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CONTENTS

LAZARUS RECUMBENT

by

Wong Phui Nam

It broke through into my darkness
much as the wind now fans
in the light outside disturbance
of black leaves on sticks of trees
which bind themselves tightly
and by the roots packed into fissures,
clefts that break the dry rook face.
Before the voice was, there had been
darkness. It lingers as faint light
beyond the great round stone rolled back
to let the day in, crows' cry
mixed into the smell of turned-over earth
and image of him at the heart
of the crowd's murmuring...

Awakening comes a trail of fire
lit down the throat, racking the lining
in the first rush of air into the lungs,
in pain of needlepoint worked
beneath the skin as blood, once black
and jelled, re-liquifying threads
a warm net pulled tight across the back
across the shoulders, around the crotch.
When I feel hunger begin to stir,
to suck at me somewhere in the gut,
anxiety rises, spreads with the dust
blown in from the afternoon outside.

Yet the darkness has not really
yielded me up. Corruption hangs
about me, wraps round my linen
a film of the grave's odour. The flesh

1

now newly made over has still
in it something of dead earth.
A touch of dissolution still holds
soft, the ear and eye. Where once
was clear mind, thin silt settles.
It is a fearful thing for me to have
to grope about my waking thoughts
to touch wet earth, where movement is,
round maggots. All that has kept me safe,
kept me secure from dream is lost.
I am come back, and another life
issues out of the winding now unstopped
recesses, manifest in forms visible, in swarms,
the once obscure compulsions that troubled sleep.

On a bee-filled sun-showery day
in a month of rain, I see
in my garden, in pools of darkness,
gigantic coils afloat over the flowering lime
and, heavy and black in power, overflow
in a tangled mass onto the corals
and the pinks of the rose and carnation beds.
In a slow current, over the grass bank
a-splash with lilies, thick schools
of wall-eyed coelacanths block out the sun.

The darkness has not wholly
given me up... I would not so return,
as the creature that swims or crawls,
that finds its home at the bottom of the sea
making of the day night, and night
a nothingness. I am not ready yet
to rise up and be out in the sun.
There is a stiffness that turns like a blade
inserted at the joints, now becoming
once more locked in ice.
What if my skin should peel in long
grey smears, coming off with the linen?
My face shine yellow and bloated,
corroded by the juice of mashed herbs, spices

packed in at the burial? And worst of all,
what if I should come back and show
myself, standing on high ground
over the raised faces of the crowd
as the man newly risen...
and they recoil as the head cloth
is removed, only to show my eyes
unlidded in the day's glare, all whites,
blank as marble, inward with vision?

I would they not rock my bones,
shake up the gel in the eye and ear
with thunder of the round stone being moved
back into place, stop up my senses
with darkness before I lose my way
into it, giving up images of day,
crows' cry, turned earth in the wind,
my sisters calling... I should be absent
from this heat, this tight cocoon,
be long gone from such remains
as are left to spoil before cockroaches
a pear, stick themselves to the cloth
gleaming like dull medallions, red stars
over the wet places, the eyes and mouth.

CAVES

The opening winds down into the rock
bringing a short way light into massif of scarred
        stone
thrust up high out of the earth

to rest -- mis-shapened, black against the sky
a severed head left lying among the burnt out
        fields
with brow that abuts the sun.

Rising before the entrance, at the pond's end,
the sole mystical serpent grows large
with looking. It is faint shadow under the edge

diffused among the algae in water that glows
with the spreading chains of mucus, frog spawn
pushing for more life in the day's heat and
        moving air.

The seven heads branching, fanned out in full
distension of the hoods, the scales in rough lumps
and blunt, uneven fangs are set, made permanent,

so much of concrete the snake cannot turn back
upon its coils to weave out of the way of clouds
of midges, of dragonflies that swarm out of mere
        change

between the rains and these hot September days.

4

The temple keepers bring to the darkness
thin flourescent tubes as if to gain for the
        imagination
in one withe-washed chamber

ancestral images, guardians in such shapes
as mixture bonded of cement, crushed stone
and coarse river sand not wholly cleaned of mud
        would take.

Once they might have been presences.
Ranged round in their galleries, they now stand
disgorged from the deepest recesses of dream,

mere torsos, stiffened rib cages locked with wire
and heads hardened about bent pig iron rods.
What can they suggest?

All that we can hope to know about being more
than merely human is held fast, mixed in with
        coarse grain
in bodies calcify into substance

that daily becomes more solid, more resistant than
        stone.

A ledge at the furthest end falls off...
a little way down by slow difficult descent
we lose the light.

Most are repelled by first scent of dung
which comes up sharply with body's heat
and, mixed into it, disquiet and the commotion we
        bring.

Once into the pit, we come up in darkness hard
        against
unyielding stone.   It thrusts itself into the face
        and teeth
and curving beyond the outstretched arms

the fingertips on either side
it beats back upon us our dis-ease.
So much of ourselves being of the senses,
        we gag for air.

The life we have stirred up here in this
        closed heat
is of our own. We touch not so much ourselves
but wing and bone, obscure rage, hunger and
        fearfulness

that rise and crowd the mind, blind swirl of bats
that swarm its walls in boiling masses, in moving
        heaps
hanging stalactites of blood and fur,
        of fighting tooth and claw.

We have touched off a dream of fury that would
not subside.

After the first descent, we would be well down
into the stone.   Where it opens, it leads us into
      uneven floors,
inward chambers, fissures, rock beds below which
      waters run.

In the moist air, where all sounds may be held,
resolved into the drawing and flowing out of
      the breath
the senses dwindle, weaken

into a thin uncertain flame, without smoke,
clear on wick that burns and does not burn,
      detached
and floating at the still liquid centre of soft wax.

If we have lost the way now, what names,
what guides can we call upon?   What bright
      presences
who will see us through?   Out of the memory

of a life lived out in this our makeshift city,
out of the ways of a borrowed tongue and myth
what can be retrieved, what word given which
      will manifest

one who would lead us across echoing wells,
      ravines, black expanse of void?

Yet it has been rumoured there are exits
in the most unexpected places, sudden openings
in the rock widening outward to a milky darkness

lit by faint points of light aligned
in constellations not seen since long before
the first kings gave us laws,

taught us to make the most of water from the
        streams and sky,
to read into the future from markings on burnt
        shells
and, if it be given that there are hints,

once out into the open, one may look across
a bare terrain of random boulders, escarpments
        under water
and see in the distance the whole line of the sky

a forest, black and writhing under an ancient
        wind.
If it be given, the sun, now caught, will struggle
to tear and free itself from massed entanglement
        of coiled roots.

Breaking out of the earth, it will ascend
taking to itself half of the heavens, reveal itself
a tremendous bird of lightning, of the source of
        light

bird that cleaves the world to itself in a
        consuming fire.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND VERB-FORM ERRORS

by

H. Hepburn

Error Analysis, especially during the 70's, seemed a fruitful area for trying to establish how students processed material presented to them for learning. However, it lost ground to the developing interest in and analysis of the various individual language skills. This interest spanned a whole host of experiments designed to establish how students acquire proficiency in these language skills. One aspect of this change was a lack of interest in the techniques used by instructors to present materials to the learner for processing. Were these techniques learning facilitators or error-inducers?

This paper sets out to examine some of the techniques advocated for use in Malaysian Secondary Schools by the Teachers' Handbook for the English Syllabus for Forms I-III for Secondary Schools in Malaysia.

The paper consists of two sections:

        Section A - A general statement on
              Error Analysis

        Section B - Comment on the teaching
              techniques to be employed
              by teachers.

A General Theory of Error Analysis

A Theory of Communication

H. V. George used communication theory to provide a general theory of error in two areas-- interference and redundancy. He suggests that the errors in a learner's output are due to interference both from sources within the language and outside, as well as from the redundant features of the language. His explanation in terms of communication theory takes the view that the aim of a course designed is similar to that of straightforward communication. "This aim matches the course designer's aim that the English appearing as a learner's output should be the English of respectively the learner's and the course designer's input." (1972: 9).

He uses Warren Weaver's classical diagram of the communication process to illustrate this point.

10
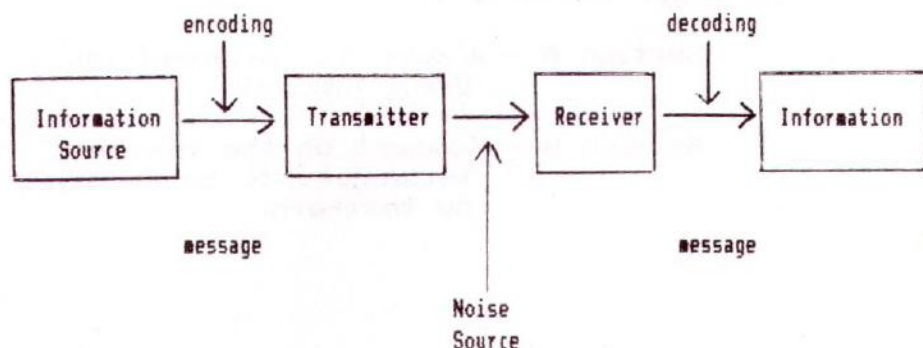
The primary aim is that a message from source should reach its destination unchanged. The message consists of transmitted and received information. Putting information into messages is encoding and extracting information from the message is decoding. For encoding and decoding to occur there must be a common code between the sender and receiver of the message. Sometimes the message is imperfectly received or it is different from the message sent. The reason lies in the noise or interference factor which can be within and outside the system.

Possible Causes of Error

In terms of language learning the aim of the course designer, is that a learner's output should be the English of the learner's and course designer's input. If the learner's output contains errors, it may be assumed that these have been caused by interference which may be of several types. If, for example, the selection and organisation of the teaching material is not well planned and the teaching technique employed is that of presenting items so that they contrast with each other, then errors of cross-association and analogy are likely.

(i) Cross-association

Cross-association is the mutual interference between partially learned items, each being affected by the other, especially if unreal contrasts are used to teach the language items. "Indeed grammarians establish the contrast stem x stem +-ed as part of the grammar of language and our school courses follow suit with "it is on the chair: it was on the table ....". (ibid: 139). This technique causes cross-association between the

11

uses of <u>is</u> and <u>was</u> and the learner uses one for the other.

One example from the Malaysians Teacher's Handbook for the first year will serve to illustrate this point further. The present perfect tense "is contrasted with the simple past tense .... (Have you seen "The Swordsman"? I saw it last night." (page 98)). In terms of input and output the result is likely to be:


```
                  - have seen                                - have seen
 ┌───────┐       - saw      ┌───────┐   ┌────────┐           - saw
 │ INPUT │ ───→ I           │ PUPIL │ → │ OUTPUT │ ───→ I  ŧ - have saw
 └───────┘                  └───────┘   └────────┘           ŧ - seen
```
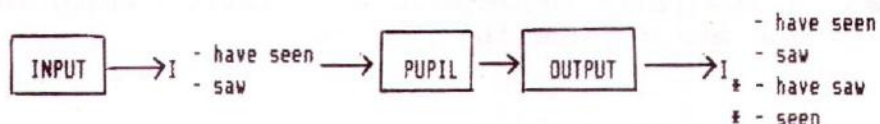
where ŧ = incorrect forms

(ii) <u>False Analogy</u>

Errors also occur because of false analogy. "Analogy enables a learner to predict that certain already perceived relations will be paralled by further relations. Often such predictions result in the production of wanted forms, sometimes in the production of unwanted forms." (George 1972: 143). Hence <u>shouted</u> and <u>watched</u> can lead to *<u>hitted</u> and *<u>maked</u>. These forms are a result of false analogy which in turn is a result of the pupil's past learning.

