

Language Awareness As A Core Subject

Conciencia del lenguaje como materia prima

María Arreaza Coyle
ketty.arreaza@icloud.com

Throughout history, a common goal for almost all cultures and certainly for great civilizations, has been the attainment of a good education of whatever nature, but marked by inquiry, and the acquisition of knowledge, and wisdom, and to achieve this goal, teachers and mentors have without exception relied on one instrument, namely human language: The oral tradition; and in time, the written word. This of course and despite technological advances, continues to happen in the classrooms of today, and what is overriding, is that in many countries, the study of the subject matter of this unique tool, namely human language, has itself become part of the school curriculum.

In the United States however, this is not the case. Here, educators and curriculum planners in public education and this includes primary, secondary and tertiary education, have overlooked the study of language per se. As it stands then, such a study is not on equal footing with its sister disciplines: Mathematics, Music, Speech, Social Studies, etc.; in other words, with the core subjects. This, is no doubt an irony, if we consider that the missing subject is really the mediator of them all, that they are its progeny, and that in the teaching/learning setting, even music and math which are languages in themselves, are nonetheless dependent on the substance, form and function of spoken language as a vehicle for communication. We often hear students and people in general express their love of a subjects, “I love art” “I love music” etc., but hardly ever do we hear someone say “I love language” Why is this? one may ask: And the answer is, because we cannot love something we know nothing about. And so we use language without really understanding its generative power, its function and its form. As such we hardly ever bring it into consciousness and simply take it for granted. In stark contrast, a few years ago, an important step was taken in education when the subject ‘rhythm’ was integrated into the music curriculum of 32 states, one of them: New Hampshire Department of Education Concord: April 2001.

So much for music, and well deserved. The question is however, with so much input from fields of research such as Applied Linguistics, Descriptive Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, etc., shouldn't language be exploited for what it has to offer? Or has it

been assumed that students have nothing to learn from its study? Where is the rub? A very brief look at past history will show that it is not for lack of arguments in its favor that Language has been cast aside.

Over one hundred years ago, Balzac is known to have said: “The mystery of genius might yet be solved by a study of the principles of language” from Adam Bresnick (1994) in his *Unknown Masterpiece Citation Information*. And, right here, on U.S. shores, a major American philosopher, W.W. Quine (1960) posed a question: “How do we acquire a theory of the world?” and came to the conclusion that first it was necessary to answer the following: “How do we acquire our talk about the world?”

Fifty years ago, in the preface of *Language and Mental Retardation* (1967, p. V (5) R.H. Copeland, R. L. Schiefelbusch, and J.O. Smith, all from the University of Kansas, pointed to the extraordinary relevance of language: “Language as a field, is drawing increasing attention from psychology, education, anthropology, speech pathology and audiology, physiology, neurology, and communication science, to name a few.”

The authors also go on to cite (p.9) Lev Vigotsky, the Russian psychologist and founder of the theory of human, cultural, and bio-social development, in his (1962) publication. On Language the latter assumes: “...the ability to think, reason, remember, plan, and organize, has its basis in meaningful language”

George Steiner, in the second edition of his famous *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1992 pp. 85-86,) discussed Humboldt on language and concluded that although we can experience reality without language: “...experience only assumes order and cognizance in the language-matrix.”

We then find Steve Levinson, from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in the Netherlands, who claimed what should be common knowledge but is not: “The particulars of a language, encapsulate a long history of people in an ecology, a way of living and a way of thinking.” *The journal Science* (Vol. 288) 5/19/00). And James Salter in (9/3/99) *The New York Times* edition called language “... the requisite for the human condition.”

And more recently (2004 August 29th) in *The New York Times Book Review* of *An Alchemy of Mind*, by Diane Ackerman, the reviewer, Marina Warner, referred to Ms. Ackerman’s view of language as: “.....our human reality at some very deep level, even biological level, as it exercises a shaping force on the individual mind’s development as well as distinguishing and communicating human self-consciousness.”

Ms. Warner went on to quote Ackerman on the subject: “ Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts.”

