley et al. 1976; Watson 1987). Nonetheless, it was the climate of dissatisfaction with old traditions of teaching English, particularly grammar, that was seen to precipitate what is often referred to as 'the momentous events of the 1960's'.

The pivotal event was the month long Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of English in the United States at Dartmouth, in 1966. The Conference's ultimate preference for the 'personal growth' model over two other currently competing models as the image for 'subject English', resulted in long-term and divisive repercussions. Interest in the growth model grew from a variety of concerns. Amongst these were:

- the interest generated in process writing;
- the change in attitude to the language children bring to school, following interest in sociolinguist Bernstein's restricted code for the speech of working class children;

Dixon's account of the Dartmouth Conference sought to develop an approach that was responsive to the language children used themselves and that argued for a better recognition of the central role of talk in learning (Christie 1993:98). These concerns reflected some of the central principles of the progressivist movement that galvanised educationalists, including Australian educators, into embracing a new ideology which radically changed the composition of 'subject English', and in so doing, also changed the concept of language teaching (see discussion in section 4.3.).

The loss of faith in the efficacy of grammar to improve writing ability, and the subsequent retreat from traditional school grammar and the methods used in its teaching, did not happen against an empty backdrop. In accordance with its aims set out in section 1., this paper will establish that although those events were portentous, two longstanding and interrelated factors also worked significantly to create the climate for a radical change in attitude towards teaching explicit knowledge about language, particularly grammar. The factors referred to were not isolated events, but followed a continuum from the early 1900's, showing signs of reaching a culmination in the Victorian primary division at least, in the late 1950's. The first relates to the lack of English language study in pre-teacher training, both academic and professional, the second, to the curriculum documents which teachers consulted to implement the language study area of the curriculum. The latter forms the main body of this paper. The well documented issue of teacher training will be dealt with summarily in section 3.

3. Knowledge about language: teacher proficiency

In state schools, past academic and pre-service training has failed to prepare teachers to confidently implement a curriculum with a linguistic component such as that developed by the national curriculum framework. The literature on this point finds in general, that the deficiency in the secondary English teacher's language knowledge can be attributed to both the undergraduate degree, commonly a major in English literature (Hoggart 1966; McLaren 1971; Christie et al. 1991), and the pre-teacher training course with its general lack of systemised language study (Grommon 1955; National Committee on English Teaching 1980; Piper 1983; Christie et al. 1991). The latter situation was common, not only to secondary English specialists but also to general primary teachers. It is also an anomaly that whilst the core study, English language, is generally omitted from the undergraduate degrees of English teachers, in other disciplines, such as science and geography, teachers always receive core knowledge of the subject in the undergraduate programme, prior to pre-teacher training (cf. Crystal 1981:121).

More recently, results of such policies became apparent in the Primary Division of NSW. A new syllabus conforming to the National English Curriculum Framework was to be underpinned by systemic functional and traditional grammar theories. The English K-6 Review Committee found one of the main obstacles to implementation was teachers' lack of grammatical knowledge. It also found that any theoretical approach to grammar would have been new to most teachers (English K-6 Review Committee 1996:44).

It can be inferred from this abbreviated appraisal that earlier disengagement with explicit language study is still reflected in the knowledge of many current teachers.

4. Curriculum documents and change

The examination of selected curriculum documents dating from the beginning of the century draws together the two problems, that of the understanding that teachers brought to the documents, and the content, tenor and quality of the documents themselves. It is these two factors that are shown to influence the degree to which teachers are able to effectively exploit the curriculum.

4.1 Curriculum documents: the Tate era and beyond

The situation at the turn of the century in elementary state schools (i.e. primary schools to Grade VI) shows that the state Course of Free Instruction for Victoria included grammar, with exercises in both analysis and composition (Anchen 1956:81f.; Blake 1973:294). In 1902 the newly appointed director of education, Frank Tate, imbued with the educational ideology of USA 'progressivists' led by John Dewey, resolved to make education child-centred, with knowledge to be acquired by active participation (Anchen 1956:79). In this spirit, he was determined to improve the language area of the primary curriculum through a fully revised course of study. The extent of the revisions and their intent are revealed in the newly combined section, Composition and Grammar, of the grade courses of study and in 'Notes by the Director', published in 1902 and 1905. In the direction of infusing a spirit of reality into school practice, Tate's objectives began with the simple prescription that 'children should be trained to use their mother-tongue correctly and naturally'. To this end, he took the deliberate step of linking grammar to composition, so that it would no longer be taught from written exercises. He also vowed to end the domination of parsing and analysis (Tate 1905:16).

Certainly, analysis and parsing were to occupy a subordinate place and emphasis was no longer on metalanguage, although in Class IV students were to gain a knowledge of the parts of speech (Victoria. Education Department 1902:44). Analysis, however, proved to be still a force. In Grade V, full parsing of straightforward sentences and analysis of easy complex sentences, including the classification and relation of clauses, were to be undertaken (p.46). Passing mention is made of function in both the 1902 and 1905 course of study. The planners' intention for training in sentence structure, is revealed as follows: 'Reasons are required for the placement of the words, phrases, and clauses, thus directing attention to their function or power in a given place, and ultimately to their definition' (Blake 1973:343).