As R. V. White (1975) notes "One ... widely observed characteristic is the reduction of several forms of one form by the language learner. In other words variability is reduced to regularity

12

and this is usually accompanied by simplication of
the items concerned."

(iii) <u>Redundancy</u> <u>and</u> <u>Mother</u> <u>Tongue</u> <u>Influence</u>

       White continues, however, "One notable
feature of these reduced varieties of the target
language is the omission of redundant features in
the code."   (ibid 1975).   George suggests that
there is fifty percent redundancy in English in
that half the items may be omitted without
impairing communication.   "... shows that at least
50% of the information ... is redundant." (George
1972: 85).   Items which are not in the learner's
mother-tongue -- copulas, inflections, etc. -- tend
to be seen as redundant because the learner is
unable to attach any meaning to these forms as
he can to lexical items which have a dictionary
meaning.   If the mother-tongue does not have
tense inflections, "The beginner's mother-tongue,
being his previous learning experience may
promote or hinder the learning features of English
as they seem compatible or incompatible with
those of previous experience."   (ibid: 40).   This
point may be illustrated in the following examples
from Malay.

       (i)   Semelam   dia pergi ke pekan.

              Yesterday he   go   to town.   (Literal
              translation from the Malay).

       (ii)   Dia sedang   pergi ke pekan.

              He   continuous go   to town.

The only difference has been the addition of a
tense marker.   When this process is applied to
English, the learner tends to produce *"He <u>go</u> to
market" because he considers the other forms of

13

the verb <u>went</u> or <u>goes,</u> etc. as redundant due to mother-tongue interference. "... the inflections and the concepts behind them seem to convey redundant information." (ibid: 14). As a result they are omitted.

(iv) Overgeneralisation

This tendency is also seen in what Richards calls over-generalisation where the learner produces a deviant form based on his previous experience of other structures in the language. "over-generalisation is associated with redundancy reduction. It may occur ... with items which are contrasted ... but which do not carry significant and obvious contrast for the learner." (Richards 1974: 175). Thus the <u>-ed</u> marker in narrative appears to have little meaning for the Malay learner as the notion of pastness in Malay is usually indicated lexically in stories.

All of this means that the teacher has to employ strategies to give these forms their meaning so as to enable the pupils to understand their importance. "Such errors demonstrate the wisdom of focussing the learner's attention on the key grammatical features when presenting and practising such items. Failure to organize the language input in this way will produce stem-form English." (White 1975).

Diagram to show possible causes of Error

However, redundancy and interference are related and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As has been suggested, the interference of the mother-tongue of a Malay speaker is one cause for his perception of the redundancy of verb