Equally important here is the field of English for Specific Purposes, and researchers are now fully aware that yes, Language Awareness is a key, a direct path to the acquisition and application of this skill. In a recent publication

Csilla Wninger and Katy Hoi-Yi Kan made this clear: Language Awareness in Business Administration:

In the last twenty years, critical approaches to language and literacy education have established themselves as an academic field, with an abundance of empirical studies applying Critical Literary principle in classes and curricula at schools and universities. Noticeably absent from the contexts of implementation are courses in Business English and Business Communication. (4/2013 Pages 59–71) English for Specific Purposes. Volume 32, Issue 2.

For the past 20 years then, there have been renewed calls for Critical Language Awareness (CLA) as a vital component of education and pedagogy. At its inception two decades ago, (1992a p. 7). Fairclough, Henry argued that: “the development of a critical awareness of the world, and of the possibilities for changing it, ought to be the main objective of all education, including language education”

Several convincing arguments have been put forth in proposing CLA as a central educational concern and curricular guiding principle.

No doubt, the above arguments for the study of Language are highly academic and interdisciplinary, and would challenge the constraints of existing public school syllabi. One can only envision philosophers of language and graduate students of linguistics dealing with these matters, and they do. But, it is the many aspects of language underlying the above claims that should be discussed “across the curriculum” As British educators have put it, it is a matter of creating awareness of Language through questions, questions that should be addressed accordingly by American educators and students. “Why study language?” “Why climb Everest?” “Because it’s there” , British linguist, Margaret Berry (1975) Introduction to Systemic Linguistics, asked and answered. And so today, given this huge curricular gap, one finds that with few exceptions, public education students, even at college level, are unable to answer key questions about language such as: What do we tacitly know when we know a language? What can we learn from the way our own native language is structured ? How do we acquire language? Is language a skill? At what age can we best learn to speak a second or a

foreign language and why? Why do languages die off ? What do all languages have in common? Is there evidence for a universal grammar? How does the language of science, biology, for example, differ from that of history? What is the difference between a sentence and an utterance? What is the role of context in communication? Does the structure of our native language determine in any way our world view? How does language contribute to artificial intelligence and computer science? What aspects of human language defy computers? What is a ‘register’? What are dialects? Is there really a standard dialect? What is an idiolect? Can we really “defend” our native language and keep it “pure”? Is there such a thing as accent discrimination in our society?

As a general rule, our students graduate college and become teachers of language, English for example, but have never heard of the tremendously revealing research on American Aboriginal Indian Languages carried out by linguistic anthropologists like Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. And much less of Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Linguistic Pragmatics*.

From Sapir and Whorf we have their famous controversial Linguistic Relativity Hypotheses:

The interdependence of thought and speech makes it clear that languages are not so much a means of expressing truth that has already been established, but are a means of discovering truth that was previously unknown. Their diversity is a diversity not of sounds and signs but of ways of looking at the world.

And the argument goes even further:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way — an agreement that tacitly holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language... all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated? Whorf’s (1964, pp. 212-214) *Language, Thought, and Reality*

The above no doubt is food for thought and can trigger a keen interest in Language.

Likewise, as mentioned above, most students are unaware of the pragmatic aspects of language use, or spoken discourse, and on this subject we cannot leave out Paul Grice, British philosopher and linguist. Gricean Pragmatics, a unifying postulate, which is -- as (2005, p.185) Siobhan Chapman, another British linguist University of Liverpool, explains "... an impulse to distinguish between literal meaning and speaker meaning and to identify general principles that mediate between the two."

Such aspects abound, not only at high academic and intellectual levels but are also well understood and ingeniously exploited by other great lovers of language like the English mathematician Lewis Carroll.

A close look at *An Introduction to LANGUAGE* by Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman (1993) gives us a clear idea of how much use Carroll made of language in his famous *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, its sequel *Through the Looking Glass*, *Jabberwocky*, and others.

The authors quote Carroll repeatedly by way of the most pertinent ones, and that is all it takes... Mathematics and Language share much here, 'permutation' being a good example.

All of the above then show that students are, in a nutshell, missing out on language, and far more, on its implications.

There are indeed topics worthy of study, reflection, and discussion, and in the hands of well trained language teachers, they can be expanded, abridged or simplified according to grade level. In fact, what can be taught and learned about language as a system and its related disciplines can fill dozens of middle school, high school, and college syllabuses. Each level of linguistic analysis for example, whether it is syntax, semantics, morphology, phonetics and phonology, or pragmatics, is, in and of itself, an enriching subject, each can be made amenable/manageable for students of all ages.