However, in the 1913 courses for newly established high schools and higher elementary schools it was explicitly required to recognise the functions of words, phrases and clauses in a sentence (Victoria. Education Department 1913:8). Tate also considered the requirements of register in oral work, recognising that ellipses are part of ordinary conversation, and discouraging the promotion of a stilted, conventional style of answering and unnatural grammatical correctness (Tate 1905:16). Elsewhere, however, the document maintains the pervading attitude of the times, namely, the promotion of correct speech and good composition. It was claimed that the work in composition was designed to give the students genuine power, but this was offset by countermeasures, such as the heavy dependence on synthesis (i.e. the building up of words, phrases or clauses to make a sentence, or combining simple sentences to make a complex one). Although the course now insisted that grammar and composition should be taught in close relation to one another, it also insisted that a body of grammatical rules be built up through carefully developed exercises in 'constructive' language work (Tate 1902:50). The term 'constructive' is rather opaque, but the reference to synthesising the given parts of a complex sentence into their most effective setting from the Class V syllabus leaves little doubt as to its meaning (Victoria. Education Department 1902:46).

Tate's intention in the 1905 course to 'rid English expression of the curse of parsing and analysis' (1905:16) failed, firstly because much of the formal grammar was transferred into work in synthesis, and secondly, the free issue to schools of the *Austral Grammar* series in 1909 helped destroy earlier freedom, with rigid learning of rules and definitions and completion of exercises, encouraging a style that was grammatically correct rather than creative (Blake 1973:343).

Other difficulties thwarted successful operation of the new course. Lack of teacher training had generated an extensive and varied inservice drive, but despite this initiative, some teachers still lacked knowledge of the course of study (Blake 1973:339). Opposition was

encountered from the traditionalists, comprising both teacher and inspector groups, who wanted a definite content of knowledge (Anchen 1956:84). Previously, payment of teachers depended on the results of testing all children individually on the syllabus. This required a definite content. Although this method of payment no longer applied, the preference for content remained (Anchen 1956:86).

The lack of success for such generally progressive ideas can be attributed to the presentation of documents whose tenor and content did not accord with the general opinion of the education community, and the quality of the documents themselves, namely their lack of precise detail, and unclear and contradictory statements. Traditionalists not only contended that the old methods secured exactness, thoroughness, and industry, but also a definite content of knowledge that could not be secured by the new methods (Anchen 1956:84). In general, the linguistic principles guiding the documents, such as attempts to contextualise grammar, and attention to variation of register, were ahead of their time and as such, deserved more success, although the emphasis in both speech and writing was resolutely committed to correctness. The preference for synthesis as a vehicle for teaching formal grammar, the uncertain reception of the documents, and the lack of knowledge and understanding brought to their implementation despite huge efforts to improve teacher expertise, served to hasten the documents' failure.

Controversy over language teaching was not confined to Australia. Later in the USA and UK it centred on the teaching of 'Latin-based' traditional grammar. Sledd (1959:9) refers to the school version of traditional grammar as defective. Quirk (1964:13) contends that it was largely language in non-linguistic terms that brought much of the older teaching to a confused end in the twenties rather than English in Latin terms. However, many of the criticisms of traditional grammar refer to inappropriate rules and categories more suited to Latin than English (cf.. Quinn 1968; Huddleston 1984, 1989; Shuman 1985; Blake 1988; Crystal 1988).

If language study in the form of traditional grammar was a matter of great contention in Britain in the 1920's, it was not such an issue in Australia, notwithstanding the attempts to bring more modern linguistic concepts to bear on language study in the curriculum. The Victorian documents of this era, as has already been shown, attempted to treat problems in that area by shifting the focus of grammatical content towards synthesis and in some measure towards function. It was not so much dissatisfaction with the grammar itself, but with the curriculum and pedagogy. In the changes embodied in the revised Victorian primary curriculum of 1934, English studies clearly embraced a more functional approach to grammar, along with more general revisions of the 1920 version. The 1934 curriculum informs that it is the method of treatment that has varied, rather than content, and that the teacher's emphasis should be transferred from the subject of study to the growing child learning through activity (Victoria. Education Department 1933:435). Significantly, the document proclaims that it is Dewey's philosophical ideals that inform the curriculum (1933:435).

It is important to note that 'functional grammar' in this curriculum refers to various sentence functions such as subject or object, and that parts of speech are introduced through their function in the sentence (1933:453, 449). The Grade V syllabus advises that the stress should always be on functional rather than formal grammar (see section 4.2), but the words *functional* and *formal* added in parenthesis to the heading of the Grade VII grammar section (1933:456), are never further mentioned or delineated. There is also the ample scope for confusion in the obscure reference to the valuable work possible in functional grammar through exercises on 'synonyms and opposites', such that suitable adjectives may be found to accompany given nouns or nouns matched to verbs, and so on. But since this exercise is divorced from the sentence, it is difficult to determine the type of 'function' referred to. Further anomalies involve the amount of terminology, which includes at Grade V level, the

following array of sentence functions — subject, predicate, object, complement, adverbial adjunct, a disparate set of case terms — nominative, objective and possessive, and recognition of the following parts of speech — noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction. This listing runs counter to the enjoinder that ‘terminology should be kept to a minimum’ (1933:453).