14

inflections. The way redundancy and interference act and interact may be shown by the diagram below.

```
                    Difficulties leading to Errors


   ┌─────────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────────┐
   │ Areas of Redundancy │- - - - - -┐      │ Areas of Overlap     │
   └─────────────────────┘           ┆      │ One forms for several │
                                      ┆      │ functions. Several   │
                                      ┆      │ forms for one function│
                                      ┆      └──────────────────────┘
            │                         ┆                 │
        Subjected to                  ┆            Subjected to
            │                         ┆        ╱      │      ╲
            ▼                         ┆       ▼       ▼       ▼
  ┌──────┐┌────────┐┌──────────┐     ┆  ┌──────┐┌────────┐┌──────────┐
  │ Past ││Present ││Presen-   │     ┆  │ Past ││Present ││Presen-   │
  │Learn-││Learning││tation    │     ┆  │Learn-││Learn-  ││tation    │
  │ing   ││        ││Techniques│     ┆  │ing   ││ing     ││Techniques│
  └──────┘└────────┘└──────────┘     ┆  └──────┘└────────┘└──────────┘
        ╲    │    ╱                   ┆        ╲    │    ╱
         ▼   ▼   ▼                    ┆         ▼   ▼   ▼
  ┌────────────────────┐             ┆      ┌──────────────┐
  │Lack dof perception of│            ┆      │ Interference │
  │the significance of   │            ┆      └──────────────┘
  │the redundant forms   │            ┆             │
  └────────────────────┘             ┆             ▼
           │                          ┆      ┌──────────────────┐
           ▼                          ┆      │ Cross-association │
  ┌────────────────────┐ ◄──────────┄┆┄┄►   │ False-Analogy     │
  │Simplification       │             ┆      └──────────────────┘
  │Overgeneralisation   │             ┆             │
  └────────────────────┘                           ▼
           │                               ┌──────────────────────┐
           ▼                               │ Errors of omission,   │
  ┌────────────────────┐                   │ insertion and wrong form│
  │ Errors of Omission │                   └──────────────────────┘
  └────────────────────┘
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Input

From a consideration of the input and possible causes of error, it emerges that the pupils are taught the language items of the verb phrase in terms of simple present, present continuous, etc. and yet the results suggest that the pupils ar not aware of their formal relationships. The English verb system is an area of complexity and potential interference and unless the learner masters the basic concepts, subsequent learning of difficult items may be severely inhibited. "It is to be noted that the most frequently used forms are not complex verb groups but simple, one-word forms. ... They are also easier to learn." (George 1971). Hence a great deal of time and effort should be spent on teaching these simple forms. Once mastered, their scope may be enlarged to include other useful areas.

One of the main causes of error appears to be faulty input at the time of learning in which case the error may become "fossilized" (Selinker 1974: 36) and appear in the learner's writing. Such a situation involves a teaching strategy which will take into consideration the verb forms and their functions.

Orderliness of Input to assist Storage of Items

Though language is a system, prediction is not always possible due to the variety of sub-systems. Hence, the input materials should be organised so that successful predictions can be made. Accordingly, structure and vocabulary have

16

to be controlled so that a pattern can be established.

The usual practice of teaching the verb area with reference to tense, mood, aspect and voice makes the verb system complicated to the learner and memorisation of the verb in its various forms may not help the learner with their simple formal relationships. "As increasing numbers of memories are stored, it becomes increasingly difficult to retrieve any particular item." (George 1972: 67). George suggests that storage of information in patterns is more efficient than storage of the same information as a number of unrelated items. In support of this view there exists research evidence (Hunter 1957: 124) for storage and retrieval of items in a system being more efficient than the same items as unrelated units and that storage and retrieval of simple items is easier than complex ones. Hunter sums the point up well. "To say that a person relates material in a meaningful way is usually to say that the material is dealt with in terms of its distinctively important characteristics, and also that these are ... related to unambiguous ways which make them a part of a larger, systematically organized complex of learned material. Such meaningful ways of relating materials are clearly more effective than ways which stress incidental characteristics and relate them together in isolated ways which neither fit with previous experience nor facilitate subsequent learning of new material." (Hunter 1957: 317).

This point then concerns the orderliness of the input which is important for the effect on storage, for which the selection of items is based on several factors -- significance, ease of recall and regularity. "Present the material in ways which emphasize whatever characteristics are to be memorized and do so in a form as familiar as

17

possible to the learner." (ibid: 141). It seems economical therefore if the verb forms are organized in a scheme from which pupils learn their formal relationships and then the functions associated with them. For example, the formal relationships of items in a verb group could be taught in terms of the position rule outlined in errors of omission where the pupil is first taught the difference between finite and non-finite forms of the verb and later the formal relationships in the verb groups.

For example, a regular verb has four forms: <u>stem</u> (<u>walk</u>), <u>stem</u> + <u>s</u> (<u>walks</u>), <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed</u> (<u>walked</u>), <u>stem</u> _ <u>-ing</u> (<u>walking</u>). An irregular verb has five forms: <u>stem</u> (take), <u>stem</u> + <u>-ing</u> (taking), <u>stem</u> + <u>-s</u> (takes), <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed</u> (took), <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed/-en</u> (taken). The difference between <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed</u> (took) and <u>stem</u> + <u>ed/-en</u> (taken) can be established in terms of finite and non-finite forms which may be shown by the following example. In the sentences:

He falls	<u>falls</u>	is the finite <u>stem</u> + <u>-s</u>
He tell	<u>tell</u>	is the finite <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed</u> (past)
He has fallen	<u>fallen</u>	is the non-finite <u>stem</u> + <u>-ed/-en</u> (past participle)
He is falling	<u>falling</u>	is the non-finite <u>stem</u> + <u>-ing</u>
He will fall	<u>fall</u>	is the non-finite stem.

Three points emerge:

(i)   The <u>stem</u> ± <u>-s</u> form is always finite and the <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ing</u> form always non-finite.

(ii) In a regular verb the <u>stem</u> and <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed</u> forms can sometimes be finite and sometimes non-finite.

(iii) In an irregular verbs, the <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed</u> (past) form is always finite and <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed/-en</u> (past participle) always non-finite.

The finite-non-finite distinction is also useful for establishing tenses, tense being defined as a category of form and not as a category of time. English may be considered as having only two tenses. "After Kruisinga it is no longer radical to describe the English verbs as having two tenses." (George 1972: 108). However, a clear distinction must be made between tense and time. Tense refers to the verb form or series of verbs forms used to express a time relation and English verbs have two tenses; present and past. The context in which these verbs forms occur can have reference to future time and sometimes a time-marker such as next year, tomorrow, etc., is used, e.g. "He flies out tomorrow."

Form and Function

In terms of use McEldowney suggests that a language has four core functions -- instructions, description, narrative and process. "However, each finite form has a range of use, but certain finite forms tend to be associated with certain sentence patterns which enables four broad language functions to be established ...." (McEldowney 1976). Examining <u>stem</u> and <u>stem</u> ±-

19

s forms in different contexts it becomes clear that a use which is typical of these forms is description and that of <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed</u> is narration. The simple present has five main uses:

1. <u>Actual</u>   His tie matches his shirt.

2. <u>Neutral</u>   The sun sets in the west.

3. <u>Iterative</u>   He eats toast in the morning.

4. <u>Future</u>   He leaves tomorrow.

5. <u>Modal</u>   The thief insisted that I give him my wallet.

<u>Actual</u> refers to 'now', <u>neutral</u> to no particular time and <u>iterative</u> to habitual actions. These forms cluster together in a general context of description but according to George the <u>actual</u> is the most frequent of all and should be established first.

The <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed</u> forms show that a typical use of the simple past is narrative where a sequence of events is narrated in the order in which they occurred, e.g. "I went out, walked down the road and met my friend." By associating the simple past with narrative the teacher can establish an important and frequent use of the <u>stem</u> ± <u>-ed</u> form in its typical context. Once narration has been established, it can be the basis for teaching the other uses of the simple past viz: Actual, Neutral, Interactive, etc.

Once the concepts of simple present and simple past have been established it is relatively straightforward to move into the verb groups. The non-finite forms could be taught as lexical items rather than as part of the verb group. For

20

example, in "The crowd was standing" the non-finite verb form functions as a predicate in a similar way to <u>cold</u> in "The tea is <u>cold</u>." This also facilitates teaching the passive because the non-finite <u>-ed</u> forms can be tested as lexical items too. Thus in "The tin is <u>mined</u>" and "the seeds are <u>planted</u>" the non-finite <u>-ed</u> forms also behave as predicates. As previously shown in the section "errors of omission" a verb group can have up to five items and an explanation of the organisation of these items is useful because pupils can learn them according to the pattern fixed by the rules. However, this system does not indicate concord between subject and verb forms within a verb group. These points would require further discussion.

The Concept of Frequency

The concept of frequency has considerable relevance to a teaching course because it shows items that are most commonly used and can therefore help to determine the sequence of teaching items and the relative amount of time to be spent on a particular language item. It seems better to spend more time on high-frequency items as they are more useful. Too much time spent on low frequency items restricts the learner in the progress he makes. For example, the under-emphasis on the past tense in the task test, can be attributed to an under-emphasis on that tense in the syllabus. In Appendix II it is seen that thirty-eight units are cited for the verb forms and usages in the first year. The simple present appears in nine units but the present perfect and future tenses appear six and four times respectively. The simple past is rated on the same frequency as the present continuous with three units. Yet, if one uses the Hyderabad verb-form frequency count as a "measuring-stick"

21

it appears that the present perfect and future tenses are receiving an over-emphasis and the simple past tenses an under-emphasis, thus making for an imbalanced input. The Hyderabad count suggests the following figures for the various tenses.

Tense	Occurrence per 1000 verb-forms
Simple Present	208.4
Simple Past	274.9
Present Perfect	20.6
Past Perfect	6.0
Present Progressive (continuous)	7.8

Hence the emphasis should be on the simple tenses -- present and past and yet Appendix I shows they occur in less than a third of the units mentioned. Frequency counts can also indicate obligatory uses and areas of overlap. Where items overlap, they present learning problems. Hence it seems more profitable to teach the most useful one, as there will be a greater coverage of language in the time available. A further point about the syllabus is that, being a structural syllabus, it focuses attention on grammar to the detriment of 'use', thereby giving it a "low surrender value" because the students "... may learn the language for a very long time before they are actually able to use it for any communicative purposes." (Johnson 1978).

Motivation of the Pupils

This ties in with the next point that the biggest single problem cited by teachers was lack of motivation on the part of the pupils to learn English (Appendix 2). The students may not be as enthusiastic about English as the authorities are, but then Malay-medium pupils have no 'real' reason for learning English, the learning of which cannot be motivated by examinations because success in examinations in securing jobs, etc., does not depend on English.

Primary motivation should be used instead, i.e., motivation to learn English must come from the teaching material itself. Pupils should have the feeling that what they are learning is of immediate value to them and not that it will have value at some distant date. Learning English, even if the range is limited, should bring a present and not future reward. However, complex skills such as learning to write acceptably in a foreign language, take a long time to acquire, so the satisfaction to be derived from their accomplishment is a long way off from the early attempts. Hence the teacher has the task of providing intermediate satisfaction and so of maintaining motivation. Getting things right instead of getting them wrong is one sort of satisfaction for a learner, so the more a teacher excludes the possibility of error at the early stages, the better. If the learner is to be stimulated to make an effort to learn something new, he needs to be given a reason for learning the new item and such a reason must be more than a promise of future reward. What the learner needs is a sense of achievement at being able to do something new as a result of learning the new language item.

Effort After Meaning

If obligatory functions are to be taught first then they should be handled in suitable contexts. Thus the <u>stem</u> and <u>stem +-s</u> forms would appear in descriptive contexts and <u>stem +-ed</u> in narrative contexts. But contexts used for presenting or practising items should be real and provide an opportunity for learning. Hence the teacher should ensure that there are opportunities for the learner to expend effort after meaning (E.A.M). "Primary motivation is available in a learning situation as 'effort after meaning'." (George 1972: 64). Effort after meaning is a response to the challenge in a situation so that the learner is forced to make an effort to discover the meaning of an item. Items learned with effort are better learned. "... habits acquired with considerable effort are more resistant to extinction than habits acquired with little effort." (ibid: 66).