Why is then such a study considered self-evident or axiomatic, taken for granted by our experts on education? Could it be because Language is the only complex cognitive system that can be more easily acquired at an early age than at age twenty, or thirty five? Could it be because speaking is as natural to us as walking or breathing? So natural, that we are not aware of the vast and complex system of rules that underlie its acquisition and use? Could it be that unlike math and science, there is no obvious utilitarian reason, no immediate gratification for studying about language because supposedly it will not dramatically improve

our ability to think, to speak? If these are some of the reasons for bypassing Language, then we are falling into our own trap, given that as the philosopher of language, (1953 5oe/129) Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations* observed: "...the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity." And complemented this with: "The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for"

Little did he know that in the 20th and 21centuries , great minds and lovers of language would second his motion as (1979, p. 4) Noam Chomsky did in his famous *Reflections on Language: 'Mirror of Mind'* being a qualifier he discusses. In another outstanding contribution (1968, p.22) Chomsky's *Language and Mind* , he further explained how we are in short, allowing the very familiarity of language to actually "obscure the importance of the insight."

But fortunately, this does not apply to the rest of the world. In many countries including England, the study of language as both, a formal, and a pragmatic system, has for sometime been successfully integrated into the curriculum of public schools. But this study has little to do with the traditional teaching of grammar that centered on parsing, and word classification, an approach that as the well known linguist and pioneer explorer of the functions of language, M.A.K. Halliday (1977) , stated in *Text as Semantic Choice in Social Contexts* "...is a rudimentary and inadequate type of knowledge about language...."

The development of language awareness as it is conceived today implies that teachers in training at state universities will have completed satisfactorily, a number of pertinent courses on language and linguistics, courses that will enable them to focus on those aspects of language, and language use, that will help their students to develop and refine their reading skills and to articulate and express content at higher levels of proficiency. And not only teachers of reading but teachers of language at any level must be trained if they are to help their students understand the crucial differences between reading and writing. Competent teachers must be aware of the patterns of the language they teach. They must be aware of how we go about acquiring our native language, and learning a foreign language or a second . They must in turn understand the effect that the social background of their students has on the way they use language. They, in short, must know what language is.

Teachers who understand phonetics and phonology for example, will be much better qualified to teach reading. On this issue, the role of phonemes in the development of reading skills in children was addressed by Dr. G. Reid Lyon, the former Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human in the journal *SCIENCE*, Vol. 4 April 30, *Teaching the Brain to Read*.

The article quoted Lyon's "The converging scientific evidence is very clear that poor readers and readers in general need to be taught the "building blocks" (phonemes) of words." This then, is a statement that defies the tenets of the long entrenched "whole language" approach with substantive arguments.

According to the whole language approach, literacy and language development occur once we understand a message; in other words, comprehension and learning are for all intents and purposes, one and the same thing, and they occur when children are able to understand texts which is the job of the teacher. Reading, should be developed integrally, the assumption being that any decoding of the system goes against nature; in other words, children should learn to read much like they learn to speak. But this of course disavows the fact that children are pre-wired for language acquisition, not for reading; reading is a learned skill and learning to read just like learning about human language calls for disintegration, for getting down to the component parts, to the underlying structure and how it works. And this of course brings us again to what is still today the 'Whole Language vs. the Skills-Based Methods' debate. Arguments pro and con are convincing but their common denominator is that for whole language to really work it must allot time to examining how words and sentences are used in the written texts. On the debate we find for example that the report of the National Reading Panel of 2000, concluded that the skills-based methods were more efficient and stated that:

1. Systematic phonics instructions is more effective than less systematic phonics instruction.

2. Skills-based approaches are superior to whole language approaches in helping children learn to read, but authorities just like Stephen (2000) University of Southern California professor: Has Whole Language Failed? may ultimately go on to favor it. Professor Krashen had this to say on the subject:

.... comprehension of messages is necessary for language acquisition and literacy development, but it is not sufficient. It is certainly possible to comprehend a text or message and not acquire anything. We acquire when we understand messages that contain aspects of language that we have not yet acquired but that we are developmentally ready to acquire (http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/text/Krashen_WholeLang.PDF)