The one criticism of traditional grammar to be found in this curriculum document, is that notional definitions of traditional grammar are to be treated as suspect: ‘Definitions should as a rule be avoided, as frequently they are only partial truths and tend to obscure the clear understanding of the function’ (1933:452). There is no evidence that teachers heeded this abstruse advice. It is not clear whether it alludes to those categories that were defined at the time solely by their inherent properties, such as noun, verb, or by the function of their semantic relation with another category, such as adjective, adverb, pronoun. Furthermore, by this period grammar had taken a retrograde step; it was once more divorced from composition, and taught in isolation from real text. Other linguistic anomalies also remained, namely, the Latinate rules and rules of logic, and the inflexible prescriptiveness with which they were generally applied to school grammar; and the credence given to the notion that the ability to write derived from the ability to speak. The Grade VII syllabus advises: ‘It should always be remembered that correct speech is the aim of the language work of the primary school; if that is attained correct expression in writing should follow’ (1933:456).

4.2 Curriculum documents: 1955 and beyond

Revisions to the *Course of Study for Primary Schools: English 1955* were chiefly innovations to the organisation of the subject. Opportunities for integrating the activities of the various branches of English were to be provided, and the subject was to be all embracing: ‘It is a subject that pervades all school work; it is a subject that conditions living’. Emphasis was now to rest on the spoken language. But the feature that most distinguished this curriculum from earlier versions was that definite requirements could not be set for each grade, although general guidelines were offered, and language structures were to be made explicit when the child indicated a readiness for understanding (Victoria. Education Department 1955). These revisions were to have profound implications for the area of English pertaining to language study. The course took as its central principle that the teaching of English should no longer be fragmented into compartments and that skills were not to be separated from content (1955:39), a firm departure from traditional non-contextual exercises. Functional grammar was now further interpreted as recognising that an element, for example the word, *stone*, could serve different class functions in a sentence, such as noun, verb or adjective (1955:32), compared with merely focusing on colligating word class with sentence functions, as in the 1934 course.

The curriculum at first glance appears to be remarkably modern in approach, even reflecting personal growth ideals. For example: teachers should use as a foundation the speech skills that children bring with them to school understanding (Victoria. Education Department 1955:1). It also recognises some differences in register: that writing requires more accurate choice and arrangement, and is more formal than speech (1955:39); that good usage is not just an arbitrary requirement designed to ensure that meaning will be clear, but also a matter of courtesy and thoughtfulness (1955:41); that speech used in the playground and the writing used for personal reference can often be confusing and misleading when used in wider social relationships (1955:41). It recognises different genre styles: that different ‘types’ of writing have different requirements and conventions (1955:39); the importance of a metalanguage in discussion of language: ‘Terminology should be regarded as part of the child’s working vocabulary .. and used in the same way as the terminology of arithmetic’; that discussion of usage should extend knowledge of sentence elements; and that a knowledge of grammar helps

to give an understanding of how the elements of language combine to convey meaning effectively (1955:41).

Under the heading 'written expression' the document deals with spoken and written language both separately and together. It recognises that speech and writing are differently acquired modes, that writing is not only more difficult for children to master, it is also more formal, and that lacking assistance from gesture and intonation it requires more accurate choice and arrangement. The document advises that some concession be given to complex or original thought and expression over mere formal correctness (1955:39). Nevertheless, the general tenor of the document for both speech and writing is normative; correctness to the teacher's own standard should prevail: 'The teacher will need to draw on his own experience to decide which children need correcting and which need more encouragement to express themselves freely' (1955:1). The standard to be aimed at is 'good idiomatic usage' (1955:40) or 'correct English' (1955:38), with little attempt to further characterise these standards. The document also advises that the purpose of instruction is to draw attention to the patterns and language forms that the children have absorbed unconsciously. Particular items of this implicit knowledge should then be made explicit when the child appears 'ready' for them. Evidence for this would be spontaneous appearance of patterns or forms in the writing of some of the children (1955:39). This neat solution would depend largely on not only one child, but a number of them manifesting the same patterns, which, at the same time would also come to the teacher's attention. It also credits the child with the ability to understand a discussion of the forms, for explicit awareness to take place. Yet despite the possibility of this 'readiness' not manifesting itself in certain children there is an expectation that, by Grade VI, the class would attain a high degree of understanding of grammar. This includes recognition and understanding of the functions of the parts of speech and sentence elements, such as phrases and clauses, subject and predicate, different types of nouns, pronouns, phrases, and so on (1955:41).

It is not surprising that teachers were confused. Teachers accustomed to following specific prescriptions in departmental courses were uncertain as to how much grammar had to be taught (Kydd 1957:82). From the discussion above, it is clear that the syllabus provided only a scant outline of a broad range of language knowledge and skills to be achieved by the end of Grade VI, without providing teachers with adequate means to accomplish it. Furthermore, teachers were faced with two conflicting ideals, the attractive spontaneity of bringing a feature to a child's attention at the 'moment of readiness' or engaging in systematic teaching of language thereby ensuring that all students were given access to the full scope of the curriculum. Systemised study implies some planned progression in curriculum development, whereas language study is most effective at the point of need, not decided by curriculum levels or stipulations. The rate and direction of language acquisition is personal, whereas the teacher's obligation must also be to the group or class. Explicit teaching of knowledge about language also raises problems of not only what to bring to explicit awareness, but also how and to whom.

This area remains a matter for debate. In the UK, the Kingman Report (Dept of Education & Science 1988:4) took the position that teaching should occur at the moment of readiness of the child, so that the explicit statement consolidates the implicit awareness. Palmer and Brinton (1990:84f.) hold that:

Such activities .. cannot practically be carried out on an 'incidental' basis, when a particular language point arises in discussion with an individual child. They are best pursued as class activities, a separate part of the language curriculum, through which all children will gain familiarity with vocabulary and concepts.

