Native-like Fluency and Native-like Selection

Native-like Selection

- “the ability of the native speaker routinely to convey his meaning by an expression that is not only grammatical but also native-like”
- The ‘generative grammar’ is part of what a person must know in order to be a competent speaker.
- Only a small proportion of the total set of grammatical sentences is native-like. Others may be grammatically correct but sound ‘odd’.
- To achieve native-like control the learner needs to learn:
  - generative grammar
  - a means for knowing which of the grammatical sentences are native-like
  ➔ Native-like control includes speaking grammatically and idiomatically.

Native-like Fluency

- “the native speaker´s ability to produce fluent stretches of spontaneous connected discourse”
- Speaking fluently affords intense mental activity. However, we only have a limited processing capacity.
- normal pattern: pause or slow down at clause boundaries
- ‘one clause at a time’ hypothesis:
  “The largest unit of novel discourse that can be fully encoded in one encoding operation is a single clause of 8-10 words.”
  ➔ correlation of fluent unit with clause
- 2 syntactic strategies in formulating spontaneous connected discourse:
  1) ‘clause-integrating’ strategy:
     use of grammatical constructions that require the speaker to take account of the structure of an earlier or later clause when formulating a current one
  2) ‘clause-chaining’ strategy:
     stringing together a sequence of relatively independent clauses that show little structural integration with earlier or later constructions
  ➔ ‘one clause at a time facility’:
     essential constituent of communicative competence
- challenges for the speaker:
  - compose grammatical clauses
  - keep in time
  - restricted ability to plan novel speech
  - make coherent, context-appropriate contributions
  - use appropriate register
  ➔ no freedom to concentrate on grammar only
Memorized Sequences

- “strings which the speaker or hearer is capable of consciously assembling or analyzing, but which on most occasions of use are recalled as wholes or as automatically chained strings”
- Memorized Sequences are the normal building blocks of fluent spoken discourse. They serve as a model for the creation of many (partly) new sequences.

Memorized sequences promote fluency because they require little encoding work and thus free the speaker to channel his processing energies into other activities (such as timing, tone, rhythm, expanding or combining ready-made constructions).

Lexicalized Sentence Stems

- “a complete sentence or expression which is something less than a complete sentence”
- A sentence or sentence stem is lexicalized if
  a) it denotes a meaning which is culturally authorized.
  b) it is recognized to be a standard expression for the meaning in question.
  c) it is a (somewhat) arbitrary choice in terms of linguistic structure.
- A novel sequence will be native-like at least to the extent that it consists of an institutionalized sentence stem plus permissible variations.
  ➔ The speaker needs to know the grammar of the sentence stem.
- example: conventional expressions of apology:
  I’m sorry to keep you waiting.
  I’m so sorry to have kept you waiting.
  Mr. X is sorry to keep you waiting all this time.

  - sentence stem: recurrent collocation with its grammatical frame:
    NP be-TENSE sorry to keep-TENSE you waiting.
  - inflections: realisations of the variable constituents in the stem
  - expansions: additional constituents of an optional kind

Conclusion

Lexicalized sentence stems and other memorized sequences form the building blocks of fluent connected speech.

Implications for grammarians and teachers

➔ phrase book as mediator between classical grammar book and lexicon