

Introduction

1 Target population and relation to *Threshold 1990*

Waystage 1990 is an early learning objective designed for those who are interested in acquiring a general basic ability in English but who are unable or unwilling to commit themselves from the outset to an expenditure of time and energy that would take them to the level of competence described in a separate publication called *Threshold 1990*.

Any learning objective is necessarily based on considerations of *desirability* and *feasibility*, the latter aspect providing the limits of the extent to which the former can be realised. What is, in our view, desirable for learners to be able to do in and with the foreign language, so as to be in a position to achieve the full mobility that a command of English may provide, is described by us in *Threshold 1990*. It has to be recognised, however, that for many beginning learners – and particularly for those with (only) little educational experience – the feasibility of mastering the learning load represented by that objective may seem to be very doubtful indeed. At the same time it cannot be denied that the achievement of a lower level of ability than threshold level might be of considerable value to them. Rather than deterring these potential learners by asking them to set their sights higher than they would consider to be reasonable, we would propose to them a reduced learning load of a weight which past experience has indicated to be generally acceptable and also manageable within a comparatively short time. *Waystage 1990*, then, is the result of our attempt to derive from *Threshold 1990* a less demanding objective based on the same model and containing the same components. In spite of heavy reduction this objective should go a long way towards enabling the learners to satisfy their most urgent communication needs. The learning load involved is estimated to be about half of that required by *Threshold 1990*, which means that we think that, with proper guidance, the average learner should be able to master it in some 180–200 learning hours, including independent work.

The original *Waystage*, first published by the Council of Europe in 1977, was primarily designed as a halfway level, a point of articulation for courses leading up to threshold level. That it might also be a worthwhile objective in its own right was only a secondary consideration.

Meanwhile it has become clear that for many learners the achievement of a level at this height is a thoroughly satisfying experience and that, in fact, a large number of them may not feel the need to go much

beyond this in the same language. We have taken this into account in designing *Waystage 1990*. It is now primarily meant as a worthwhile objective in its own right and secondarily as an intermediate objective on the way towards threshold level. It remains a rigorous selection from *Threshold Level*, in this case *Threshold 1990*, but the consideration of immediate usefulness and widest possible scope has been paramount in this selection. Nevertheless, as the name indicates, it has also been conceived as a station on the way to *Threshold 1990*. In fact, containing all the components that also constitute the higher level, it will allow the smoothest possible transition to further learning for *Threshold 1990*. There can be no doubt that this transition will be made by many learners. We expect that the successful completion of a *Waystage* programme will be a strong incentive for the undertaking of the further learning effort required in order to reach the higher objective, and we also expect that this will be true for many learners who, at first, had no intention to do so.

2 Economy

What, at *Waystage*, the learners are supposed to be able to do in the foreign language is described in general terms in Chapter 1 of this document. The rest of it contains the specification of this ability. This specification will make it clear that, in spite of the modest height of *Waystage 1990*, the linguistic and other resources that the learners have at their disposal at this level will, in fact, give them a fairly wide range of action in the foreign language. This is largely due to the economy that has been practised in the selection of the learning content. This has invariably been chosen with a view to giving the widest communicative range with the simplest means. One consequence of the application of this criterion has been the inclusion of a fairly comprehensive grammatical apparatus. It is a characteristic of grammar that with a limited number of elements it provides the means for large numbers of combinations and variations. The acquisition of a grammatical system, even if at this level this can only be a restricted system, is, consequently, to be regarded as a highly productive – and economical – activity.