This allows the teacher to effectively exploit the level of language awareness of a particular child or group with incidental teaching 'at the appropriate point of their writing development'. Arnold (1990:34) argues that 'it will be for the teacher to decide whether a particular group of children is at the right point for, say, some attention to be given to particular lexical or syntactical features'. Cox, in presenting the National Curriculum for the UK (Department of Education & Science 1989:6.17), on the one hand advocates a systematic approach, particularly for secondary students, but on the other (6.11) that 'work should start from the pupils' own competence' (cf. Hawkins 1984; Dennis 1990; Rothery and Macken 1991). Teachers' uncertainty in complying with such conflicting demands can be imputed to this dichotomy, which is evident in writings on the subject, and reflected in this and other curricula examined, including the National English Curriculum Framework.

The key changes for the 1955 course were the emphasis on spoken English, and the conscious teaching of English throughout the day (Victoria. Education Department 1955:20). The high level of expectation demanded in the midst of an acute shortage of teachers and overcrowded classrooms worked against the success of the innovations. Despite the spirit of liveliness accorded English language as a topic encompassing all facets of everyday life, the emphasis on spoken English, had as its unrealistic motive, correct speech 'uttered clearly and pleasantly' both in school and out. Now, speech had also been endowed with such powerful qualities that the authors claimed: 'With a British person's whole education and experience of life .. it is possible to know, soon after a man opens his mouth to speak, a good deal about the quality of his mind, the width of his experience, and the extent and thoroughness of his education' (1955:20).

Some teachers misinterpreted the vague descriptions of aims and instructions, taking the constant focusing on the spoken mode and correctness to extreme. In spoken English the aim was 'to extend the good Australian speech that was taught in the English period to all subjects, to the playground and to the home' (1955:1). Holloway (1958:520f.) writes of 'rigidly' banning his primary school students from uttering '*that's them*' and insisting on '*those are they*', and '*those are we*', without regard to situation. The banner taught under was 'grammar at all times'. Insufficient knowledge about language to make sound linguistic choices for his charges, and failure to comprehend the advice on register, resulted in the grammar chosen for 'all times' being the most formal, even outdated form. The course of study failed to convey that it was normal practice to use different grammars for different situations.

Kydd identifies yet another group of teachers who wanted freedom to develop their own courses, but were concerned about the interpretation of phrases such as, 'it is expected that ..' or 'pupils should learn to recognise ..' (Kydd 1957:82). Moreover, the constant assessment of students for later particular correction, in an era of very large classes in primary schools, raises questions of practicality. The instructions for speech correction alone are an example of the varied linguistic expertise required: 'The teacher should take note of technical faults in grammar, usage, pronunciation, vocabulary, and control of voice, and provide brief but frequent exercises and drills at appropriate times' (Victoria. Education Department 1955:20).

At the time, the heavier focus placed on functional grammar, a term found to be somewhat elusive for teachers, presented further problems with the course and teachers' understanding of it. The trend towards 'functional' grammar was, according to Kydd (1957:82), a recoil from the failure of formal grammar (i.e. traditional school grammar) to carry over into other branches of English study. The grammar still had the hallmarks of traditional grammar, albeit taught for a different purpose. In their research on problems in the primary school in Australia, Radford & Pratt (1957:129) attest to 'a reduction in formal grammar content of courses of study' as a common feature of curriculum revision. However, it was Diack (1957) who pinpointed the source of the very real confusion he found amongst teachers, concerning

the terms 'functional' and 'formal', within the context of explicit language teaching. He reserves the term 'functional' for the grammar which concerns itself with 'the functions of words in relation to one another - a functional grammar', as opposed to 'formal' grammar, but observes that 'now it is taking on the meaning opposite of formal lessons in grammar' (1957:218f.). When the term 'functional' is applied to the teaching of grammar, the situation arises where teachers, who believe they are teaching functional grammar because they are teaching incidentally, are found to be teaching 'formal (usually Latinised) grammar in bits and pieces as the opportunity offers' (1957:218f.).

Not only were primary teachers confused over the meaning of the term 'functional grammar' in curriculum documents, but many books published under the guise of functional grammar were adding to the confusion. Text book publishers attempted to seduce teachers with books claiming to present the new functional approach but merely offered a new motivational format, which Diack (1957:219f) describes as 'gay in colour .. and full of frolicsome activity'.

After 1955, the primary course in language had a semblance of a *laissez faire* approach; at the same time, secondary courses were still much more formal and structured. It was clear that for students making the transition from primary to secondary school, on the one hand, and for secondary teachers receiving them on the other, the expectations of neither would be met.

In the 1955 course of study for primary schools the outstanding emphasis was on correction and remediation of speech and writing difficulties. It was full of aphorisms, such as 'correct usage is a habit' (1955:40), but yielded little evidence of its being a systemised approach. Nonetheless, the curriculum was an attempt to accommodate some of the features of a modern linguistic approach, such as differing mode, tenor and field in diverse registers, and the different features of various genres, without resisting the corrective position of traditional grammar. Teachers' lack of expertise to interpret and implement the syllabus, as we have shown, could produce a negative impact. The teacher was required to have expertise in child language acquisition, detailed knowledge about language, including grammar and discourse, and some knowledge of prosody. He or she was the appointed 'standard' without intimation of what might constitute that standard. The documents have been shown to be confusing in content and normative and unrealistic in attitude. The planners failed to give clear direction in the implementation of the innovations to the language area of the 1955 course of study. The unaccustomed freedom granted Victorian primary teachers concerning decisions on what to teach, when to teach it, and to whom, without adequate professional guidance in both content and method, opened the way for teachers to embrace the new tenets of 'personal growth', as they were presented to them.