However, when an item is initially presented it may be received by the learner but not registered. Unless the item is repeated it disappears and is forgotten. Well spaced, meaningful repetitions are essential to make the associations formed significant. These should not be mere parrot-like repetitions which lead to little learning, but repetitions of effort after meaning. "It is not so much repetition which results in learning as repetition of effort." (ibid: 64). These should be meaningful and well-spaced.

For example, a teacher may present a new item in such a way that it becomes a challenge to the learner to make an effort after the meaning of the item. When an item is not quite established it can be incorporated into a puzzle or problem that poses a challenge to the learner to make an effort to solve it. In the search for clues the learner may have to re-read the item

24

several times, thus giving himself several chances to establish the item sub-consciously.

For example, this puzzle could be put to the class. "Mr. and Mrs. Grimes and their sons wanted to cross a river in a small boat which could carry 150 lbs. Mr. and Mrs. Grimes each weighed 150 lbs and their sons weighed 75 lbs each. They also had their dog with them. How did they all cross the river without swimming?"

The point is that the students imagine they are solving a puzzle but in fact they are practising verb forms e.g. stem +-ed.

Techniques of presentation of Language Items

Perhaps the greatest criticism of the syllabus lies in its presentation techniques. For this purpose the primary and secondary syllabus will be seen as an on-going continuum in that the presentation techniques of both are similar and there is also frequent back-reference to the primary syllabus. Thus in the second last unit (53) of the third year secondary syllabus there is the suggestion to re-examine unit 21. Unit 21 states "Make use of the material in Primary Handbook III for items ...". Accordingly, the two syllabuses will be treated as parts of a whole.

"... the realisation that structural ... methods of teaching do not produce the results claimed for," (White 1975) has been accompanied recently by a growing interest in what the learner contributes to the language learning process. It has become clear that learner's efforts are not random but conform to a pattern which reflects both the cognitive and developmental characteristics of the language acquisition process. It is felt that "far from indicating a weakness in

the learner ... learner's errors provide a guide to the ways in which language input (i.e. lesson input) is dealt with by the learner." (ibid 1975). A brief examination of our points of the presentation techniques indicates that the syllabus helps to create non-standard forms.

(a) Contrast

Frequently two items are presented together as a teaching device. It is contended that such a technique makes learning harder and not easier. For example, in item 16, the contrast between his and her is advocated by the following sequences.

(a) This is Ahmed.   (b) This is Piah.

He's a boy.   She's a girl.

Apart from the wanted forms, this process can also produce *He's is Ahmed, *This a boy, *He's a Ahmed. If (a) and (b) are combined, then one is likely to meet, through cross-association, forms such as This is Piah. *He's a girl, especially if the L1 does not distinguish male and female personal pronouns. "This distinction of gender does not generally exist in the native languages of S.S.E.S.M. speakers." (Tongue 1974: 118).

It is suggested, therefore, that only one item should be presented and that should be the most frequent one. The teacher can return to the second item when the first one is established.

26

(b)   <u>Language Needs of the Learner</u>

The syllabus also seems to include items which do not really meet a language need which the learners will appreciate. Thus for item 23 (Attributive adjective of colour), the sample lesson advises the teacher to display different colours, using the sequence:

This is a pencil.

It's a pencil.

This is a black pencil.

It's a black pencil.

Though adjectives are useful in providing a means of identifying objects in a group, there does not appear to be a need at this beginning stage to state the same thing in a different way. An alternative (It's a pencil) appears to have been used because it exists in the language and it seems methodical to include it at this point.

However, it also allows for errors of cross-association.

<u>INPUT</u>	<u>OUTPUT</u>
It's a pencil→	→ It's a pencil This is a black pencil.
Pupil	
This is a black pencil. →	→ *This a pencil. *It's a black pencil.

27
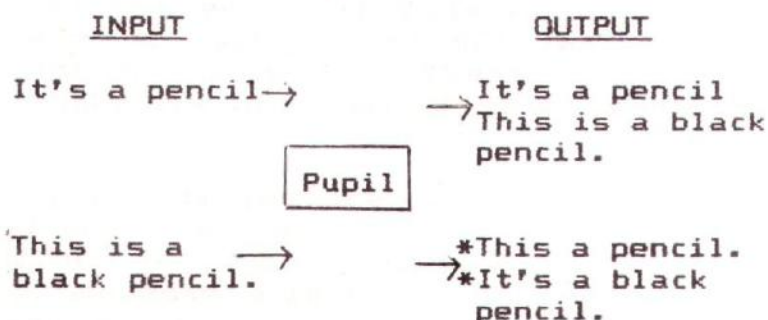
Later, in item 25, the following items are used as part of a sequence to teach "What colour is her ribbon?" The teacher has to say "Look at this. This is a ribbon. It is red." Here alone exists opportunities for cross-association.

INPUT

This is a
ribbon. $\longrightarrow$
$\longrightarrow$ This/It is a red ribbon.
This/It is red.

$\boxed{\text{Pupil}}$

It is red. $\rightarrow$
$\longrightarrow$ *This/It is red ribbon.
*This/It is a red.

(c)   Use of English

There are also occasions where it is doubted whether the language used represents the ordinary use of English. Thus the present continuous is presented in item 30 by advising the teacher to perform a series of actions and to describe what he is doing. Teacher does actions and says e.g. "I'm running." Later in the course (item 41) it is indicated that the teacher should contrast the presentation of 'now' in the above presentation with the use of the simple tense to represent everyday examples, e.g.

"(iii)   In this item, the only meaning taught is the use of the tense for habitual actions. (iv) In this item ... the simple present should be associated with phrases like "everyday ... etc."

28

From the learner's point of
view the distinction between the
two forms at this stage, is that
habitual acts are indicated by the
use of the simple form and events
concurrent with speech are
indicated by the progressive form.
Against this position, the
following points are to be made:

(i)   We do not describe what we are
        doing to people who see us doing
        it, unless we are demonstrating
        some process in which case the
        simple present or imperative is
        used.

        "This reflects the essential
        unnaturalness of the common
        procedures for teaching the use of
        the progressive form in English,
        whereby a teacher performs an
        action and describes it at the
        same time: 'I am opening the
        door, etc.' In fact a person is
        most unlikely ever to need to do
        this ... precisely because it
        conveys nothing that the hearer
        cannot see for himself."

                            (Wilkins 1974: 85)

(ii)   "Verb form counts at C.I.E. in
        Hyderabad, 1963 ... showed that
        when the reference is now," the
        simple present is used on 95% of
        occasions and the present
        progressive on only 5% of
        occasions."   (McEldowney 1972).
        In other words the forms used do
        not represent the ordinary use of
        English.

29

"What is wrong here is not the
form - but the situation. For the
teacher is demonstrating and
ought to use the simple form, but
he is pretending not to be
demonstrating but acting in a
'normal' non-demonstrating type of
situation.   The class-room
unfortunately creates a situation
(that of demonstration) in which
the progressive would not normally
be used, and, therefore cannot be
taught naturally ... in this case
the difference in the forms used
in the pretended situation and
those likely to be used in the
actual situation (in the class-
room) can only create confusion."

(Palmer 1965: 85)

(d)   Overlap

There is also the technique which
brings into close association two or more
items which are similar in form but different
in function or usage.   The prime example is
bringing into association verb forms which
normally occur in separate contexts and
differ in usage.   The learner who has to
carry out a conversion exercise from
'present to past' tense is confronted with
the problem of manipulating within the same
context two different verb forms each with
a quite different use as in unit 2 (4.1).
"Begin this passage with 'Last month'" (page
63).

"A favourite device used by many
teachers and books is to bring out the
contrast between the use of the present

30

progressive and present simple tenses by bringing them together in the same situations. It may be the fact that the same situation is being dealt with in examples of this kind that helps to confuse the student. There is always this possibility of confusion if two competing verb forms are used with reference to the same situation, if the two forms have not been firmly established before they are brought into competition."

(Bruton 1964)

The result is generally a muddling together of both forms and usage because the learner is unable to associate each form with the context in which it typically occurs.

Nonetheless item 41 "Simple Present (Habitual)" tells the teacher that "Since this tense is often confused with the present continuous, it should be taught and practised in contrast with the present continuous. The ample presentation juxtaposes "I'm cleaning my teeth" and "I clean my teeth" thereby inviting by cross-association, the incorrect forms of *I cleaning my teeth and *I am clean my teeth.

(e)   Out of Teaching Language items

The final point about the syllabus is that the teaching of certain items in a certain order tends to undermine the learning of previous items. Item 41 contains this sentence, "The '-s' in the third person singular causes a lot of trouble .... Pupils need to associate it not only with 'he', 'she' and 'it' but also with names and singular nouns. Yet in item 42, the teacher is

31

instructed to elicit statements in the simple present by questions, e.g. "Do you eat rice everyday?"

Within the same unit (42) on the next page, there appears the following technique for the presentation of the negative of the simple present:

John eats fish every day.

He doesn't eat meat everyday.

Still within the same unit but on the next page appear the question forms in the simple present e.g. "Does he ....?"

If it is difficult to establish 'John eats', a too early introduction of questions and negative statements provides opportunities for potential unteaching in that in sentences such as "He does not eat ...." or "Does he eat ....," the pupil experiences *'he eat' rather than 'he eats'. He perceives the -s as being redundant. "The principle which we can derive from this is that learning is more likely to be facilitated if formal features associated with different usages and functions are presented and practised in separate, distinctive and authentic contexts." (White 1975).

The syllabus, with its structural progression and its presentation techniques outlined above, tends to initiate interference and redundancy. Here there seems to be a need for minimizing the effects of interference and redundancy.

The tendency to reduce and simplify as a means of diminishing the learning load is

32

promoted by the presentation techniques which brings into close association two or more items similar in form but different in function. An item should hence be selected because it has a certain function to perform, distinguishable from others and not because a grammatical description of it exists. Where an item has more than one function, then only one (the most frequent or useful) should be established at any one time. Contrasting items which are similar tend to lead to cross-association and therefore such similar items should be separated. When one has been firmly established, then the other may be introduced. Questions and negatives should be delayed and taught as systems in their own right, rather than as transformations.

Some Considerations for Syllabus Design and Teaching of Language Items

My final point is to list some questions posed by McEldowney (1972) which might be considered before introducing a new item to be taught.

(i)   Does this represent the ordinary use of the English language?

(ii)   Does presentation of this item now, meet a language need which learners will appreciate, or is it introduced only for grammatical reasons?

(iii)   When two or more items are listed together as one teaching point will presenting them together make language learning easier or harder?

33

(iv)   Will presentation of this item hinder later learning?

(v)   Will teaching this item undermine learning of previous items?

(vi)   Will the learner's previous language experience help, hinder or have no effect?

Summing up

As a final comment on a teaching strategy I would repeat that first the core area of verb usage should be established using some, at least, of the principles outlined above. Once the core area is established it is possible to extend the range of items by including non-finite forms and verb groups as well as the function of process which later item is important for the scientific types of English the pupils studying E.S.I. will later encounter. Questions as to the actual content and methods and techniques to be used, surely point to an area of future research into a teaching syllabus for the verb phrase.

The Form One English Syllabus

A Rough Synthesis of its Items into

Cognate Groups

Verb Forms and Usage

Tenses

Present Simple	–	intrans. verbs (+/- time/place phrase)	2a
		trans. verbs + noun phrase	2b
		interrogative and tags	2c
		negative	2f
		More practice/revision of above	6a
		to be + mid-position adv. + complement	8a
		other verbs + mid-position adverb (often, sometimes, never, always, usually)	8b
		for future reference (e.g. plans)	5d*
		+ still	17b
Present Continuous	–	for current action	5a
		for future reference	5b*
		+ still	17b

Past Simple	-	+/- time phrase	2d
		interrog & tags	2e
		neg	2f

| Past Continuous | - | in <u>when/while</u> time clause | 12b* |

Present Perfect	-	minus time phrase, in contrast to past simple	9a
		+ mid-position adverb (<u>ever</u>, <u>never</u>, <u>just</u>, <u>already</u>)	9b, 17a
		+ <u>yet</u>, <u>since</u>	17a
		+ <u>never</u>, in contrast to future tense	9c
		+ <u>for/since</u> time phrase	17c

| Present Perfect Continuous | - | + <u>for/since</u> time phrase | 17d |

Expressions of the Future	-	<u>will</u>	5c
		<u>going to</u> + infinite	5f
		present simple and continuous	5b*, 5d*

Other Verb Forms

Modal
Auxilliaries   –   must, have to   11a
                                needn't   11b
                                ought to, should   11c
                                above as part of main
                                clause + time clause
                                + time clause   11d

Imperative   –   Always/Never
                                + imperative   11c

Infinitive   –   after certain verbs
                                (eg. like, want,
                                used, agree)   7a
                                to show purpose   10d
                                (also see Compound
                                Sentences, E. 3)

Present
Participle   –   following before,
                                after, while   12a

37

RANK ORDER

Problems	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Lack of TESL training communicational syllabus and experience	4	1				1		
Other extra duties to do besides teaching English and preparation	1	2						
Workload in teaching English is high; corrections, etc.	1	1	1	1	1			
Pupils are too inhibited in speaking English	2	1			1			
Most students from Sabah know very little English		2						
Shortage of supplementary reading books, 'set' readers, ref. materials and aids		2	4	3				
Textbooks are too difficult for the brighter/weaker sets	2	1		1			1	
Lack of reinforcement outside the classroom or through other subjects				2				
Lack of motivation to learn English	5	1	3	2				
Lack of the English Language room		2						
Insufficient time for English teaching	1	1						
Environment of school is not conducive to learning English	1							