But on this issue, this proposal sustains that in as much as reading and writing unlike native language acquisition are again learned and taught, not natured and nurtured, teachers, beginning readers, and students in general, should have a degree of working, applicable knowledge concerning the meaningful sounds of language, the phonemes, and their

articulation. And there is indeed evidence to support the application of such knowledge. For this we can turn to *Get Back To Basics* (1995) Richard Lee Colvin, Los Angeles Times. In his article he quoted Tammy Hunter-Weathers, a teacher at Hyde Park School in Los Angeles who came forth concerning the frustration of her students taught with the whole language approach. Her first graders she said were in tears when they were asked to read texts even though they did not know the letters or sounds in them: “They look at you with three paragraphs on a page and they say, ‘What do we do with this’ ?

But over and above the practical application of Grammar to the development of practical skills the contention of this proposal is that aspects of language are worth knowing because they are there, and their complexity and richness, must be brought to bear in the curriculum ; after all not just language, but also music and math work along the same principle of permutation as briefly mentioned above, which grants them their generative power, their open-endedness.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1975) *Learning How to Mean*, once again, on the importance of awareness and its relevance to the development of language competence in pupils, sums it all up:

The development of awareness has a marked effect upon a pupil’s ability to cope with the whole range of his work because he/she comes to see that many problems are not so much problems in grasping the content of what he/she studies, but problems in handling the language appropriate to it. (Halliday, 1975, pp.164).

It follows then, that in many countries, all students independently of their academic ability, begin to develop an awareness of language early on and continue to do so through secondary school. Educators here have come to agree that depriving children of the opportunity to learn about language, is equivalent to detracting from their education in general.

As the late Eric Hawkins, University of York, York UK , a brilliant advocate of language , a pioneer, told us in (1974 and 1992) *Awareness of Language: An Introduction*, one does not have to apologize for wanting to teach aspects of Language and Linguistics, just like teachers of the many aspects of science do not apologize because their degree was Biology. As he actually put it: “We are seeking to light fires of curiosity about the central human characteristic of language which will blaze throughout our pupils.”

From Hawkins obituary, which appeared in *The Guardian*, written by Peter Downes, Thursday 16 December, 2010, we can further substantiate his and our claim from the following:

Eric edited a series of teaching materials aimed at inspiring in young people an interest in communication, an understanding of how language works and an appreciation of the similarities and differences between languages.

This approach continues to be influential in many primary schools today.

Eric helped set up the Association for Language Awareness, an international body bringing linguists and educators together, and his influence has been felt worldwide. He continued to write, lecture and attend conferences into his 90s. A quietly spoken, modest and unassuming man, he had the happy knack of inspiring people without dominating them.

There is indeed accredited research which shows that our native speaker competence, our tacit knowledge of language as a system, is not something we master at a given age and then stop. It is indeed as Hawkins further explained, a "life-long apprenticeship" dependent on numerous variables. Most important, wholly dependent on our linguistic competence, is our linguistic performance, that is, our coherent use of language in producing, comprehending, and processing speech. Linguistic performance has a vast pragmatic component and as such it is not so much a question of what you say, but of what you do with what you say by means of a written or spoken discourse that in a given context, has unity and purpose. In addition, formal links between sentences and clauses, grammatical connectivity in a written text, also known as cohesion depends crucially on our linguistic levels of competence. So what is competence?, one may still ask.

Very recently, on November 7, 2004, there was indeed an article in *The New York Times Education Life*, written by Kate Zernike, which discussed the importance of grammar. But the article, entitled *Modifying the Subject Diagram this: Grammar is back*, mainly referred to grammar as ordinarily conceived; in other words, as Syntax or the rules of sentence formation. But Grammar in its linguistic context, with a capital G, is much more. It comprises as mentioned above and herein defined: Morphology, or the internal structure of words, the rules for their formation; Semantics, which studies the linguistic meaning of sentences and words as propositions devoid of an actual context; Phonology, the component of Grammar that studies 'phonemes' key elements of the sound system of all languages and the rules for their combination and pronunciation leading to meaningful words; Phonetics which comprises the sounds themselves and their place and manner of articulation. And finally, Pragmatics a relatively new component of Grammar which is the study of the meaning of utterances as used in context and how these are interpreted by the speaker/listener. It is, as mentioned above, what we do with what we say; in short, in its entirety language comprises competence and performance.