4.3 Curriculum documents: personal growth era

The Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 1984:25), in its Report on a national language policy concluded from its findings on standards of language skills in school leavers that all was not well in the teaching of English in Australia's classrooms. This report followed a period of turmoil for 'subject English' in Australian secondary schools (Piper 1983, 1988). The period referred to was the late 1960's and early 1970's, during which a personal growth model emerged from progressivist ideals once more (see section 2.).

From the turmoil emerged a number of radical changes to English curriculum documents in all Australian states (Piper 1988:7). The first significant change, a general movement away from a centrally controlled prescriptive curriculum towards 'general guidelines and statements of principle' (1988:7), brought with it a degree of autonomy in curriculum planning, never before experienced. Furthermore, in a number of states, including Victoria, schools were now free to allow teachers to develop a curriculum relevant to their own student community, a particular year level, or even a particular class. However, evidence from a

number of sources (Crystal 1981:119-122; Piper 1983:85; Kalantzis & Kress 1989:18) suggests that teachers generally lacked the resources to incorporate knowledge of language development in curriculum design. The second significant change moved away from 'traditional conceptions of language education based on grammar, spelling, composition exercises, and 'correct usage' in favour of a view of language as personal growth' (Piper 1988:7). The third change, evident by 1970 in many Victorian secondary and technical schools, found 'subject English' itself incorporated into wider programmes of social studies which were variously named as: 'General Studies, Humanities, Community Man, Studies of our time, Topic Work' (L Hannan 1970:27). This change was to further remove the connection with language study.

The personal growth model focused on the way in which a child used language to process experience, and hence 'grew through English' (Christie & Rothery 1979:199; Piper 1988:7). It was concerned with development of skills or abilities through personal experience and response rather than systematic learning of knowledge, and with process rather than content - hence its concern with creative or process writing. Bill Hannan, a major figure in the curriculum reforms of the 1960's, stated that he did not subscribe to the non-interventionist stance of some personal growth extremists (cited in Dowse 1988:308). Indeed, Hannan, in line with other eminent figures of the era interviewed in Dowse, rather than rejecting the established linguistic conventions, such as the teacher intervening in the writing process to help solve a problem, simply ranked content above them (1988:307). He saw the teacher's role as that of 'critical adviser' (1988:308). Further to this point, Dixon (1969:12) was also concerned over the problem of intervention. He believed the swing to process risked over-rejection of the conventions. Consequently, the teacher should judge the right moment to call attention to a child's problem with the written message. From evidence of the concern of early 'growth' advocates with tempered intervention, it is now apparent that the non-interventionist attitude for personal growth may have been somewhat exaggerated over time. Or it may have been due in part to insufficient understanding by teachers of the theoretical bases of the syllabuses that Christie & Rothery (1979:206) and Hannan (cited in Dowse 1988:311) suggest was common. But regardless of its source, the rigid non-interventionist stance could not align itself with explicit teaching about language.

Further confronting teachers were conflicting appraisals of existing models of English. Watson (1987:45) challenges the simplistic notion of distinct models or views, 'and the position is made more difficult by the fact that these views, though different in their central emphases, shade into one another'. Dixon's (1969:3) view of the skills model, sometimes known as the old 'drills' (1969:2), was that through distortion, operations specific to the written system of language became the centre of English. This model was based on discrete skills gained from isolated exercises in traditional grammar. Whitehead (1973:157), after Firth, points to the imbalance that traditional school grammar creates in the total situational context, by confining itself to only one level, that of syntax. Dixon is also critical of the cultural heritage model in which literature tended to be treated as '*a given*', with a content that is handed over, and equally importantly, discussion ignored, which meant that that part of the child's experience was also ignored (Dixon 1969:3). On the other hand, Donnelly (1993) maintains that the personal growth model is also flawed. He argues that, equally important as the child's experience, are both the content of the subject and the world and nature of the student. 'To overly emphasise either to the exclusion of the other is to offer an imbalanced and flawed English curriculum' (Donnelly 1993:260). These criticisms draw attention to the uneasy path for teachers adjusting to new, autonomous curriculums driven by a new ideology, which also generated a whole new pedagogy. On a number of levels, the narrowness of the scope of the models mentioned has proved them inadequate for supporting balanced and systemised language study, including text analysis.

Further criticism of the 'new English', as it was often called, has centred around the 'relevance' criterion in certain interpretations of the personal growth models, such as the NSW junior secondary English curriculum (1984). Rothery and Macken (1991:216) believe the pursuit of relevance for students, in the choice of material, has limited the range of writing that students have been exposed to. For similar reasons Hannan (1989:3) decries the redefining of 'popular culture' or 'the TV series' as separate disciplines within the field of study known as English. He asserts that these forms can be studied under the traditional discipline of literature. Further, by rigidly tying literature to literacy, the broader experience beyond what can be read by the student is denied (1989:5). In Victoria, the activities proposed for Years 7-10 courses in English reflect this trend. The independently defined studies or activities proposed for inclusion in schools' programmes by the Secondary English Committee (1968) were the study of literature; wide reading; creative writing; experience of drama, film, theatre and television, with 'discussion' basic to each study's procedure (Secondary English Committee, cited in Kelly 1973:24; Hannan 1970:27). The curriculum was now the responsibility of the school (Kelly 1973:25). The activities described at this stage make no specific reference to language as a study or in the discussion opportunities. If teachers were expected to continue working in the area of language, this was not clearly stated.