Insufficient guidance is given in the treatment of ER Programme			1					
Influence of mother tongue		1						

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PINTER'S *OLD TIMES*
AT THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

by

E. N. Dorall

MACLALS's presentation of Harold Pinter's *Old Times* at the University of Malaya Experimental Theatre for three nights in June was a quiet, happy event. Widely advertized by its producer Goh Bee Chen -- on TV, in all the English-language newspapers, and on posters everywhere -- the play attracted sizeable, attentive audiences who, though they were baffled by the usual Pinter puzzles, were eager to solve them and, above all, to enjoy what they could understand.

Old Times (1971) begins a third phase in Pinter's plays. Absent are the violent dialogue and action of early plays like *The Birthday Party* as well as the complex characters and exciting themes of the second-phase plays, *The Homecoming* (his masterpiece), *Landscape*, and *Silence*. For nearly an hour and a half three characters talk, hardly touching each other, rarely raising their voices, and from the start we are aware that the theme is the usual Pinter one, in this case the struggle for possession of a woman between her husband and her best friend.

The highlight of the play, and of Pinter's other third-phase plays, *No Man's Land* (1975) and *Betrayal* (1978), is its dialogue. This was always Pinter's strong point. But now the lines have a new beauty and richness; their rhythms are almost musical, the phrases melodious. The

41

challenge for the actor and actresses is not only
to speak the lines in character but also to
"perform" them as parts for instruments in a
chamber work. For this is what *Old Times* is,
essentially: a Trio for One Male and Two Female
Voices, in which every sentence, every word, has
its ideal volume, duration, and pitch, and even
the many pauses are part of the rhythm and must
be correctly timed, as in the music of Beethoven
and Bruckner. A formidable challenge for any
performer! Kenneth Haig's comment on playing a
role in an early Pinter play: "The thing is,
Harold's plays take such bloody concentration"
applies just as much to the simpler, civilized, but,
in their upper class way, equally vicious and
funny characters of *Old Times*.

Chamkaur Singh Gill's production began
shakily. The idea of having the opening lines
spoken in total darkness was a gimmick that did
not consider the audience's instinctive reaction.
Instead of listening to Pinter, we wondered if the
lights had failed. When they did come up, there
was a further distraction. Pinter has the outsider
Anna standing in dim light at the window, looking
out, and therefore with her back to Deeley and
Kate: she is physically absent, but present as the
topic of their conversation. To have her outside
the room in darkness and then to light her up
intermittently was very irritating. Every time she
appeared we wondered why, and turned away from
the others, and the play. But even if we had
been totally attentive throughout, that opening
scene was still wrong. Deeley and Kate were
conversing, slowly but, definitely, talking <u>to</u> each
other. Pinter, however, has so many pauses that
it is clear he intends Kate to give the impression
that she does not want to talk to Deeley, that
she is putting him off. An umpteenth example of
Pinter's "non-communicating" conversation.

42

The rest of the play was taken at a slightly faster tempo than Pinter indicates, a fault common to young players and first-time actors of Pinter's plays. But it was no longer distracting. Instead, it is a pleasure to commend all three performers, Susan Philip (Anna), Chacko Vadaketh (Deeley), and Carol Gnanu (Kate), for their perfect diction and a considerable understanding of their roles. Chamkaur's decision to change the lighting whenever Kate and Anna talked about their shared past, thus leaving Deeley rejected and isolated, worked this time, and helped the audience to understand the play just a bit more.

But no actors, however much they try, can solve the play's central problems. Deeley and Anna are competitors for Kate from the beginning. But how do they fight each other? At one point Anna says, "There are some things one remembers even though they may never have happened. There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place." If this indicates a major technique of the play, then Anna and Deeley invent stories about each other in which the victim, whose character is known, is placed in embarrassing situations. So Anna invents Deeley crying in the room she shared with Kate, knowing he feels inadequate with her; Deeley in turn invents Anna as the belle of the pub and the seductress of the Westbourne Grove party, knowing that Anna knows she is unattractive to men. Knowing each other's weakness, each destroys the other by revealing this weakness in a fictitious situation.

This is one interpretation of *Old Times*. Another, the one chosen by Chamkaur, is indicated in the programme to his production: "As they recall their past, they discover that

43

Anna and Deeley have met before -- and at the expense of Kate's affections...." The play is, in fact, another *Odd Man Out*, the film all three saw at one time or another. At first Anna is out, and Deeley and Kate, albeit uneasily, together. Then Anna and Kate unite to exclude Deeley. Finally, at the beginning of Act Two, Deeley and Anna are together (or, rather, were together) without Kate's knowledge, and Chamkaur has her as the odd one out standing visibly outside the room; in Pinter's text she is, fortunately invisible, having a shower, her presence indicated only by a faint glow from the glass panel in the bathroom door.

But whichever solution is chosen, the lines never allow the actors to reveal it clearly. The text remains stubbornly uncommunicating. We know clearly <u>what</u> happened except <u>whether</u> it happened. The audience must, finally, make up its own mind. Only it does seem clear at the end that both Anna and Deeley have "played" with Kate, considering her as a prize, to be petted and won, and not as an adult in a full, mature relationship. And so, both have to be rejected by her, Anna forever (she lies symbolically dead), though the way does seem open for Deeley to return (he sits, crumpled, in a chair).

Susan Philip in the most straightforward of the roles was a perfect, gushing Anna. Chako Vadaketh spoke too fast and was made to move about unnecessarily, but had so much stage presence that his Deeley came across totally as the awkward, nervous character Pinter intended. Carol Gnanu as Kate had the hardest task of the evening, to act through her many silences. A more steely expression would have helped, and in her final outburst a heavy, less personal tone would have been more effective than the normal range of rhythms and emotions. But throughout

there was an ample detachment, a tension built up
from waiting in vain for a moment of "epiphany,"
that made this outburst the high point of the
play.   And, to compensate for the uneasy opening
scene, the final movements were perfectly timed,
a veritable silent adagio of Mahlerian proportions
and intensity.

   Old Times does not offer us great
revelations about the human condition.   No one
will come away shattered by the experience of
seeing it.   But there can be the very real
satisfaction of hearing impeccable verbal music
composed by a master craftsman and interpreted
by accomplished players.   MACLALS's production
went a considerable way to providing us with this
rare pleasure.

P O R T R A I T S

by

Leonard Jeyam

IN MEMORY OF CHIN THIAN SEE

When I told them of your going

It was as if they were lost for feeling

As they stared disbelieving me,

The bearer of ill news –

Death strangely affects all of us, the living.

You should have seen it on our faces

Especially when we never thought it possible

For one amongst us,

Especially when we had just

Seen you smiling a few days ago.

But then it is we who are disturbed

With thoughts of departing:

You need not worry,

You silently have already.

PORTRAIT XI: e. e. cummings

treat him

your new arrival

                    kindly

because he who never grew up

       can paint you pictures

       write

       and sing you songs

Mister Death

Now

      you have Two blueeyed boys

        to help you while your

           silent days away

         (before the next one comes

  along

SUNFLOWERS

Yellow is the colour of the Sun

Who is the colour of creation.

Hurry Vincent,

Your blooms are dropping;

Paint us yellow

Because I love your colour too.

GRACE ROZARIO (1898-1976)

Now at the ripe old age of seventy-seven,
The fruit has grown old;
But at this age you will know
That life isn't just living from day to day.
If it is loving in a simple way,
You'll discover that life has Life,
And if treated well,
It'll be like the full blossom of a flower:
Before dying, its seeds will be budding
With a new-found meaning;
But now the fruit has grown old,
And has to drop to leave this world.

Dear world,
If I were never to see you again,
It would not matter; you see,
I've had more than my share of Life.
Now it's my turn,
Now it's time for my soul
To move all the way up to heaven
To meet a gracious God.

OF BROTHER FELIX

There is something different

in him, as we bow

and follow his every whim,

and understand

the aura surrounding him

is a gracefulness from within.

THE USE OF ORATURE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POETRY*

by

Rotimi Johnson

Orature has generated a lot of renewed interest among scholars in societies which have a relatively short history of written transmission of culture and in which the majority of the populace live by oral traditions or are greatly influenced by them. This is largely because written transmission of culture is not as effective as oral transmission of culture in terms of its outreach and effectual communication of ideas and where written transmission of culture is perceived in terms of national development there is a tendency to use features of orature as a vehicle which conveys idea rapidly within the communication process of written transmission of ideas in societies which are largely governed by the influence of oral traditions irrespective of the level of literary in such societies where comprehension is enhanced among the literates by the influence of oral traditions.

Orature lends itself to several definitions though there is an underlining unity of meaning resulting from this plethora of definitional attempts which are motivated primarily by the need to give precision to its meaning in the light of its growing importance and secondarily by the

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necessity of avoiding the contradictions embedded in the term "oral literature". Xitu has characterized orature as "that kind of culture expressed even today by peasants or those of peasant origin among African populations,[1] Levine succinctly describes it as "orally transmitted expressive culture[2] while Olatunji suggestively depicts it as culture "which has shown continuities of the oral in the written form".[3] Xitu identifies the origin of orature, Levine emphasizes its expressiveness while Olatunji underlines the link between oral and written forms of culture. Individually they offer a particularized view of orature while collectively they offer an insightful view of orature. This leads to the proposal of a more comprehensive generalized view: orature is orally transmitted culture which has its origins in the traditions of the generality of the people or the masses of rural dwellers in non-urbanized societies and which has shown continuities of the oral in the written form even when the language of communication changes.

The diversity and extensiveness of orature are reflected in some of the studies carried out by diverse scholars on some aspects of orature: Lawrence Levine has written intensively on Afro-American orature.[4] Olatunji has written extensively on Nigerian orature[5]; Xitu has presented a graphic descriptive of Angolan orature[6]; Yai has attempted to define the poetics of orature[7] while Femi Osofisan has explored the development of African creative writing through orature.[8] Osofisan's essay is of direct relevance[9] and significance to this study, for it fails within the framework of the theory of creative writing which necessarily precedes the study of the practical manifestations of the theory. This study is therefore an examination of the realities that

have emerged from the possibilities suggested by Osofisan.

The identification of some of the major features of orature is indispensable to a thorough understanding of its use in contemporary African poetry and only those features which have direct bearings on poetry will serve as good analytical tools. Some of the most commonly used features of orature are proverbs, songs, local imagery or local referential events, refrain or chorus, local expressions whose meaning and significance are best captured untranslated, imagery of local flora and fauna, imagery of Nature, riddles, verbal game of abuse, prayer, folktales, myths, folkheroes, folk beliefs or thoughts, didacticism, symbolic tables about animals, stories about contemporary issues, chronicles of the tribe or nation, incantation, praise-singing and traditional role-playing.[10] These features of orature are used in varying degrees in contemporary African poetry. While some are commonly used by poets who have had recourse to this form of artistic expression, others have become the stylistic hallmark of poets who have particularized the use of these features of orature. The increasing use of orature in contemporary African poetry raises some questions about the rationale behind this trend. It is basically a reaction against obscurantism in African poetry (in European languages) which was initially imitative of Euro-American literary traditions. It therefore seeks to particularize African poetry through oral aesthetics and utilitarianism; give an original character to African poetry; produce populist poetry; awaken true national consciousness; narrow the artistic communication gap between the elites and the masses; create avenues for widespread didacticism and entertainment: evolve African idioms in European languages; create a universal culture

53

through poetry; project the people's culture; and familiarize the bourgeoisie with the mode of existence and thoughts of farmers and workers.

The most outstanding practitioners of this form of poetic expression in Africa are Okot P'Bitek, Bernard Dadie, Christopher Okigbo (in "Path of Thunder"), Kofi Awoonor, Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan (as Okinba Launko). The analysis in this study will be largely informed by the poetic works of Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan who are representative of the new generation of African poets. However, references will be made to other poets when the occasion demands it and in order to enrich the analysis. Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices* "manifests several features of orature. The whole collection is presented as direct communication between the poet and a live audience in the manner the traditional griot, village bard, town-crier or story-teller relates to his audience. The opening lines of the first poem in the collection titled "I Wake up this Morning" go thus:

> I wake up this morning
> With a song in my throat
> a youthful breeze harps the leaves
> rising feet drum the road
> to meet the upland sun
> my sole threads the dew
> rousing my body
> to the virgin cool of earth
>
> (p. 1)

The confidence and enthusiasm which the poet evinces are characteristic of the presentational method and the nature of such introductory poems. The same kind of confidence and enthusiasm informs Osofisan's introductory poem "Awakening"[12] which goes thus:

Rise,