So it is not a question of bringing back grammar for whatever academic or practical purpose it may serve. It is a question, again, of integrating Language into the curriculum so as to develop in our students an awareness, and an appreciation of the interaction of all of those components that make language generative, and endow us at an early age with the ability to create sentences that adhere to the matrix of the language; in other words, stylistic meaningful propositions, and pragmatic utterances.

But in the United States, in ignoring the study of language per se, educators and legislators are also devaluing the process of foreign language teaching and learning; the fact that to a significant extent, this linguistic undertaking as described by the versatile Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky and quoted in (1996) *Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework* by John-Steiner, V. & Mahn, H. *Educational Psychologist*, 31, pp. 191 – 206, is indeed: “a process that is conscious and deliberate from the start” for whatever academic or practical purpose it may serve. It is a question, again, of integrating Language into the curriculum so as to develop in our students an awareness, and an appreciation of the interaction of all of those components that make language generative, and endow us at an early age with the ability to create sentences that adhere to the matrix of the language; in other words, stylistic meaningful propositions, and pragmatic utterances.

And, although Vygotsky did not make the statement in the context of the once popular ‘communicative’ teaching methods, or the latter whole language approach, there is evidence from research, that his assessment was correct. And back to Victoria Fromkin, and Robert in (1974i) *An Introduction to Language*, they also pointed to this fact in their overall assertion that in learning a foreign language students have to learn grammar, which includes learning the syntax and semantics, and how the two languages interact. The stumbling block in foreign language learning then, is that because students have never developed an explicit awareness of language, because they have no insight into its patterned nature, or its rule-governed structure, their experience is one of great frustration.

As a teacher of Spanish, and English as a foreign language for over 30 years in high schools and colleges, I have seen this happen. Between teacher and students there is no common ground to fall back on because students are unable to transfer general language skills from their native language to the foreign language; unable to discern, to detect differences and similarities between the two systems. Teachers then, have no choice but to introduce brief ad hoc grammar lessons, like explaining that a verb has a subject and may also have an object, or two objects depending on what kind of verb it happens to be. And most important, that in the foreign language, the word order in a sentence may be quite different although the functional

relationship between the parts is the same. In the end, the more mature and able students actually learn about the structure of their own native language through that of the foreign language and when this happens progress follows, and they realize it.

In ignoring the importance of language awareness, educators are failing to place Language where it belongs, a core subject in the curriculum. We are also failing to take advantage of the multicultural settings found in inner and even outer city schools, here in the United States, schools like those of Chicago and New York City, where so many children speak languages other than English. These are indeed fertile terrain waiting to be both, explored and exploited along these lines, given that it is in settings such as these that a genuine interest in the use of language and in foreign languages and cultures can be developed. Motivate these children to talk about their native language; to compare languages at different levels; to want to know what it means to know a language; to ask questions about language, and their linguistic skills will improve along with their demands for foreign language learning. No doubt, their interest and curiosity about other cultures will also grow and stay with them.

And on the subject of foreign languages and multiculturalism, shortly after the 9/11 disaster, Margaret Talbot New York Times Edition of 9/3/99 aptly addressed these issues in The New York Times Magazine of November 18, 2001. “Multiculturalism’s triumph, tied to weak foreign-language skill, has deafened us to many of the world’s dangers” she said. Other leading newspapers have focus on this same topic, on the strategic importance of being bilingual in languages other than the usual Romance Languages. Languages like Arabic and Pashto, etc. And this of course brings to mind the present inconsequential status of foreign language requirements in American schools, and the issue of competent teachers to address the current needs. It may appear to some as an insurmountable problem, but it isn’t; however, if it is to be solved, it must be met. In the flammable arena of world politics, there is no better communication than that carried out by a speaker whose linguistic skills in the foreign language are good enough to impress the native. The many cultural, ethnic and even sectarian barriers are lowered, and seemingly incompatible world views begin to decipher each other and to find common ground.

In public schools curricula then, at least one of a few foreign languages should be obligatory and the earlier it is started, the better. Needless to say, if students come to learn a foreign language with some understanding of what Language is, they soon will find the patterns and apply the rules; skill development will proceed. They will no longer stumble, nor grope, as a lot of them do now. Future generations of American students will grow up linguistically savvy; English of course being the official language as it should be.