Even after the influence of 'personal growth' ideology began to show, traditional language study continued to be practised in some classrooms for a variety of reasons, and generally through decontextualised exercises rather than through analysis of real language (Christie & Rothery 1979; Piper 1983). However, little evidence exists that the approach was systematic. Halliday (1982:203) notes that it was not much used for commenting on children's writing or the language of literature. The reason that school grammar was not used in these and other potentially productive ways is:

because this would have involved analysing discourse, passages of real text, instead of isolated sentences; and the grammar provided no means of doing this. Moreover many teachers were less than confident at analysing sentences that were not in the textbook .. Also grammatical analyses were presented as all or nothing (they were always either right or wrong. In fact, the analysis of language is a task of interpretation; there are often two, three or more possibilities, and the interest may lie precisely in the differences among them.

(Halliday 1982:203f.)

Halliday's comments drew attention to some of the problems confronting English teachers over matters related to language study. On the one hand, they and their students possessed little conscious linguistic knowledge or a common basic metalanguage; on the other, English curriculum documents in general held that some language study, including even grammatical knowledge, was desirable. Particular stipulations couched as curriculum advice, however, contributed to the confusion experienced by many teachers. For example, in commenting on the freedom Victorian schools have to determine their own courses, Kelly nevertheless identifies a dogmatic stance on language in the Technical Schools Branch *Suggested English Syllabus Forms 1-3* (1967), from the stipulation that 'neither grammatical exercises nor spelling drills are desirable classroom practices' (1973:24f.). A dilemma was created for those teachers who believed that some formal knowledge of language was an intrinsic part of the English curriculum, but whose general pedagogy for it was often built on practices of teaching language, including grammar, in isolation from real texts, as discussed above. Prevailing practice often featured either of two extremes, 'indoctrination in the tenets of traditional grammar' (Kelly 1973:26), usually through non-contextual exercises, or, following a non-interventionist doctrine, no explicit teaching of language awareness at all, a common interpretation of the personal growth model. As an expert witness for the report on a national language policy for Australia by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts,

Dr B. Horvath states: 'There is a big gap between what is actually set out in these documents .. and what actually goes on in the classroom' (cited in Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts 1984:26). The new-style guidelines display an emphasis on language development modelled on children's osmotic acquisition of language and the belief that language is learned through use (Christie & Rothery 1979:202). Also derived from this growth concept is the process method of writing with its recursiveness through redrafting and 'conferencing'.

The Technical Schools division assumed responsibility for both syllabus documents and discussion papers for specific objectives, such as: 'the ability to write effectively, for any purpose and to any audience', and 'the ability to speak effectively for a specific purpose and to a specific audience'. However, it was the absence of documents defining aims and objectives, or their relative unimportance in the eyes of teachers that characterised the teaching of English in the majority of schools in the Victorian secondary division (Kelly 1973:22f.). Rather than issue a curriculum document in 1968, the Secondary division published a series of papers to stimulate ideas on course organisation and content, and the theoretical background of the new teaching practices. Also produced was a list of those activities that should be incorporated in English teaching, as discussed above (1973:24). The very general advice was in stark contrast to the formally prescribed *Course of Study for forms I, II, and III in Secondary Schools* of 1964. Published only four years earlier, this document contained a section on language study, which subsumed grammar. It included vocabulary, with emphasis work on such areas as over-used words, shades of meaning and tracing word origin. The grammar section included functions and rules of syntax for the parts of speech, sentence structure, including analysis and synthesis; typology of clause and phrase, and even discussions of permissible and awkward use of such problems as the split infinitive. Other areas included creative expression, which also aimed to improve language performance through sentence and text structure. Progression was planned over the three year course (Victoria. Education Department 1964:7-11). The dramatic contrast in the language area of the new English curriculum was starkly apparent.

In NSW, the revised English Syllabus for forms I-IV 1971, as Kelly (1973:10) states, was little more than a philosophical rationale and framework that curriculum developers could use. This syllabus disclaims as an objective 'abstract knowledge of any formalised system of grammar' (although not demanding an absolute abstinence from any mention of grammatical terms); (cited in Kelly 1973:10). It rather promotes 'the development of practical competence of language in use'. The document's lack of clear explanation and its vague direction in these statements, taken together with teachers' lack of training in re-interpreting language study in other ways, would pose difficulties for developing and implementing it as a course.

Rothery & Macken (1991) offer an apt description of yet another guidelines curriculum, the 1984 junior secondary English curriculum in NSW:

It sets no specific goals for language development; nor does it deal with progression in language from year to year. While the curriculum is designed to promote language development, it leaves how this will be achieved to the discretion of the English staff of each school, who have complete responsibility for its implementation.