                    Take your dream to the end
                    of the street
                    Then stretch the street
                    Take it to the end of your dream
                                            (p. 2)

What is striking is the suggestion that the
professional activities of the poet begin in the
morning and significantly in both poems the
activities end in the evening or at night. The
last poem in Osundare's collection "I Rise Now"
reads in part:

                    I rise now
                    for it is time to go
                    The journeying sun
                    is disappearing behind the trees
                    the baobab's shadow sprawls
                    in the market square

                                            (p. 71)

The persona in Osundare's poetry is obviously
sedentary as he rises at evening fall to return
home unlike the persona in Osfisan's collection
who is an itinerant poet whose activities end at
nightfall:

                    Night never grows old
                    until morning:
                    night never grows old
                    in the daylight, dreams of
                    the night yawn
                    and come to flower:
                    night ages in the shroud
                    of morning.

                                            (p. 71)

The architectural orderliness of both collections
from the beginning to the end and the cyclical

nature[13] of the poetic activities of the personae from morning to evening or night only to recommence the following morning are indicative of the professional activities of the poet within the frame of reference of oral traditions. Thus, stylistically, both collections have been largely influenced by oral traditional methods.

Osundare's "A Dialogue of Drums" contains both elements of praise -- singing and abuse. Firstly, he says:

> When I raise my voice
> The world will be my chorus
> I, owner of the throat for
> pleasing songs,
> And hands sculptured
> For the talkative face of the drum
> (p. 5)

and conversely he asserts:

> But there are some people I know
> whose hippo hands slap the drum
> like a slab of flabby flesh
> Flogging mere noise from
> its tuneful belly.
> (p. 5)

This juxtaposition of praise -- singing and abuse serves as an introduction to the contents of the collection, for the next poem "Not in My Season of Songs" is predominantly a poem of abuse though it chronicles the events in the village with its reference to the white District Officer, the tax collector, produce buyer, cocoa, bribes and sanitary inspector. On the contrary, the persona in *Minted Coins* after his awakening embarks on some initiation rites which are circumscribed by prayer and blessings. These are professional rites

56

he must perform within oral traditions.   In "Prayer, he prays for professional success:

> Then the first prayers:
> Call his name
> the priest is waiting ...
>
> Swollen like a poet
> surrendered to his muse
> prayers descend
> into loins of history:
>
> Let his name be the season's
> first rain, flush of joy
> call: Okinba, let my name be well
>   (p. 4)

In 'Blessings', the persona receives blessings as an insurance against death, disease and the evil machinations of enemies:

> Ase !
> the shaft of death
> will not pierce you here
>
> Ase !
> disease will not
> misuse you
> nor will *Aisan*
>
> throw you down:
> your enemies will not stretch
> your hands: but if they do
> their hands will not reach you.
>   (p. 5)

The use of local expressions is evident in both "Blessings" and "A Dialogue of Drums" and in both cases the local words give deeper meaning and authenticity to the events.   The qualities and

functions of the different drums are inherent in their local names while the forcefulness of the triumph of blessings over illness, diseases and evil-doers inheres in the word "Ase".

Many of the poems in *Village Voices* are didactic; they chronicle the events that occur in the society and affect the lives of the villagers. Such poems usually end with proverbs which brand the message deeply in the minds of the audience. "Killing Without a Sword" ends thus: "There are many ways of killing without a sword". In "Akintunde Come Home", the persona concludes that "though a man's penis is small/ he will not borrow a bigger one/ to fill up his wife's nagging mouth"; and in "The Pillar is Fallen" the persona declares: "Better to leave now/ With some food in the stomach/ Than face an empty evening/ In the company of begging bowls". Perhaps the most representative of such poems is "Chicken Story" which is also significant because of its use of animal imagery and symbolism. The poem will be quoted in full because of its contribution to one's understanding of orature:

Who does the chicken think
it is deceiving?
It eats pebbles
and swallows sands
 Yet complains of toothlessness
the goat which has teeth
the dog which fortifies its mouth
with he strongest of ivory
dare they eat pebbles in the morning
and still walk about at noon?
Let the ear sift
what the mouth says
the mills inside all men
do not grind with equal force.
(p. 14)

Minted Coins is characterized by a predominant use of untranslated refrain or songs, imagery of nature and animal imagery. Poems such as "Blood Season", "For Thompson and Irabor" and "The Departed" contain the refrain of songs or songs in Yoruba. The fact that these songs are untranslated indicate that the poems are best appreciated by a live audience. Olokun(2) is archetypical of poems replete with the imagery of nature: harmattan, thunder, winds, hawks, flowers, season, leaves, rain and the River goddess. Man is closest to nature in a rural setting and since the majority of the people in the persona's society are rural dwellers, the poet is therefore seeking to communicate with a wide target-audience. The room that best exemplifies the use of animal imagery and symbolism in *Minted Coins* is "So I Went Seeking" which sees human society as a forest peopled by all sorts of animals with different characteristics and peculiarities: the lion is callous, the elephant is wicked, the antelope is impatient, the peacock is proud and the tortoise is cunning. The symbolic interpretation of this poem shows that man is basically alone in the world and his salvation often depends on the strength of visions and efforts.

The dominant features of orature used in *Village Voices* are didacticism and proverbs while the dominant ones found in *Minted Coins* are animal imagery and symbolism as well as songs and the imagery of nature. Underlining both collections is the use of simple language with idioms that particularize it as African poetic expression in English. The stylistic differences between the two collections result from the pre-dominance of certain features of orature in each of them as well as the formalist organization or architectural orderliness that informs the poems

though they have all been creatively constructed within the basic framework of oral traditions. Thus the poets still retain their originality and individuality in spite of the common background of oral traditions from which their poetic works emerge. The two collections explore the depth of human existence in the society through a multi-faceted presentation of the joys, sorrows and problems of life and living. While Osundare's vision in *Village Voices* proceeds from rural life and thoughts symbolized by drums, Osofisan's vision in *Minted coins* is essentially cosmopolitan though it has strong taproots in a rural setting and hence the universality that is easily associated with it.

Niyi Osundare and Femi Osofisan are the most prominent and most consistent of those new contemporary African poets who have wholly incorporated orature in their poetic works but there are others who have made serious attempts to give "a more meaningful, dynamic and original character" to contemporary African poetry through the use of orature. Apart from Okot P'Bitek whose pioneering and archetypical poetic work, *Song of Lawino* is a classic, others like Kofi Awoonor, Christopher Okigbo (Path of Thunder), Kofi Anyidoho and Veronique Tadjo have also had recourse to orature in their poetry. In his most representative poem, "Hurrah for Thunder",[14] Okigbo makes use of animal imagery, symbolism, proverbs, nature and prophecy in a significant contribution to contemporary African poetry. His references to 'thunder', 'jungle', 'trees', 'grass', 'pumpkins' and the 'earth' show his pre-occupation with nature while his reference to "the elephant" which is the dominant image in the poem reflects the significance of animal imagery in his poetic consciousness. The animal imagery is situated within a grand complex of

symbolism which is graphically captured in the
following lines:

> "The elephant, tetrarch of the
> jungle:
> with a wave of the hand
> He could pull four trees to the
> ground;
> His four mortar logs pounded
> the earth:
> Wherever they treaded,
> The grass was forbidden to
> be there:

(p. 67)

The elephant symbolises a powerful tyrannical
ruler who terrorises his subjects. African
thoughts are reflected in the proverbial
statements used in the poem and they convey
forcefully the message of the poet to his target-
- audience:

> The eye that looks down will
> surely see the nose
> The finger that fits should
> be used to pick the nose

(p. 67)

These lines reflect the African sense of order,
justice, co-operation, functionality and
effectiveness. The reference to the town-crier is
an indication of the traditional role Okigbo
ascribes to himself: he sees the poet as a town-
crier, an itinerant information cum education
officer. Perhaps the most significant of all these
features is prophecy. "Hurrah for Thunder" itself
is a poem under this section *Path of Thunder*
which is sub-titled "Poems Prophesying War".
This shows the importance of prophecy in the
consciousness of the poet but the significance of

prophecy in contemporary African poetry transcends this poetic awareness.[15] The concluding couplet of "Hurrah for Thunder" is pathetically prophetic of the poet's death:[16]

> If I don't learn to shut my
> mouth I'll soon go to hell
> I, Okigbo, town-crier,
> together with my iron-bell.
>
> (p. 67)

He died during the war he prophesied.

Kofi Awoonor (George Awoonor-Williams) is best known for his traditional dirges, invocation of ancestral spirits and his use of African idioms in English. One of his best known poems is "Songs of Sorrow"[17] which as the title suggests is a dirge. In this poem, he refers to the traditional god "Dzogbese Lisa" and his ancestors Agosu, Nyidevu, Kpeti and Kove as sources of influence on the persona's fortunes or misfortunes in life. The imagery is local and it reflects traditional thoughts which are best captured in the following lines:

> Agosu,if you go tell them
> Tell Nyidevu, Kpeti and Kove
> That they have done us evil;
> Tell them their house is falling
> And the trees in the fence
> Have been eaten by termites;
> That the martels curse them.
> Ask them why they idle there
> While we suffer, and eat sand.
>
> (p. 75)

The intimacy noticed in this poem is given an impetus as a feature of oral traditions in most of Veronique Tadjo's[18] poems which have an aura of

confidentially and gives her poetry a personal touch. The opening lines of many of her poems suggest intimacy between the poet and her interlocutors, a suggestion of the presence of a live audience: 'sing to me', 'slip on my finger' and 'Tell me'. The force of this intimacy and confidentiality is best captured in 'Sing to me'.[19]

Sing to me
the history
of the labourer
his burning sweat
and the over-heated land
Speak to me
about the heavy-breasted woman
with a calabash-stomach
in the burning furnace
of a night without a morrow
show me
closed books
taut hands
blocked hopes
in the dark oblivion
of an over-decorated town.

The poem is self-explanatory, the images are clear and the intimacy is emphasized.

Kofi Anyidoho embraces African idioms and prophecy in his poetry though his use of prophecy is not as striking as Okigbo's. In "Blood Harvest",[20] he comments prophetically on contemporary issues thus:

Those who have nothing but guns
for the hungry
and think of nothing but
death and dying
Let them spend our earth's fortune
harvesting blood from fields of war

The last banquet shall be their
        children's children's blood.

The prophecy may be obvious but the emphasis is
on the need to prevent self-destruction.
Anyidoho's use of African idioms in English ia
particularly striking in "Sound and Silence"²1
where he asserts:

        Because because I do not scream
        You do not know how bad I hurt
        Because because I do not kiss
        on public squares
        You may not know how much I love.

        This expository analysis has shown the
diversity of the use of orature in contemporary
African poetry. It has also shown that there has
been a gradual transformation of the nature of
contemporary African poetry not merely in terms
of its thematic pre-occupations which necessarily
change with events and situations but
significantly in terms of the stylistic devices
adopted for its creative construction. The
increasing influence of orature is noticeable in
many of the new poetic works from the continent
but the extent of their dependence on orature
varies in accordance with the predilection of the
poets. The use of orature in the representative
poems analysed shows that the use of African
idioms flavoured by proverbs and African thoughts
is the most common feature of orature found in
the poems and this is because the use of language
-- even if it is European -- is still the easiest
means of identifying African poetry and making it
authentic in terms of the poet's communication
with his target-audience. It is along this line of
communication and identify that a new direction
of poetic development is envisaged in
contemporary African literature in terms of

language and thematic pre-occupations which should become increasingly relevant to the majority of the poet's target-audience.

NOTES

[1]Uanhenga Xitu et al. "The Use of Oral Traditions in Literature of Portuguese Expression" in Donald Burness (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Lusophone African Literature*, Washington, Three Continents Press, 1981, pp. 45-48.

[2]Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, New York, O.U.P., 1977, p. ix.

[3]Olantunde Olatunji, *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry*, Ibadan, U.P.L., 1984, p. 3.

[4]Lawrence Levine, op. cit.

[5]Olantunde Olatunji, op. cit.

[6]Olabiyi Yai, "Towards A New Poetics of Oral Poetry in Africa" in *Ife*: Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies: University of Ife, No. 1., 1986, pp. 40-55.

[7]Uanhenga Xitu et. al, op. cit.

[8]Femi Osofisan, "Oral Literature and the Possibilities of Modern Poetry", Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan.

9Femi Osofisan's hypothesis has been actualized in his first collection of poems *Minted Coins* which will be subjected to detailed analysis in the course of this study.

[10]These features of orature are not peculiar to Africa. See Rotimi Johnson, "From Oral Tradition to the Written Word: The Evolution of Literature in African and Afro-American Culture", paper presented at the 21st Annual NESA Conference, December, 1986.

[11]Niyi Osundare, *Village Voice*, Ibadan, Evans, 1984. All references are to this edition.

[12]Okinba Launko (Femi Osofisan), *Minted Coins*, Ibadan, Heinemann, 1987, p. 2.

[13]For a detailed and particularized study of architectural orderliness and the cyclical nature of life see Rotimi Johnson, "Revolutionary Consciousness and Committment in Osofisan's *Minted Coins*", a memorial essay in honour of Kolawole Ogungbesan, Dept. of English, A.B. U. Zaria, 1989.

[14]See Christopher Okigbo, *Labyrinths*, London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 67.