3 Flexibility and adaptability

Waystage 1990 has been designed for the largest single target group that may be identified, that of general beginners. A single objective for a target group of this size can only serve its purpose if it is highly flexible and adaptable to a variety of needs and interests. At the same time it should be recognised that, in spite of all the variety that may be

expected, all members of the target group will have quite a lot in common. For one thing, they all want to acquire a general ability in the use of English. This means that they will all have to be able to ask questions and to provide information, to elicit opinions, views, preferences, and to express them, to refer to past, present and future events, to express reasons why and conditions under which something may come to pass and to understand others doing so, etc. Also, they will have to be familiar with certain social conventions and common assumptions inherent in manners of expression in the English language, and they will need to be aware of how cultural differences may be reflected in communicative behaviour. And then, of course, they will also need experience in coping with the inevitable occurrence of situations which overtax their resources. All these elements of communicative ability – and many more – are included in *Waystage 1990*. Collectively, they constitute the general basic ability which we have attempted to describe and specify in this objective. In this respect, then, *Waystage 1990* is an appropriate objective for anyone who wants to learn English for purposes of communication, whatever their special interests may be. However, it has a further potential. Through its comprehensive system of categorisation and the open-endedness of the various specifications it offers virtually unlimited possibilities for such expansions as may serve the purposes of particular sub-groups of the target population. Not only may the various categories be separately expanded, but several of them contain slots for the insertion of further (sets of) elements. Thus, for instance, if we would consider the sub-group of those who would wish to learn English particularly for professional purposes, text types of a professional nature may be added to the reading component, the writing component may be expanded as required – for example, with certain types of standard letters – the topic specification may be supplemented with further topics of professional interest, and open-ended lists within the topics can be filled in accordance with the needs and interests of particular learner groups.

The adaptability of *Waystage 1990* is a consequence of its open-endedness and of its internal flexibility. This flexibility in itself may be exploited in a variety of ways and with different emphases in accordance with the educational context in which the learning of the foreign language takes place and the effects that this learning is meant to produce. For the learning of a foreign language is an educational experience which may benefit the learners in several different ways. If undertaken as part of an overall educational programme, foreign language learning may, through the contacts it provides with another culture, play an essential role in widening the learners' horizon, in stimulating their awareness of the potential validity of different value systems, of different ways of organising, categorising and expressing experience, etc. If viewed in the perspective of permanent education, a foreign language course may equip the learners with skills and insight

that will facilitate the subsequent expansion of their ability in the foreign language concerned or the subsequent learning of one or more other foreign languages. If pursued in a social context, foreign language learning may contribute to the development of the learners' understanding of the complexities of personal interaction, and it may prepare them to function more effectively in social contacts, not only in the foreign language but also in their native language, etc.

Many more of the potential benefits of foreign language learning are listed in Van Ek, *Objectives for Foreign Language Learning, Vol. 1: Scope*, Strasbourg 1986. Which of these learning effects, and how many of them, are explicitly or implicitly aimed at in a foreign language course, depends on the educational context in which the course is offered and/or taken, as well as on the educational views of those who provide the course and/or of those who take it.

4 What is new in *Waystage 1990*?

Waystage 1990 is designed to fit into a wide variety of educational contexts and to suit a wide variety of learning aims. In this respect it corresponds not only to *Threshold 1990*, but also to its predecessor, the 1977 *Waystage*. The main difference is that now those components of communicative ability which particularly allow it to be related to a wider educational context are identified and explicitly incorporated into the objective. Thus, *Waystage 1990* includes discourse strategies, a sociocultural component, compensation strategies, and a 'learning-to-learn' component. In addition, it contains numerous major and minor improvements in the specification of those categories which were already distinguished in the original *Waystage* as well as certain adjustments reflecting differences in assumptions as to foreign language needs in the 1990s as compared to the 1970s.

Some of the improvements have been designed to make the specification more accessible. They include a redesigned grammatical inventory and the provision of a subject index. Other changes are of a more fundamental nature, such as the more liberal inclusion of items for 'understanding' only, the explicit treatment of selected intonation patterns, the addition of two new categories of language functions – 'structuring discourse' and 'communication repair', and the introduction of several open-ended items in the list of specific notions.

Such changes and additions as distinguish *Waystage 1990* from its predecessor result from experiences gained in various applications of the original version and of the earlier *Threshold Level* as well as from the further development of insights into the nature of communicative ability and implications of all this for educational practice. Much of this we owe to the rich literature bearing on 'communicative language

learning and teaching' that has been produced in the last fifteen years or so. As authors of a new threshold level version as well as of a new waystage version we are particularly indebted to all those who, since the original threshold level for English came out, have undertaken the development of parallel versions for other European languages and in each case contributed insights of their own.