(Rothery & Macken 1991:215)

One feature typical of personal growth is that specific goals for language development and year to year progression are non-existent. In contrast to this view of curriculum is the later 1987 version *Syllabus in English Years 7-10* for NSW, which reveals in some areas distinct trends away from the perceived personal growth model, while remaining with others: 'Growth in language is integral to the student's personal growth as a thinking, feeling person' (NSW Board of Secondary Education 1987:5); 'Language learning needs to be a **student-**

centred activity ...' (1987:6); and further, the assumption, 'Students learn to write mainly by writing' (1987:38), are all personal growth tenets. (cf.. Kalantzis & Kress 1989:18). However, further into the document, there is evidence of movement away from conventional personal growth precepts:

- Teaching particular grammatical concepts can improve students' writing if undertaken in context and at the time of need.
- Teachers should respond to individual language needs in students' writing.
- Lessons should be given to individuals, to groups in need, or to a whole class as appropriate, to assist students to improve the quality of their writing (NSW Board of Secondary Education 1987:41).

The application of grammatical concepts to improve students' writing and the movement away from the policy of non-intervention in writing classes is evidence of a trend away from typical personal growth tenets. This curriculum aims for continuity, has broad goals, but no yearly progression or statements of learning outcomes at different levels. It can be viewed as a transition between the personal growth era and the new curriculums based on the National English Curriculum Framework.

The changes to curriculum and documents outlined above, and their varied interpretation can be attributed to the unclear role of English language education in 'subject English' over the 'personal growth' era. Coupled with these are what Piper (1988:5) describes as uncertainty and confusion brought about by 'the rapid advance of linguistic theory, with implications for practice which are manifest but ill-defined; [and] a bewildering succession of ideas, frequently in competition and jostling with each other for the teacher's attention'. The uncertainty aroused in teachers through the progressive ideals espoused by the 'new English' of the 1970's under the 'personal growth' model paralleled that aroused by the ideology of progressivists from the United States, as earlier envisaged by Tate. The Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 1984:26) found that although new approaches to curriculum development might be desirable, curriculum documents in the States generally recommend an approach to English based on the results of recent linguistic research. More important, they believed, was that English language teachers were confused about their role and their effectiveness. These were amongst the problems that beset the English teacher.

However, Christie & Rothery (1979:206) were critical of curriculum documents for their role in the general malaise. In most states the documents, whose design was influenced by the ideas emerging from the Dartmouth conference, manifested a number of perceived deficiencies, in particular failure to provide teachers with sufficient help in translating the new ideas into practice. Christie & Rothery's (1979) findings were that changes were not as widespread as is sometimes suggested in the community and that teachers had insufficient understanding of the theoretical and research foundations of the syllabuses. Consequently, they had difficulty in interpreting them and acting upon them (1979:206). This investigation corroborates these findings.

A further complication for language teaching manifested itself. As Hannan (1992:167) points out, within personal growth ideology, English language courses and frameworks mostly espouse what is known as the whole language approach. This involves the three aspects of language development, namely, learning in language, through language, and about language, but in manifestations of the approach 'the learning about is honoured more in the breach than the observance'. Piper (1988:23) offers as grounds for the rejection of learning about language, that this one facet of the tripartite image of the holistic approach was viewed suspiciously by some adherents of the model as a means of engineering a return to traditional

grammar teaching. Hannan puts forward wider implications in pointing to the anomaly, that learning about language 'requires learning systematically about such aspects of language as grammar, word formation, etymology, stylistics, phonology and sociolinguistics' (1992), some of which are seen as opposed to the spirit of a whole language approach. It has already been shown in section 3. that teachers did not have the type of expertise to follow a curriculum of systemised language study based on a modern linguistic approach. Quirk (1964:9) was conscious of this problem when he noted that for decades linguists had damned the 'old grammar' but offered nothing but general principles in its place for teachers to use in the classroom.

4.4 Curriculum documents: current trends

Linguists are now offering practical advice about modern language study to curriculum planners. And with the growing interest in this field of English, there is a strong likelihood of the 'language-sized hole in education' (Durie 1997:E2) being filled through the new English curriculums embracing a language study far removed from the 'old grammar'. Leading the way is the collaborative project of the Australian Education Council, namely, the national English curriculum framework for Years 1-10 and beyond, published in 1994 as the two documents, *A statement on English for Australian schools and English* and *A curriculum profile for Australian schools*. Under the language modes of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing, the language content includes grammatical categories and functions, discourse strategies and analysis, the language and structure of different text types, language variation, both situational and socio-cultural. Its purpose is for students to gain effective use of linguistic structures and features to compose, comprehend and respond to texts (Australian Education Council 1994:12). Although the statement recognises the need for some explicit teaching, in context where possible, it disclaims any attempt to 'outline methods of teaching and ways of learning' (1994:1).

All states have responded to the national framework. Some, such as South Australia and Tasmania, are working directly with the statement and profile as a framework, through which they examine and modify their own curriculums at each level. Others, such as Queensland, NSW and Northern Territory, who were already well advanced in devising curriculums that incorporated a significant attention to language study, have given it less attention. Some states also chose to employ more than one theory of grammar as the basis for the knowledge about language programme. Curriculums devised by the Northern Territory (Northern Territory. Department of Education 1992) and NSW (NSW. Board of Studies 1994) use traditional grammar terms at the sentence level and systemic functional grammar at the whole text level. The NSW Board of Studies postponed publication to incorporate the structure of the national framework. The Queensland English syllabus for Years 1-10 project, twelve years in the making, is also firmly committed to systemic linguistics (Carr 1996:38f). However, Carr (1996:41) views the National English Statement and Profile as one of the programs not completely in accord with the Queensland syllabus, but competing for teachers' attention. However, Wyatt-Smith & Ludwig (1996:33) find the English statement document and the Queensland English Syllabus essentially compatible. Individual opinions and preferences can cause contention in this still volatile area of the curriculum.