[15]See Rotimi Johnson, 'Poetry as Prophecy' in *Contemporary African Poetry*, Lagos, Dominion, 1989 (forthcoming).

[16]Okigbo died at Akwebe near Nsukka during the Nigerian Civil War in August, 1967.

[17]Kofi Awoonor (George Awoonor-Williams) "Songs of Sorrow" in D. Nwoga (Ed.), *West African Verse*, Ikeja, Longman, 1967, pp. 73-75.

[18]Veronique Tadjo is an award-winning poet from the Ivory Coast. She has published a volume of poems *Laterite* (Paris, Hatier, 1984).

[19]This is my translation of the poem from the French.

[20]Kofi Anyidoho, *Earthchild*, Accra, Woeli Publishing Services, 1985.

[21]Ibid.

UPM TESL MATRICULATION STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSES TO THE LITERATURE COURSES

by

Rosli Talif and Malachi Edwin

Background to the Study

The importance of Literature as a subject and as a component in the ESL classroom is becoming more apparent in the Malaysian education scene. In relation to this, the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) TESL Matriculation program includes a Literature component which comprises five literature courses. The two-year matriculation program was started in the July semester 1987.

There are five literature courses in the program which are offered in four consecutive semesters. They are MT 033 Introduction to Literature, MT 039 Introduction to Short Stories, MT 044 Introduction to Novels, MT 047 Introduction to Drama and MT 048 Introduction to Poetry.

The primary aim of the literature courses is to provide students a pleasurable and an enriching experience in the study of literature. The courses are also designed to instill confidence in the students and to encourage the expression of their opinions and criticisms. As such, these courses which are student-oriented involve group discussion, drama activities and simulations.

Below is a description of the course synopsis

for the literature courses in this program.

Introduction to Literature (MT 033)

This course serves as an introductory course to the other literature courses. The literary elements in the various genres and writing styles are introduced. A general survey of the classical and the contemporary writers is also carried out. It is also aimed at simulating critical thinking on the various aspects of literary writing such as, theme, character, plot and setting.

Introduction to Short Stories (MT 039)

The prime aim of this course is to promote intensive reading and also the development of critical and appreciation skills through a detailed investigation on the nature of fiction in short stories. Selected works of renowned American, British and Malaysian writers are considered in this course.

Introduction to Novels (MT 044)

This course aims at encouraging critical thinking in addition to the enjoyment of reading novels. The emphasis of this course, however, is on the study of language and style in relation to characterization and themes in the novels besides developing the awareness and the appreciation of the different writing styles of the authors. A variety of novels from the British, the American and the African writers is considered in this course.

70

Introduction to Drama (MT 047)

This course provides an overview of the conventions and the different types of drama Literary terms associated with drama and the plays of Shakespeare and contemporary dramatists are studied. There are also attempts in dramatizing certain scenes of the play; however, these activities are limited to classroom presentation and not a large scale production for an audience.

Introduction to Poetry (MT 048)

This course provides an opportunity for the study of literary devices, themes, dramatic situations and dramatic movements in poems. It also emphasizes the development of intellectual judgement and the exploration of emotional response.

The respondents for this study have been introduced to the works of American, British, African and Malaysian writers. These writers include: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Katherine Ann Porter, William Faulkner, Edgar Allan Poe, Gregory Corso, Carl Sandburg, Anne Sexton, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Mark Twain, Robert Frost, Stephen Crane, Emily Dickinson, Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller, Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Ben Johnson, John Donne, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Ted Hughes, T. S. Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, Wilfred Owen, William Wordsworth, William Blake, S. T. Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Joseph Conrad, Terrance Rattigan, Chinua Achebe, J. P. Clark, Jared Angira, Lenrie Peters, Muhammad Hj Salleh,

71

Fadzilah Amin, K. S. Maniam, Lee Kok Liang and Ee Tiang Hong.

The other courses which are offered in the program are related to the study of grammar, study skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Purpose of the Study

This study sets out to investigate the expectations of students before they register for these courses and their response to these courses after they have completed them.

The Sample

The sample of this study comprised one hundred and eighteen fourth semester (final year) TESL Matriculation students in UPM. These students had obtained distinctions for the English language paper in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination which is conducted at the end of the fifth year of Secondary School education in Malaysia. Most of these students had also obtained a distinction or credit pass for the English language paper in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination. The majority of these students were in the science stream and had not enrolled in any literature courses during the upper secondary education.

The respondents had undergone the five literature courses and completed their study for the TESL Matriculation program. These students would be admitted into the Bachelor of Education

(TESL) program in the July semester of 1989 if they met the requirements of the program.

All the students were involved in responding to the questionnaire but only twenty-eight of these students (24%) participated in the interview.

Methodology

Two research instruments were used to obtain data in this study. The first was a two-section questionnaire. The first section consisted of fifteen statements or reasons for studying Literature. For each of these statements or reasons, students were asked to indicate if it was an important or a minor consideration or not an important reason for studying literature. In the second section, students were given a statement and were asked to respond to it regarding the choice of studying literature. The students were given twenty minutes to respond to the questionnaire in class.

The second instrument was an interview. Twenty-eight students (24 percent of the sample) were selected at random for this purpose. The interview was conducted in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. It was geared mainly to getting information on the students' expectations of the literature courses and their responses to the literature courses they had undergone. The interviews were held at the researchers' offices. The respondents were asked seven questions regarding their expectations and responses to the Literature courses which were offered to them. Each student took an average of fifteen minutes to express views on the questions asked.

73

Analysis of Data

Below is the data from the first instrument for this study, the questionnaire which was given to all the 118 fourth semester students of the UPM TESL Matriculation program. The table below presents the breakdown of the students' responses to each question.

Table 1

Reasons for Studying Literature

Section I : What would be your reasons for studying Literature?

	Important	A Minor Consideration	Not Important
	%	%	%
a. I enjoy reading.	73	25	1
b. I enjoy class discussion.	63	34	2
c. I think I might gain a worthwhile qualification at the end of the literature courses.	64	30	4
d. I enjoy writing my own stories and poems.	55	37	6

74

		Important	A Minor Consideration	Not Important
e.	I enjoy reading novels.	66	31	2
f.	I enjoy reading poetry.	38	47	13
g.	I enjoy drama.	67	26	5
h.	I would like to be a professional writer one day.	18	47	33
i.	I like writing essays.	15	65	18
j.	I think the study of Literature is worthwhile in itself.	69	27	3
k.	I think it will make me a more interesting person.	53	41	5
l.	I need a qualification in Literature for my future career.	42	38	18
m.	I enjoy reading short stories.	79	17	3
n.	I enjoy studying literary works	36	51	11

Section II : If I have a choice, I ...

1.	would study literature.	56%
2.	am not sure if I would study literature	40%
3.	would not study literature	4%

The students' responses ranked according to what they considered important for studying literature are as follows: enjoy reading short stories (79%), enjoy reading (73%), think the study of Literature is worthwhile in itself (69%), enjoy drama (67%), enjoy reading novels (66%), think I might gain a worthwhile qualification at the end of the literature courses (64%), enjoy class discussion (63%), enjoy writing my own stories and poems (55%), think it will make me a more interesting person (53%), need a qualification in literature for my future career (42%), enjoy reading poetry (38%), enjoy studying literary works (36%), would like to be a professional writer one day (19%), like writing essays (15%).

For section two, the majority of the students (56%) said that if given the choice they would study literature. Forty percent of the students said that they were not sure if they would study literature if they were given a choice and four percent said that they would not study literature if given the choice.

Below is the tabulation of the responses of the twenty-eight students during the interview.

<u>Question 1</u> : What were your expectations of the
literature courses before you
enrolled them?

	Interesting Course	A lot of Reading	Difficult Courses	No Expectations	Others
Respondents	4	7	4	6	7
Percentage (%)	14	25	14	21	25
Total Respondents	28				
Total Percentage	100				

The majority of the students expressed the
view that they expected a lot of reading as these
were literature courses. Fourteen percent of the
students expected the literature courses to be
difficult as they had not studied literature before
and heard that literature courses were more
demanding than the other courses. Among the
responses of the students in the "others" category
were: literature courses would be dull and
boring, there would be creative writing exercises,
there would be exercises in literary criticism and
appreciation of the classics. One of the
respondents stated that she had studied literature
before and expected it to be a continuation of
what she had learnt before.

Question 2 : What did your learn from these
literature courses?

	Learnt About Life	Be More Critical	See Things in A Different Perspective
Respondents	16	8	4
Percentage (%)	57	28	14
Total Respondents	28		
Total Percentage	100		

The students' responses to this question could be broadly categorized into three groups. The majority of the students (57%) responded that literature taught them about life. While presenting their views for this question, many said that they were learning about adulthood and the facts of life. Twenty-eight percent of the students said that these courses made them more critical and required them to think especially when analyzing characters and themes. Fourteen percent of the students also responded that they began to see many things in a different perspective.

	Makes One Critical	About Life	More Activities	More Difficult
Respondents	12	7	6	3
Percentage (%)	43	25	21	11
Total Respondents	28			
Total Percentage	100			

It is interesting to note that forty-three percent of the respondents mentioned that the literature courses made them critical of situations in general. This response can be related to the students' response for Question Two in which fourteen percent of the respondents had earlier said that they learnt to be more critical from the literature courses. Twenty-five percent of the respondents also stated that the content of the literature courses was about life and this made it different from the other courses.

However, a small percentage of the students (11%) found the literature courses to be more difficult than the other courses. It is interesting to note that fourteen percent of the respondents had earlier expected literature courses to be difficult even before they had undergone any of the courses. This might have influenced their response to this question.

Question 4 : In what ways have these literature courses affected your outlook on life?

	More Aware of Society	More Cynical	More Broad-Minded	More Critical	Not Affected
Respondents	9	4	4	6	5
Percentage (%)	32	14	14	21	18

Total No. of Respondents   28
Total Percentage   100

Thirty-two percent of the students stated that these literature courses made them aware of society. Students also said that now they were more aware of what other people. Some of them had become more critical about their approach to life and fourteen percent of the students said that they had become broad-minded. However, a surprising fourteen percent said that the literature courses had made them more cynical in their outlook on life and finally eighteen percent said that they treated the literature courses as the other courses and they had not affected their outlook on life.

: Could these literature courses be
disturbing as they are imitations
of real life?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Respondents	6	20	2
Percentage (%)	21	72	7
Total Respondents	28		
Total Percentage	100		

For this question, students were informed
that the word "disturbing" was used to indicate
whether they were strongly affected by the
content of the literature courses. This was
especially true when they had to deal with certain
characters, conflicts or themes with which they
might not be comfortable, which were related to
their own experiences. In this instance, the
disturbing experiences included initiation into sex,
death and other matters. The majority of the
students (68%) said that the literature courses
were not disturbing and that they could handle
them.

Twenty-five percent of the students said
that these literature courses were disturbing.
Among the reasons were the writers' treatment of
certain themes, portrayal of characters and
religious issues.

81

Question 6 : Are the literature courses an
eye-opener?

	Yes	No
Respondents	9	19
Percentage (%)	32	68
Total Respondents	28	
Total percentage	100	

The term "eye-opener" here was used to
mean that literature introduced new ideas and
matters about life in general.   Most of all,
literature courses enhanced the awareness of
universal values and how these values related to
the individual in society.

A large majority of the students (96%) stated
that the study of literature was an eye-opener.
Among the reasons cited by the students were
that through these literature courses they had
new ideas about life, religion, relationships, sex,
were able to see things more clearly and even not
to expect too much from others.

Question 7 : Would you like to see any changes
(if any) in the literature courses?

	Yes	No
Respondents	9	19
Percentage (%)	32	68
Total Respondents	28	
Total percentage	100	

The majority of the students were satisfied
with the content and presentation of the
literature courses. However, 32 percent would
like some changes in the literature courses.
Among the proposed changes were more student-
oriented discussions, viewing of more films related
to the subjects, more dramatization and that the
lecturers should be more receptive to students'
view.

Conclusions

It can be accepted that the students in
general enjoyed the literature courses and would
continue to study literature if given the choice.
Among the things highlighted by the students
after undergoing these literature courses were