5 Learning load

Waystage 1990 has more components than the old one and in some cases – particularly 'reading' and 'listening' – it requires more of the learners than its predecessor did. At first sight, then, it might seem to represent a heavier learning load. It is our assumption, however, that in practice this will not be the case. The new components are largely concerned with the acquisition of strategies and the development of insights and awareness. Their incorporation will have a qualitative rather than a quantitative effect. It does not substantially increase the number of learning items but it will affect the presentation and practice of these items. It will involve, for instance, the selection of texts not only for (pragma-) linguistic relevance but also for sociocultural relevance or for relevance with regard to 'coping strategies'. It will also mean that learning tasks will have to be made transparent enough for the learner to understand how the performance of these tasks may contribute to the achievement of his or her aims. The promotion of the development of various types of insight and awareness will require the introduction of teaching/learning procedures which are not yet commonly found in language courses. One such procedure is described in the recently developed 'Stage 3 level' brochure of the International Certificate Conference. It concerns the development of sociolinguistic awareness and appropriate strategies and consists of three steps:

- exposure to a variety of situations in which such features as participant roles, setting, communicative goal, etc., significantly influence the choice of language forms;
- stimulating awareness of this influence through observation, reflection, discussion;
- involving the learner in similar situations for active practice.¹

The introduction of such a procedure into a language course, we assume, will make learning more effective rather than more demanding.

¹ *Foreign Languages in Adult and Continuing Education; Specifications for Stage 3 Level of the International Certificate Conference Language Certificate System: English, third draft, Deutscher Volkshochschulverband e.V., Bonn-Frankfurt 1987.*

No more do higher demands with regard to 'reading' and 'listening' necessarily increase the actual overall learning load. On the contrary: it is increasingly recognised that frequent exposure to texts – or the intensive practice of 'receptive skills' – will contribute substantially to the efficient development of productive ability as well. In fact, what we propose in *Waystage 1990* is much more in agreement with current educational practice than the more modest requirements of the original version.

Our conclusion is that, in terms of the average number of learning hours that may be required, the learning load of *Waystage 1990* will correspond to that of the original version and that, as stated in section 1 of this introduction, a total of 180–200 hours would seem to be a reasonable estimate.

1 The objective: description

The learners will be able to use the foreign language for the following purposes:

I carrying out certain transactions:

1 making arrangements (planning, tickets, reservations, etc.) for:

- travel
- accommodation
- appointments
- leisure activities

2 making purchases

3 ordering food and drink

II giving and obtaining factual information:

1 personal information (e.g. about name, address, place of origin, date of birth, occupation)

2 non-personal information (e.g. about places and how to get there, about the time of day, about various facilities and services, about rules and regulations, about opening hours, about where and what to eat, etc.)

III establishing and maintaining social and professional contacts, particularly:

1 meeting people and, if strangers, making their acquaintance

2 extending invitations and reacting to being invited

3 proposing/arranging a course of action

4 exchanging information, views, feelings, wishes, concerning matters of common interest, particularly those relating to:

- personal life and circumstances
- living conditions and environment
- occupational activities and interests
- leisure activities and social life

The learners will be able to carry out the above communicative activities in contacts with:

- native speakers of the foreign language
- non-native speakers of the foreign language (using the foreign language as *lingua franca*)

Such contact may occur:

- in a country or region where the foreign language is the native language
- in the learner's own country
- in a country or region outside the learner's own country, where the foreign language is not the native language

The learners will primarily be able to function in contacts involving the oral use of the foreign language, mainly face-to-face contacts but also those requiring the use of the telephone or of public media.

Secondarily, where appropriate, they will be able to understand the substance and/or relevant details of written texts and to express themselves in writing. Both the text types to be understood and those to be produced will be specified subsequently.