Both the NSW and Queensland systems have experienced some problems in implementing systemic functional grammar. Reporting on the Queensland position Carr (1996:40) notes that the problems lie in the 'lexicogrammatical fine print and more inductive approaches to textual analysis'. Because of their comparative complexity, functionally-based approaches require substantial professional development inservice programmes (1996:42). At the time of his writing, this problem was still to be addressed. The situation in NSW is entirely different. The NSW curriculum was strongly oriented to a systemic functional approach, as shown in its major support documents, its professional development programmes and the findings of the

English K-6 Review Committee Report: Part A (1996) surveying experiences and responses to the use of the 1994 syllabus. Amongst the difficulties the Review Report noted: 'The language of the Syllabus was seen as an impediment to teachers' understanding and has alienated many' (NSW. Board of Studies 1996:51). The Review Report also documents the difficulties of the terminology associated with functional grammar (1996:51), and various criticisms of the adequacy of early inservice programmes. The subsequent report recommendations have resulted in the new English K-6 Syllabus 1998. This syllabus claims to incorporate findings from recent research (NSW. Board of Studies 1998:7). Gone are the extensive systemic functional definitions, such as participants and processes that featured in the 1994 syllabus. However, the syllabus adheres to a functional approach while employing traditional grammar terms. Although there are some concessions to modern categories, such as 'modality', some of the definitions remain outmoded; for example, a phrase is 'a group of words that forms part of a sentence and does not include a finite verb' (1998:97). The definitions are not altogether consistent, some relying on form rather than function, such as that for 'sentence' (1998: 98).

The Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework: English (Victoria. Board of Studies 1995) is also closely aligned to the emphases embodied in the National English framework documents, although the interpretation of grammatical structures and features is not clear. Nevertheless, it states that 'a particular purpose of the English program is to teach knowledge about language' (Victoria. Board of Studies 1995:9). Again, because of the complexities associated with implementing and monitoring the new curriculum, Doecke (1996:71) articulates the need for continuing professional development, sometimes in partnership with academics.

Because the new curriculums discussed above are still evolving, it will be some time before research data is available on the results of the massive changes to the English curriculum in the area of language teaching during the 1990's and beyond.

A new study in the Victorian Certificate of Education, namely, English Language, also reflects the renewed interest in language study. In Australia, it is at the forefront of endeavour in this area for senior students, and is to be offered alongside the subjects English, and Literature to students in Years 11 and 12. The Board of Studies lists the four units of study: Language and communication, Language change, Language in society, and Stylistics and language. Units 1 and 2 are to be conducted in selected schools in 1999, with full implementation by 2001 (Victoria. Board of Studies 1998:4). To overcome the problems of training that have beset other attempts to introduce new content and theoretical approaches, extensive professional courses are being offered to teachers by university staff.

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown that curriculums over the past century have continued to effect changes to the language area of the English curriculum through changes in ideology or their modified versions, changes in pedagogy, and changes to the actual content. However, they show similar reasons for foundering. The common thread appears to be the lack of understanding that teachers brought to the documents and the quality of the documents themselves, that is, their lack of clarity, their capacity for being misinterpreted, and their failure to give sufficient guidelines to teachers. A further factor, namely, content, cannot be ignored. It has been shown that for almost two-thirds of this century curriculum documents continued to adhere to a language foundation that was both Latinate and linguistically unsound. The established practices of traditional school grammar were also normative and had as their underlying motive, improvement in writing and speech. Through the 'Language Development Project' Christie & Rothery (1979) examined the content of official curriculum documents used throughout Australia during the late 1960's. They noted two main purposes for teaching

grammar, 'to assist students in the development of writing skills and to provide rules for "correct usage" in speech and writing skills' (Christie & Rothery 1979:197). Although various curriculum revisions attempted to improve the validity of grammar teaching under the guise of various functional nomenclatures, success in their purpose remained elusive, until the grammar and the documents were finally rendered unfashionable. It is true that up to the time of the personal growth era the English classroom generally enjoyed systemised language courses, but the particular variants of traditional grammar chosen to interpret the courses were linguistically unsound. On the other hand, the curricular documents following the precepts of the personal growth model later in the century generally paid little attention to systemised language study, and the grammar taught was haphazard. The more recent push to reinstall language study via a linguistically valid approach was spearheaded by projects like the National English Curriculum Framework. However, the notion of teaching language at the point of need was shown in the 1955 course of study to be at odds with systemised teaching. This dilemma also resides in The Statement of the National English Curriculum Framework (Australian Education Council 1994:12) and needs to be resolved, as it does in the National English Curriculum of Great Britain.

It has been shown that in this area, responsibility also rests to a large extent on longstanding inadequate teacher education, serving to magnify the problems of interpreting that part of the curriculum where language study pertains, and contributing to the tenuous position that language study held in the latter decades of the century. The current controversy over systemised language teaching and changes to emphases in the study of language can be viewed as part of a continuum throughout this century. After the fall, the rise of a suitable and linguistically valid approach to grammar is the challenge at this end of the continuum.

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