that they had become more critical and more
aware of society. To three questions during the

oral interview, students mentioned that the Literature courses had made them more critical and this reason ranked rather high among the reasons given for these questions.

The students mentioned that the study of literature was relevant to their lives as it dealt with matters that were related to life. Among the reasons for studying literature in relation to the four genres, poetry ranked lowest, followed by novels and drama. Short stories ranked highest of the genres the students enjoyed.

It is interesting to note that though these students are being prepared to be enrolled into a Bachelor in Education course and later to become English teachers, they did not consider the need for a qualification in literature for their future career an important reason for studying literature. This reason was not ranked highly by the respondents.

REVIEW

by

Wong Ming Yook

K. S. Maniam, *Plot, The Aborting, Parablames
and Other Stories*, AMK Interaksi, 1989, iv +
159

"Are we a dream or are we real?" is the
question which Govindasamy asks in "The
Pelanduk", and it is a question which takes us
through the entire collection of short stories in
K. S. Maniam's newest book. In this volume, his
intense studies of man besieged reveal his belief
in the endurance of the human spirit. But the
poignant depictions of failed heroes and heroines
nevertheless suggest no easy answers, no
palliatives to counter the pain that living and
being entail. For in the world of K. S. Maniam's
characters, revelation and transformation are hard
words, and life itself is a hard taskmaster which
demands that the individual struggle to push
through the outer layers of his own received
beliefs and traditions in order to see the core of
himself. In Govindasamy's words again, man has
to "destroy everything he has known to reach the
other realm. He must take vengeance upon
himself" (71).

And in *Plot, The Aborting, Parablames &
Other Stories*, the characters do just that. From
a comic and grotesque Arthi in "Plot" to the
tragic Mala in "Mala" or the growing cynicism of
Ganesan in "The Eagles", K. S. Maniam's message

is the same: in Kaliamma's Age, the fourth phase
of the dreamtime of the gods, man can no longer
rely on his old pantheon of gods to bail him out,
to solve the riddle of existence or the dilemma of
the universe for him. In this, the fourth and
final phase, man stands alone in transforming and
recreating life.

It is in the depiction of the individual, and
his search for 'realness' out of a dream world
that K. S. Maniam's incisive and powerful prose in
this collection is best exploited. He portrays
individuals filled with a strange longing for life
which draws them to find fulfilment in obeying
the tenets of traditional society, or to look
outwards and away from such tradition to the
more materialistic modern life. And yet, as the
writer suggests, neither the cultural nor the
social milieu can provide man with what he needs,
for the one can destroy with its unrelenting
demands, as Arthi of "Plot" discovers to her own
tragedy, and the other merely prostitutes and
erodes the idealistic vigour and youth of those it
claims, such as Ganesan of "The Eagles" and Mala
of "Mala". Arthi marries Karupi off to her own
husband in the hope that the young girl will
compensate for her own childlessness, but in the
process is herself pushed out of the home when
Karupi gains prominence as the fertile,
childbearing wife. Ganesan, on the other hand,
whose family value his money-making at the big
house, finds that his pride and dignity are
compromised by the contempt of the family at the
big house. The thrust of the story here is that
Ganesan becomes disgusted with his initiation into
the adult world, but despite this, is already
contaminated by the same unclean force which
drives men. Both contamination and disgust are
shown in his disillusioned reaction to his
stepmother's rebuke at his quitting his job: "I'll

pay you...Five dollars for teaching those stupid children...Five dollars for eating their rotten food....Five for not being an eagle,'" (22). In "Mala", it is the husband figure who prostitutes his wife; Sanker and Lucy, his landlady, reduce Mala to the level of a dummy when they dress her up, determine how she must look and behave, so much so that she is no longer her own person. In the end, Mala admits defeat, for "in the gestures of Lucy" she recognised the "silent pressure of a force from which there was no escape" (147). Her idealism and hopes, like Ganesan's copper tinted eagles in "The Eagles", cannot withstand the eroding effects of a world which worships materialism.

K. S. Maniam's characters are scarred and sometimes shattered by the terrible struggle of becoming real. Confrontation with the world is necessary, but triumph is not always assured, as Mary Ling, the strange girl-woman in "The Aborting", well knows. An innocent who wishes still to preserve that innocence from the ravaging world, Mary locks herself into a make-believe world where she is in total control: "The voices tell me I've great mental power,' she said. 'I've controlled other things before. I wanted to see a candle burn against the wind,'" (107). And yet her cowering fear of sexual intimacy shows how much she is not in control. Life is a menace waiting to destroy her, as it finally destroys Mala ("Mala"), who, by turning to the modern world and rejecting tradition in quest of 'realness', becomes a mannequin, without identity, without rights. Even the incestuous Viji in "The Loved Flaw" discovers that passion cannot help her "find the reality to [her] dream", that her life with 'athan' is a "shadow life" (155) which is based on lies.

How then, can man find himself, or come into 'realness' to counter the dream? If tradition has outlived its usefulness, and modern life is seen as a kind of spreading disease which paralyses and makes ghosts of men ("Parablames"),

where can man look to find hope? If even the act of recreating or the attempt to transform life seen as a meaningless jabber of words ("Encounters"), is man condemned to live a skid row existence out of disgust for the "blinded, money-seeing selves" (53) which make up society?

The answer, if it is an answer at all, lies still in human effort, as "Parablames" suggests. The realisation which paralyses is not enough. As Anita Raouf writes, "Hope must lead to rebellion", for mere "Words are useless" (130). This, if any, is the key to the problem. The narrator of "Parablames", having read through Anita's diary, concludes that determined human effort is the only way to bring back life to the community, that the individual's pounding his way through the "iron labyrinth of man's crazy traffic" (130) is not futile.

The idyllic Langkawi island of "We Make it to the Capital" is a concession to this optimism, and it is here in this Paradise that several school teachers, hard and cynical, rediscover the joy of life in the naive and innocent island children they teach, and in the island itself, unmoved and untroubled by the storm tossed seas that the teachers find themselves sailing upon. In danger of capsizing, the small team wakes up from the half-dream of their lives, and comes to grips finally with the issues of life and death. And again, it is their effort which saves them from possible death and throws them back, safe and tired, upon a "familiar shore" (69).

K. S. Maniam's collection of stories is disturbing then, to say the least. We are telescoped into an intense and uncomfortable fictional world which, for all that it is the 'dreamtime' of the author-god, is much more strikingly real in its colour and feel, its reeling emotions and violent passions, its filth and its beauty, than the world we know. *Plot, The Aborting, Parablames & Other Stories* is the prophetic rendering of a personal vision of man and his world; and it is man who takes the centre stage here, shown in all his nakedness and his glory.

THE QUESTION OF FAITH IN
IN SUNDRY PLACES: VIEWS OF DURHAM CATHEDRAL

by

Susan Philip

Siew-Yue Killingley, *In Sundry Places:*
Views of Durham Cathedral,
Newcastle Upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt
(1987), x + 10pp.

In her introduction, Siew-Yue Killingley remarks that this collection of poems seems "a natural choice as a fitting memorial for Deanna [Rippon]," a very close friend for many years. According to Dr. Killingley, "Deanna's life was one of quietly living out her love of God in her daily acts of kindness to everyone with whom she came into contact" -- in other words, her life was dominated and guided by her faith in, and love of, God. It is this fact that makes these poems such a fitting memorial, for they are in fact an exploration into the nature of faith in God.

The point that Dr. Killingley seems to be making about faith is that it comes from the heart rather than the mind. The idea that is constantly reiterated is that God is beyond the scope of our limited human knowledge and understanding, and that in spite of this, faith exists. Faith, then, is a matter of deep feeling rather than of intellect.

This collection of poems charts the progress in the poet's understanding of what faith entails. There are two distinct phases of movement in the poet's journey towards this understanding. The first movement (including all the poems from *The Vision of a Creed* to *I'm Congregation, Not Choir* we might categorise as being an advance towards the awareness that faith is not a mental process. The second movement can be seen as an attempt to understand the full extent of God's love -- a closer understanding of God's love might lead to a deeper knowledge of what faith is. There appears to be something of a contradiction here-- after all, the poet first contends that faith is not a matter to be intellectually understood, and then proceeds to try and understand it intellectually. The question to be asked is whether there really is a contradiction, and this question will be answered at a later stage.

The overall structure of this collection (which takes us from the entrance of the cathedral to the burial ground, and in a parallel movement, from the beginning of the poet's understanding of faith to her final awareness) is far tighter than the internal structure. At the entrance to the church, the poet is asked to think about her belief in God, and this is the starting point (the entrance) for her deeper examination of the question of faith. The altar, symbol of God's sacrifice of love, is the point at which the poet achieves some understanding of God's love. The journey culminates in the burial ground, which symbolises death and (because of the Resurrection) rebirth. The promise of rebirth (eternal life) is there for all who have faith, so it is fitting that the poet's final revelation about faith comes in conjunction with this particular symbol. The structure thus very neatly reflects the development of the poet's understanding.

However, the development of ideas within each section is less satisfying. All the ideas basic to the collection are present in the first poem, *The Vision of a Creed*. God's infinity is made clear and contrasted with our own puny mortality: the "reflections of his mind" are "like the dim sight/Of gradated misty mountains" which "stretch and fade/Away into the distance," making us all too aware of "our own candle-flame mortality." The poet then becomes aware of the enormity of the sacrifice made out of love. That awareness is "a sight/Too terrible for [her] to bear." God's love is so huge and so terrible that it cannot be understood through a mere exercising of the mental faculties. It is of no use to

> ... think and wear to the bone
> The convoluted fingers of our brains, calculating
> The ramifications of the theological
> oneness of three.
>
> L. 58-60, p. 2

We can only be seen as truly responding when "finally our hearts/Are stirred by a weak murmur that strangely starts/From within ourselves" (L. 27-29, p. 1).

These ideas are reiterated in the rest of the poems, without significant development. In *By Word of Mouth*, for example, the poet discusses the Virgin Mary's complete lack of understanding of the significance of what was happening to her -- her acquiescence came through her simple, heartfelt faith. *Singing Practice* talks of our need to praise God instinctively, like the birds, while *I'm Congregation, Not Choir* stresses the idea that God examines the heart, not the outward trappings of perfection. *Remembrance Sunday, The Human Race* and *Calvary* all look at

92

the actual moment of sacrifice from different viewpoints. It is this section that actually offers the most interesting development of ideas: in these three poems we see (respectively) Christ's humanity, his divinity, and finally a combination of these two attributes. His reward, as shown in *Calvary*, is the movement from the thorny crown to the heavenly crown, from mortal agony to divine glory.

The first two poems in *Burial Ground* (*My Life and Death* and *Contrapuntal Plainsong: My Love is a Lily*) look at God's love. The first poem tells us that God's love supports us throughout our lives, while the second contains the idea that Christ is love. Neither of these ideas is particularly new, nor are they presented in an especially interesting way. The cycle of life and death in *My Life and Death* is represented by the image of a silk worm in its cocoon, that cocoon being God's warm and supportive love. The dominant image in the second poem is that of trees and flowers – Christ is represented as a lily among thorny roses, an apple tree in the wild forest. The images are, sadly, not especially unique.

Easter Flowers deals with the Resurrection. The poet identifies the risen Christ with King Arthur awakened from his long sleep ("Love rose, crowned, a strong gentle Arthur"), but then carries the identification no further. The rest of the poem is dominated by the imagery of spring flowers, slipping back into the more conventional association of the Resurrection with the renewal of the earth in spring.

Understanding is the final poem in this collection, and it represents the poet's final and full awareness of what faith entails.

Unfortunately, it says nothing that has not already been put forward in the previous poems. God cannot be understood, this poem states, because he is simply beyond our comprehension:

> For those divine dimensions
> Are beyond me, and measure
> In unreal terms all or nothing;
> For God has no dimensions.
>
> L 13-16, p. 9

We believe in him because we are "transfixed" by him, "Compelled by love" to have faith. As has been made clear already, faith is something that can be felt, but not understood. Here, the poet quite successfully conveys to the reader the absolute awe she feels when she contemplates the incomprehensibility of God. Unable to produce calm, flowing verse, she stutters out her wonder "At oh, length ... height ... depth ... breadth" of the God who is beyond the grasp of her mind. Coming back to the question of the existence of a contradiction, we can see that the poet deals with it by finally acknowledging her attempts at understanding God to be futile. But this is something that we have known from the beginning.

The final revelation is not, after all, much of a revelation because it has all been revealed before. We come away from this collection feeling that, though the poet has made a careful study of what faith is, she has not had any new ideas about it, nor has she found new ways of expressing these old ideas. What we have here is a reworking of an old theme which holds no surprises for us.

On the level of intellect, of ideas, this collection of poems is perhaps less than wholly successful. Where it does succeed, however, is in communicating, simply and clearly, the poet's feelings about her faith. And this fact, perhaps, can be seen as a reinforcement of her theme-- that feeling rather than intellect constitutes faith.