Bilingual programs which in fact are not a must for reasons too long to explain here, would then be fully redundant, in as much as linguistically enlightened teachers and pupils will know that when the native language is spoken at home, the matrix which is the linguistic heart of the matter will be retained. The children's speaking skills will prevail and their vocabulary can always be enriched by reading later on. As to their English skills, these can easily be developed through English as a Second Language in school, and reinforced through exposure in regular classes and through the myriads of situational contexts outside. This is how thousands of us learned English. This is how millions went on to learn it after passing through Ellis Island.

And so, in light of many of the arguments above, we can only agree with the British linguist, Richard Hudson, University College London who in a message to the Linguistic List: <http://linguisticlist.org/issues /8/8-1330.html> Sept. 21, 1997; shortly before the study of language was integrated into the British school curriculum, wrote: ‘...it would be fair to say that English-speaking countries where grammatical analysis is no longer part of the curriculum (UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand), are out of step.’

And sadly, we are still out of step. But fortunately, once in a while, substantial arguments like Margaret Talbot's above, are voiced. In addition, in a discussion of the book, Diane Ravitch (2000) *LEFT BACK: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, The New York Times Book Review, Sunday 8/27/00 pointed to the practice of teaching only the “useful” and “immediately functional”, a practice which in Ms. Ravitch's opinion should be questioned and even denounced. As examples of this she mentioned “The dropping of foreign languages, the replacement of history with social studies, and the elimination of high-quality literature to be substituted by uninspired scraps from textbooks.” I believe, this partly answers my initial question, for in the eyes of many influential but misguided educators, learning about Language is neither useful nor immediately functional. Yet, in the long standing debate between advocates and practitioners of the reigning “whole language” approach to curriculum, teaching, and learning, and the more traditionally oriented critics, language as a subject will fit into both formats, given that they concur with respect to the nature of language itself. Language is viewed by both groups, as a bridge between two planes, namely objective reality, and subjective interpretation. Language in use is the tool that allows us to articulate both planes, and the outcome in education is not only a matter of degrees, and of inescapable individual experience, but also of inescapable facts.

In the long run, the result of this gap in our knowledge much too often translates to ignorance, misunderstanding and misrepresentation, many times on the part of otherwise

educated people, an issue which was partly addressed by Margalit Fox, an editor of the New York Times Book Review who writes about language and linguistics.

In closing, it can be said that in those countries where Language is part of the curriculum, what educators share is a keen interest in human language and the firm belief that an objective appreciation of it is worth acquiring for a significant number of valid reasons, not all of them discussed in this proposal. Their common goal is then to advance and disseminate information on language, the implication being that in the absence of explicit language awareness not only do we fail to learn and benefit from an incredibly rich cognitive, functional, and structured system, but allow the essence of our being, the core of our humanity, to remain at the level of mere intuition.

To those of us in this country who are concerned and would like to see Language join the rank of other subjects in the curriculum, pertinent questions come to mind: Is Education a real priority in the United States? If it isn't, it should be, specially, given its status quo in this country today. American students compared to European ones and Asians are lagging behind in science and math. And if language skills were being compared they would also fall behind. Back in the New York Times edition of 11/6/99, questions were raised on the quality of the city's curriculum given the results of the math and English test scores of 8th graders. The article alluded to the fact that "...American middle school students were and still are, getting a less demanding curriculum than those in 20 other countries, including France, Japan and Hungary." This, brings to mind a further question: Is the United States the richest country in the world? Yes, it is. Then, how costly could the materialization of this project be? If there are still funds for the No Child Left Behind Act, with all its Pros and Cons, there should be enough money to enrich the curriculum, and to train teachers accordingly in state colleges, just as they do in European countries. If teachers abroad trained in linguistics and applied linguistics are able to produce coherent language syllabuses on the subject, why can't their counterparts do the same in this country? In short, if all these questions found cogent answers in so many countries, why not in the United States? No doubt, this is an ambitious project, but certainly one that can and should be taken seriously. Implementation is a matter of funds, willingness, and time, and the US has all three. Education at its best is, as we should know, the backbone of any developed or developing nation. What we must also keep in mind is, that it ALL depends on Language.

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