2 Components of the specification

The *Waystage* specification is not a closed syllabus, nor is the communicative ability described in it confined to a strictly limited number of specific situations. On the contrary: it is aimed at providing the learners with an overall basic skill in using the foreign language which, although it is primarily directed towards the requirements of selected situations, should give the learners a far wider range of action as well as a solid basis for further language learning. Thus, in spite of the limitations of its content, which are inherent in the concept of an 'early learning objective', *Waystage* does provide the learners with an ability to manipulate the language for their own purposes. This means, for instance, that at *Waystage* learners can fulfil a fairly wide range of essential language functions, although with very simple means, and that they can also express a large number of generally used concepts as well as understand others expressing them. Moreover, they will have at their disposal a fair number of communication strategies that will enable them to make the most of their as yet limited resources. Also, they will have been specifically prepared for functioning in those situations in which, on the whole, they are most likely to need the ability to use the foreign language, while having the potential to make at least a good attempt at coping with other situations as well.

It is in accordance with the above considerations that the *Waystage* specification consists largely of components and items relevant to general basic communicative ability, the requirements of specific selected situations being met by – mainly – concrete vocabulary items.

Waystage, while being a worthwhile objective in its own right, marks the conclusion of a first significant phase for learners on their way to *Threshold*, the objective that gives them a more general freedom of action in the foreign language. To a large extent, then, the specification of *Waystage* is a selection from that of *Threshold*. This selection is based on what, in view of the general description of the objective (see Chapter 1), the learners are likely to need most in order to satisfy their most urgent communication needs. As is the case in *Threshold*, *Waystage* offers lists of recommended 'exponents', i.e. of those language forms which are estimated to enable the learners to do all the things specified in a highly economical manner. This means that whenever feasible those language forms have been chosen which offer a wide functional range. If the learners' linguistic resources are to be narrowly limited – as they necessarily are at this stage – it is all the more important that those resources should be selected which provide the widest possible range of action.

The same criterion of economy cannot be applied to language produced by others than the learners themselves. We therefore include a much larger selection of language forms that the learners may find it very useful to be able to understand, even if they cannot and need not produce them themselves. These exponents are marked **B** to distinguish them from exponents recommended for productive use.

At *Waystage* the learners should be able to fulfil a number of language functions and to handle a number of notions, both notions that are generally involved in the use of language ('General Notions') and notions required in dealing with specific situations and themes ('Specific Notions'). Our specification of *Waystage*, then, starts with lists of selected language functions, general notions and specific notions, together with their recommended exponents.

What may be expected of learners at *Waystage*, as far as conversational ability is concerned, is obvious from the whole of the specification. Requirements for reading, listening (as a one-sided process) and writing are scattered throughout the specification and often only implied by it. After the earlier 'lists' we therefore provide separate surveys of these requirements in a chapter on 'dealing with texts' and in a short one on 'writing'.

A separate chapter is devoted to 'sociocultural competence' or the ability to relate language use to the sociocultural background of communication partners. For this chapter, too, a selection is made from *Threshold 1990*.

The exponents of language functions are likely to occur in sequences. If these sequences exhibit certain regularities in the order of their elements we may refer to them as 'patterns'. A chapter on 'verbal exchange patterns' (Chapter 9) deals with a number of patterns which are likely to occur in situations of oral language use that may be particularly relevant to members of the target group.

No matter what level a foreign language learner has reached, there will always be situations that overtax the learner's resources as a user of the foreign language. The lower the level achieved, the more often such situations are likely to occur and the more urgently the learner will need the ability to use certain strategies that may enable him or her to cope with the requirements of these situations nevertheless. The availability to the learner, then, of 'compensation strategies' is at least as important at *Waystage* as it is at *Threshold*. The acquisition of such strategies by the learners should be promoted from a very early stage onwards in a language course. Which strategies are acquired by individual learners and the rate at which they are acquired may vary enormously from one learner to another.

The point is not so much which strategies learners have acquired and to what extent they have acquired them at a given moment but that